

Small Business Manual

5th Edition
February 2021



Acknowledgments

The Dietitians Australia Small Business Manual 5th Edition has been revised for Dietitians Australia (DA) by Tara Diversi, Accredited Practising Dietitian. This manual replaces previous Dietitians Australia publications: The DAA Small Business Manual 2002, 2005, 2009, 2014, and A Manual for Private Practitioners 1995.

Many thanks are extended to dietitians who volunteered valuable feedback during the updating of this edition.

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ABN 34 008 521 480

The DAA Small Business Manual 4th edition, previously titled The DAA Small Business Manual 3rd edition 2009, The DAA Small Business Manual 3rd edition, previously titled The DAA Small Business Manual 2nd edition 2005, The DAA Small Business Manual 1st edition 2002, and a Manual for Private Practitioners 1995

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ISBN: 978-0-9597026-0-6



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Foreword



Tara Diversi
President

If you're thinking about starting a business and you're an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), then you're in the right place. Business for dietitians is not new, and the Dietitians Australia Small Business Manual is now in its 5th edition.

Starting a business isn't easy, but it also doesn't have to be difficult. This manual aims to help you navigate how to start a successful business.

New to the 5th edition are stories of Australian self-employed dietitians, who share their journeys and their lessons.

Traditionally, small business opportunities for dietitians revolved around private practice. However, there are now many other business opportunities for dietitians. These include:

- nutrition communications
- consulting to the food industry
- digital health
- public relations and media
- consulting to nursing homes and schools
- fitness centres
- providing corporate health services to businesses

With the rise of the digital economy, opportunities for self-employment are no longer restricted by geography. There is increased scope to provide nationwide services and even export your services or products to overseas markets.

As a new graduate dietitian, I didn't expect to be in business. I had no interest in working for myself. My dream was to work throughout the Cape York Peninsula helping improve children's nutrition in Indigenous communities. Despite moving back to my hometown of Cairns with enough enthusiasm and drive to tilt the earth, my dream job was given to someone else. I still feel rejected and dejected when I think about the day I found out. I continued applying for jobs and continued to cry when I opened the rejection letters (yes, in those days they came via snail mail).

I felt I had no choice but to start my own business. I had no idea what lay ahead for me. Although nutrition was my first love, entrepreneurship is my soulmate. I started my business before the ink had dried on my Provisional APD certificate. Since then, I've developed multiple income streams. I started in traditional private practice and have now worked in almost every area of private dietetic small business. After 16 years in business, people often ask me for advice. Below are some tips I think could be helpful if you are thinking about starting a dietetic business.

1. Plan – even if it's in your unique way

Having formal business, marketing and financial plans are essential if you want to go to the bank, a big investor or the government to obtain funding. However, if the plans are just for you, they can be as short or as long as you like. They can be in a different format, such as a mind map or a vision board. Having some type of plan allows you to see where you're going and where you've come from. After all, if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. But is it what **you** want?

2. Naming a business is not the same as naming a child

An overarching principle to remember is that you can change your business name and corresponding domain name. Naming your business is not the same as naming a child, and I'm often surprised at the level of anxiety created by choosing a business name. I started my first business with an extension of my name. Many big businesses are based on a person's name. Other business names have a uniqueness to them, and some are very literal or descriptive. Overall, you should be able to say your business name proudly and tell a story about what the name means to you. Alignment to your values and personality may be the best option for choosing a business name. Be mindful of the availability of your business name, and whether you will infringe any trademarks. Refer to the [Australian Securities and Investment Commission](#) to check for the availability of a business name.

3. Using money wisely makes good business sense

If you're good at saving money and understand budgeting, you're going to be better prepared in the early stages or when business is slow. If you haven't been successful in saving money while being employed, you need to train yourself to be mindful around spending money. Most people I work with who are good with their money continue to be so during their business life. Some small business owners spend money that they don't have because they believe promises that they will make the money back. For your first business, I strongly encourage against this. There are many marketing initiatives you can do without money – from there you can pay once you have income coming in.

