

**Strategic Inter-Governmental Nutrition Alliance (SIGNAL)
POSITION STATEMENT**

EAT WELL: THE BENEFITS OF VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

All available evidence suggests that a diet rich in vegetables and fruit is beneficial to health, in particular, for the reduction of risk from cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer (particularly bowel, stomach and lung cancer). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Burden of Disease study (1999) attributes approximately 11% of all cancers to inadequate consumption of vegetables and fruit. This burden is higher for men than women at all ages and highest for both men and women between the ages of 55 and 74 years.

The direct and indirect costs of diet-related disease in Australia have been estimated at approximately \$2.5 billion per year. At least 10% of the total burden of disease in Australia is attributable to nutrition for example through obesity (4.3%), inadequate consumption of vegetables and fruit (2.7%) and high blood cholesterol (2.6%). It ranks a close second to tobacco control as the most important preventable health measure.

Results from the 1995 National Nutrition Survey indicate that Australians are not eating enough vegetables and fruit to meet the **NHMRC recommended intake of *at least 5 serves of vegetables (including legumes) and 2 serves of fruit per day***, with no upper limit as defined by the Core Food Groups. On average, adults eat about 3.5 serves of vegetables and 1.5 serves of fruit daily ie. about 2/3 of the *minimum* recommended amount for good health.

Call to action: SIGNAL calls for a comprehensive, intersectoral, consistent effort to increase consumption of vegetables and fruit throughout Australia.