



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

**Speech for Ambassador for Ageing Noeline Brown
Monash University - Ageing Research Centre/NHMRC seminar:
"Food and sustainability: Influences on healthy ageing"**

- Thank you Professor Browning (Collette Browning, Director Monash University Research for an Ageing Society).
- It's an honour to be here and to be able to contribute to this important seminar.
- As you all know, some months ago I was appointed as the Ambassador for Ageing and one of my primary roles is to promote healthy ageing.
- This is, and always has been, important. However, there is something of a seismic shift happening in our population and healthy ageing will be absolutely vital, given the impact the opposite could have on our health system and economy.
- Research tells us the ageing population will result in fewer people of working age, increases in health outlays and increased demands for aged care.
- While this is certainly true, there is a more positive slant on this story.
- Modern medicine and more active lives has meant a large proportion of our older population is living longer, healthier lives, and these people are continuing to contribute in meaningful ways to the community, sharing their skills and knowledge.
- While this is good news, the current Government is very focused on prevention across the health and ageing policy spectrum.
- It behoves us to ensure that all older people have what they need to live healthy lives as they age.

- Thomas Eddison said “the doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest her or his patients in the care of the human frame, in a proper diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease”.
- I think Mr Eddison was probably hoping that by now his prediction would be realised. Unfortunately we’re not quite there yet. But this is the goal. It is what this government is working towards. And it will be the work of many of you here and the willingness of governments will be what gets us there.
- As I touched on earlier a really important part of my role is to encourage older Australians to remain active, both physically and as contributors to society.
- A balanced diet and good nutrition are essential for healthy ageing. Promoting the potential benefits of healthy eating to all Australians, will not only reduce the risks of diet-related illness but will also improve the community’s health and wellbeing.
- A consistent national effort to reduce lifestyle health risk factors and promote good health and healthy ageing is important.
- I note that the Australian Government has implemented a range of nutrition initiatives including the national strategy, *Eat Well Australia 2000-2010* and *The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.
- I also understand that from 2008, the Australian dietary guidelines suite (including the *Dietary Guidelines for Older Australians*), the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* and the *Core Food Groups* will be comprehensively reviewed and updated by the National Health and Medical Research Council to reflect the latest available evidence, including the Nutrient Reference Values. Revised publications are expected to be released from mid 2010.
- Also, the National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey Program will collect regular information about Australians’ food intake, physical activity participation and physical measurements.

- The survey results will inform both the development of initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles and regulatory decisions concerning the food supply. The first survey is expected to focus on Australian adults including older Australians.
- But the quality of life our older people have is influenced not just by the present. The society and culture people grow up in, where they live, all of these things can have an influence on how people age.
- We need to take into account everything that comes before ageing in order to truly have a healthy older population. In other words we need a whole of life approach to healthy eating and physical activity.
- In effect, healthy ageing starts early and is affected by all sorts of events and conditions at every stage of life.
- For example, a pregnant woman requires adequate nutrition because fetal malnutrition and low birth weight can lead to increased risk of chronic diseases such as hypertension, coronary heart disease, adult onset diabetes and autoimmune thyroid disease.
- The risk of osteoporosis at an older age is strongly influenced by bone density at puberty based on adequacy of calcium and vitamin D intake in childhood and by the adequacy of these nutrients throughout life.
- Regardless of predisposing factors, dietary and other environmental factors influence the risk of illness and death at every age. Because of the cumulative effect of adverse factors throughout life, it is particularly important for older people to adopt dietary and lifestyle practices that minimise further risk of ill-health and maximise their prospects for healthy ageing.
- That is why I am particularly keen to promote healthy and active ageing in my role as the Ambassador for Ageing.
- As individuals, we can do a lot to help ourselves, if we know how. But we also need the support of a community that values and respects older people.

- Research has certainly shown that community perceptions of ageing and older people are important. Negative or uniformed attitudes can act as barriers to people's lifestyles, their capacity to participate, their quality of life and subsequently their health.
- Other issues, such as access to services and transport, and the affordability of these can also act as barriers.
- Staying connected is therefore very important. Family and community support can help people continue to live active lives in the community and access the help that they need.
- So making a difference in healthy ageing really needs to be a shared responsibility - across governments, business and industry, community organisations, individuals and the community in general.
- I am sure that if we work together we really can improve the quality of life for people as Australia's population ages.
- But I think that's enough from me.
- I am really looking forward to hearing from everyone else today on food security and sustainability in relation to healthy ageing so I thank you again for inviting me.