4. Be smart with choosing technology solutions

Certain technology will be required at some stage in your business. Have a plan for using different technologies from the beginning or throughout your business. Some software becomes difficult to change from or to, so it's good to choose an option you're happy with from the beginning. Some software has a cost that seems expensive, but it can increase your income (e.g. online booking software).

5. Consider partners carefully

Starting a business takes courage. A friend or family member may love your business idea so much that they want to join your business. If both of your skills are needed to make the business work, then this could be a great idea. But if you have similar skills, attributes and knowledge, building the business to a level that supports two incomes can be very difficult. Some businesses have a low chance of ever getting to the revenue level needed to support two incomes, and therefore you may need to be courageous and start your business by yourself. Once you can afford to pay yourself, then you may consider bringing on a second employee or business partner. If you're in a romantic partnership and the business needs two or more people, consider if your partner is the right fit, or if you'll be better off if they have a higher-paying job and you hire a cheaper employee. Overall, an objective look at partnerships is important before going down this road.

6. Educate yourself enough... only do courses that create value for you

In many parts of the country, there is a lot of support to help you become a better business owner. In addition, with Coursera, Go1, LinkedIn Learning, Udemy and all the other online course platforms, we've never had cheaper and more accessible education. Personally, I love to learn and apply my learning. But be mindful about how much time you spend on courses, seminars and workshops. If you find you have a knowledge gap, then look for a course or workshop that will fill that gap. If you can apply the information, then that's great. If you find yourself doing so much education that you don't have space and time to apply it, then perhaps you need to do less and be more picky about the workshops and classes you attend. Trust in the knowledge you already have!

7. Network – personal relationships create lasting value

Networking can be done face-to-face or online. It's important to practice networking as a skill. Ask someone you admire for a coffee or meeting to get to know them and their work. Attend conferences, both dietetic conferences and those within your area of interest. At networking events, remove yourself from the safety of your friendship or work group to bring value to your career or business. It may be tough the first few times but keep practising and stretching your comfort zone. Often, people who you meet at networking events can become friends. If there is a genuine and authentic connection, that connection will be valuable. Remember that people are human, so even if you're lucky enough to get in front of someone extremely successful or influential, they have struggles, joy and a life outside their role. Treat them like humans (and expect to be treated like a human). You deserve to be talking to them (and them to you). Respect their time (and yours). Again, like workshops, be mindful of how much networking you're doing and whether this is getting in the way of your work.

Quick-start checklist for self-employment

8. Enjoy your work

The main benefit I see of being self-employed is being able to choose the work you do and when you do it. Quickly, though, you'll find components of your work that you don't like that much. It's helpful to be able to identify these early and write the job descriptions (and even advertisements) for the jobs that you don't enjoy doing. If you can have this work ready to hand over to someone else as soon as your income allows, you'll have a more enjoyable working life. You should focus your marketing efforts on work that you want to do, rather than work that you don't. This also rings true for the type of customer you want to work with – market to them rather than to everyone. Create the type of workplace that you want to work in. A positive aspect of working for yourself is that many components of the business can run to your rules.

9. If you have to do it twice... write a system.

Generally, when you start in business you have fewer customers than you'd like. As you grow, you can get to the stage where you have so many customers or clients that you need to employ some help. Trouble is... by now you're too busy to train someone and you're becoming overwhelmed and losing customers and income. When it's quiet it is the time to write down any systems, policies, procedures and checklists so they are ready to give to new staff members when they come on board.

10. Start your business!

Aspiring business owners are always looking for the answer to what makes a successful business owner or entrepreneur. There are more exceptions than rules. The only thing that literally all successful business owners have in common is that they started their business. Regardless of how big and successful their business is now, they all got their first customer one day, made their first dollar one day and employed their first employee one day.

