



THE HON KEN WYATT AM, MP

Minister for Health and Aged Care
Minister for Indigenous Health
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SPEECH

Launch of Meals on Wheels' National Meal Guidelines Wednesday, 15 February 2017 Canberra

Good morning.

Before I begin I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and future. I acknowledge other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here with us this morning. Welcome.

I also want to acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues Mark Coulton, (Member for Parkes) and Brian Mitchell, (Member for Lyons) as co-convenors of the Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Mr Nelson Mathews [President, Australian Meals on Wheels], thank you for inviting me to speak this morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Meals on Wheels is an iconic Australian institution. It's up there with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and Vegemite as part of Australia's DNA. It has always been there. When we think about Meals on Wheels it's natural that we think about food.

Over the years Meals on Wheels has become so much more. It's a service that provides nutritious meals but also the welcome company of a volunteer at times when people might be feeling vulnerable. It's about caring for another person and watching out for signs that they may be struggling with daily tasks in their life. Or they might have a health concern that's escalated since the last Meals on Wheels visit.

Meals on Wheels is also about the special connections and the sense of purpose felt by the devoted team of volunteers. They have the warm satisfaction of knowing they make a real difference in their community and they are very much appreciated.

The National Meal Guidelines launched today are a collaborative effort. People devising menus based on sound nutritional principles will find the guidelines invaluable. I'm a very strong believer in the power of collaboration.

I was pleased to hear that Meals on Wheels—in partnership with the Smart Foods Centre at the University of Wollongong—worked closely with the Dietitians Association of Australia. They also worked with customers, service providers, food producers and health professionals to produce the guidelines.

As we know, Australians are living longer and healthier lives. And sometimes, a helping hand by organisations such as Meals on Wheels can be the difference between older Australians staying at home longer, or moving into residential aged care earlier than desired.

In 2015-16, more than 1.3 million older people received some form of aged care support—the great majority received home-based care and support. In the same year, Australian Government expenditure for aged care totalled \$16.2 billion, more than two thirds of which (\$11.4 billion) was for residential aged care. The Australian Government was pleased to provide \$150,000 to the Australian Meals on Wheels Association to develop the National Meal Guidelines.

It's important that the organisations providing meals, or producing meals, have a handy tool for the benefit of people who are not in a position to prepare nutritious meals for themselves. It is expected that the guidelines will also be very useful for home-delivered and centre-based meals programs across the sector.

Being able to provide a balanced diet and nutritious food to people from all walks of life needing a helping hand is, at its heart, about building strong communities. And this is where the Government can play its role, because stronger communities benefit from all of us.

But that does not mean the Government 'owns' or 'controls' the system – we are in partnership with you, and with the wider community – to deliver the right conditions so we can look after our old people, and they can live a dignified life into old age. We are working together for a better, kinder and more cohesive society and I acknowledge the role of Meals on Wheels in making a real difference for caring for our community.

Meals on Wheels does more than just delivering meals in a community – sometimes it is the only point of connection for some. It has been estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of people are lonely and I am committed to working with Meals on Wheels.

For more information, contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7720.