- ✓ Understand the advantages and disadvantages to starting your own business
- ✓ Create a vision – what you want the business to be when it grows up
- ✓ Write a business plan
 - Start with a one-page business plan and develop a full plan as required
 - Determine your offerings, prices and packages for sale and consultancy rates
 - Talk to your ideal customers to see whether you can sell them your products or services
- ✓ Consider the benefits of purchasing an existing business compared to setting up a new business
- ✓ Get an Australian Business Number (ABN), and register a business name and domain name
- ✓ Get business advice from a qualified accountant to determine the most suitable business structure for you and how to set up your business for taxation.
- ✓ Open a separate business bank account and set up merchant facilities or use online payments such as Paypal, Square or Stripe
- ✓ Start to offer your services for sale
- ✓ Set up social media pages
- ✓ Set up payment systems
- ✓ Determine the local or online help you can access to provide support
- ✓ Find mentors (dietetic and non-dietetic)
- ✓ Set up systems, policies and procedures
- ✓ Continually experiment, evaluate, iterate and improve your offerings
- ✓ Remember, it is okay to feel like you don't know what you're doing. All business owners have this feeling at some stage of their journey!







Chapter 1: **Are you ready for a career in small business?**



“Entrepreneurs are the crazy people who work 100 hours a week, so they don’t have to work 40 hours for someone else.”



- Richard Branson



Before you start

Starting a business is a big commitment. Even the best ideas take time to build enough customers or clients to enable the owner to take a wage.

Despite popular articles and memes doing the rounds on social media, you'll find almost every type of person in self-employment. You can be successfully self-employed regardless of your skills, personality, attributes, knowledge, experience or stage of life. There are statements that I believe make a successful dietetic business owner, and as soon as I start to write that quality, I'm immediately reminded of someone who does not fit that mould.

We've asked dietitians from different backgrounds to share their journeys to self-employment with you so you can see the variety of dietitians who are business owners and entrepreneurs. These stories will hopefully help you confirm whether being self-employed is or isn't for you.

When starting a small business, people often underestimate how long it takes to do business tasks or how much it costs to get someone else to do them for you. It is important to understand the tasks you need to complete and whether you have the skills to do them. From here, some tasks may

be worth learning how to do. Our training as dietitians gives us skills and knowledge that are transferable to business. However, more complex tasks or strategy may require outside help or additional training.

If you're selling your products or services, it is important that you have a level of expertise in the area you're working in. Accredited Practising Dietitians (APD) must practice within the [Dietitians Australia Code of Conduct](#) and the [Scope of Dietetic Practice Framework](#).

Qualifications and small business

If you want to work as a dietitian in private practice and receive payments or benefits through Medicare and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), you'll need to be a member of Dietitians Australia (DA) and be accredited as an APD. This includes the advanced credentials, Advanced APD (AdvAPD) and Fellow of Dietitians Australia (FDA).

Most private health funds use your Medicare provider number as their provider number for your clients to claim. You'll need to check with different funds what their requirements are, and always remind your clients to check what services they are covered for by their health fund.



To see clients through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), you may need to be registered with the NDIS. NDIS participants self-managing or plan-managing their plan (i.e. funding) can choose any provider, but participants whose plan is managed by the National Disability Insurance Agency must see an NDIS-registered provider. Find out more about plan management on the [NDIA website](#).

You don't need any licenses or business qualifications to start a business; however, there are a number of accredited and non-accredited training programs available through private providers, registered training organisations (RTOs) and universities.

If you're marketing your services, having qualifications relevant to your business can be a quality cue for clients. Having your qualifications or awards visible can reduce the level of perceived risk for clients and referrers. It also indicates that your qualifications are independently supported by Dietitians Australia (and other professional organisations you're a member of).

Note it is a legal requirement for you to display your Business registration in your office in a position where it is clearly visible.

Experience

It can be an advantage for dietitians to have had several years of dietetic experience in a hospital or an established private practice before venturing into their own business. The learning that occurs in a team setting with other dietitians and healthcare professionals can increase knowledge and confidence enormously. It can also give you good contacts and mentors when you venture out on your own. The disadvantage in having experience working for the government or someone else is that you may get used to different ways of working, or client groups or values that don't align with your style of working or the direction you'd like your business to take.

Other dietitians believe there's no advantage to having employment experience before setting up a small business because it's a unique setting.

If you talk to dietetic business owners, you'll find a mix of stories and beliefs about what the best way is for you. Sometimes you accidentally fall into small business because you can't find work. This is the reality of today's market. Developing your own experience may be the best or only option you have that fits with your lifestyle.

Regardless of your level of experience, it's important for you to know when to refer clients on to other dietitians or other healthcare professionals for issues you don't feel you know enough about. This allows for the best treatment for the client. If you intend to practice in a particular area, you must have appropriate training, experience or both. Should you need to develop new skills there are several ways you can do this, including:

- online courses
- face-to-face training
- advanced courses like those offered through the [Centre of Advanced Learning](#).

You may also find that a good way to upskill is through being supervised by or shadowing a senior dietitian in the area you wish to work in. In your first year as an APD, you'll need to be mentored. Even when your mandatory mentoring ends, you can keep working with your mentor, perhaps on a less-formal basis.

Advantages and disadvantages of self-employment

There are advantages and disadvantages to having your own business. It's important to consider both when making your decision.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined decision-making, flexibility and complete control • Variety of work and multi-skilling (e.g. clinical, media, management, marketing, public speaking, counselling) • Productivity and profits are related to input and effectiveness • Personal satisfaction • Flexibility for when you complete business administrative tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty around success • Economic risk and financial insecurity • No guaranteed return on financial investment; irregular income or seasonal cash flow • Large time and effort commitment • Risk of professional and personal isolation

Financial costs and commitment

Before starting or purchasing a business, you must seriously consider the financial costs and commitments. Financial costs are the monetary expenses incurred and include establishment and ongoing costs. Financial commitment relates to placing a value on your time spent within the business without receiving financial reward, and the opportunity cost if you're turning down paid work to do it.

Some dietitians feel comfortable investing all their time in the new business. Others prefer to keep two or three days of outside employment for financial security, then gradually decrease this as their business grows.

Considerations include:

- Working capital (i.e., Cash) to cover your initial expenses until the business starts making money – allow for at least six months
- Occupancy costs, including lease payments, bond, rates, electricity, security deposit, telephone
- Online occupancy costs, including domain registration, website hosting, email subscription, software subscriptions
- Business name and company registration (if relevant)

- Digital branding and marketing materials
- Marketing costs, including advertising and promotions
- Equipment and furniture, including computer, printer, scales, height measure, desks, webcam, microphone
- Purchase considerations such as whether to purchase equipment up front, lease or rent
- Administration costs, such as stationery and software
- Tax and finance costs, including insurance premiums, loan repayments, interest on loans, consultants' fees (e.g. accountant and solicitor),
- Public and Professional Liability insurance premiums
- Personal income/salary
- Staff (e.g. receptionist) expenses, such as salary, payroll tax, superannuation and Workers Compensation insurance premiums
- Transport costs
- Professional development and networking costs
- Membership fees

Most of the above-mentioned points are expanded on in this manual.

It is advisable to acquire some training in the financial management of a small business and to seek the advice of an accountant before making any long-term commitments. Short courses are available online or through RTOs, universities and government small business departments.

Is your idea feasible?

Having a good idea is not uncommon. Every day, someone has a great idea that could change the world. Dreaming big is wonderful. Sometimes, however, the big idea that will make you happy and rich is not feasible at this time. The difficulty with a big idea is that it is often new and untested, so it can be difficult for others to support your vision and give you guidance.

Sometimes people are so wedded to their big dreams that they get side-tracked from a potentially feasible business that they can start right away. When this business is successful, they may have the money and business experience to make the big idea feasible.

There are important questions to consider when determining the feasibility of your idea. Not every question below may be relevant to you and your business, however, the ideas are worth considering before you get started.



Question	Comments	If YES	If NO
Do you understand the licenses and registrations you need to start the business?	You may need several different business licenses or registrations through the Australian Government, your state government or your local council.	Keep up to date with changes to business licenses and registrations.	Check the Australian Business Licence and Information Service (ABLIS)
Are you legally able to work or have a business in the location that you want to?	Ensure you understand the laws about the type of business you are hoping to start in the location where you want to work. Be aware of where you register, where tax is paid and where to hold bank accounts.	You can start your business in that industry and in that location.	Is it feasible for you to work or have the same business in a different location? Can you work remotely?
Are you legally able to work in the role/industry you want to?	Some professions require accreditation, registration or certification. If you have the qualifications or experience, you'll be able to access insurance and use titles that may be protected.	You can start to offer your services or products	Can you partner with someone who is legally able to? Can you do the training required to become formally qualified?
Does something like your product/service already exist?	Having competition is not a bad thing, but it's good to understand if there's a market for your product. It's also helpful to see what people have done before you and learn from their successes and mistakes.	Is the market size big enough to support multiple similar businesses? Is your offering unique enough to bring customers to you?	Have people tried and failed? If so, why? There could be a market for your product or service.
Do you have money to start your business?	Most businesses require some level of funding to start. It's important to work out how much money you need and the opportunity costs of starting a business.	You can invest in your new business venture.	Are you able to save some money? Is there another service you can offer to test the business and grow to your complete idea?



Question	Comments	If YES	If NO
Do you know how many products or hours it will take to be able to pay yourself a wage?	There are some great ideas that simply do not sell enough numbers or for enough money to allow you to make a full-time wage.	Can you pay yourself after you've paid for materials and all other expenses?	Work out how much money you'll make after you've paid your suppliers and expenses.
Do you have enough spare time to start your business?	Working for yourself can be time intensive. Having extra time to devote to a business will increase your chances of success until you are in the position to employ people.	Start working on your business and on business education by committing time to your business.	Do small things, or education that can contribute to your self-employment in the future when you do have time.
Have you received feedback that potential customers want your product?	Direct feedback is requests for products or services "for them," not positive feedback "for others".	Ask those clients/customers what they'd pay for your product or service.	Find your target customers and determine whether they would buy your service/product.
Is there uncertainty in your life that could impact your business success?	Business is uncertain. If you have other priorities in life, it can make success more difficult.	Consider starting a smaller-scale business or preparing for business in other ways. It may not be the best time to start a business.	This may be a good time to start your business.
Does it matter if your business is successful or not?	If you have investments, a job or a supportive partner, the success of your business may be an added bonus. Some businesses may take time to become successful, so you need to know if you have the time to spend on it.	Consider if there's something you can do to increase security for you and/or your family while you build this business.	Success in this business is an added bonus. You'll still need to focus on the business to be successful though.
Do you understand the industry you're trying to work in?	Deep knowledge of an industry can be an advantage. Connections also come with an understanding of the industry. But being too close to an industry may give you biased views.	This may be a good business to start, in a good industry. Consider what problems or solutions outsiders may have for your industry as well.	Can you partner with someone who has deep knowledge of the industry you want to work in? Do you have enough knowledge through research to work in this industry? Are you a customer of the industry?
Do you need outside help, and are you aware of the cost of this help?	There are several free programs in Australia to help you get your business started. There are also consultants and employees, but these come with a cost. If you can start a business using your own talents and resources, it's easier to predict success. New entrepreneurs often underestimate costs.	If you know costs, you can prepare for them and budget for them.	Make enquiries and determine what you can afford, and what you need to delay. Ensure your essential costs are covered.
If the business is busy or successful, are you able to pay yourself?	If your costs to produce your product or service are more than you can make, it may be a hobby, not a business.	You'll need to re-adjust your pricing strategy.	You should continue to understand the costs of running your business.
Is it the right time to launch this product/service?	Think about your personal circumstances, the industry and the market. Is now the right time for you?	Start your business.	Do what you can to prepare yourself for when the time is right.

Table adapted from © Diversi, 2019. YEP Entrepreneurship Facilitators

Case study: Starting a private practice from scratch

Brady Schultz: Healthy Lifestyle Australia



I grew up as a small-town farm boy who used to harvest lettuce in the fields before and after school. Needless to say, I know what hard work is. This is one of the attributes that I believe contributes to success as a dietetic business owner. I value focus, passion and genuine care for the people we are helping (employees and clients). Because my business aligns with these values, I don't mind the long hours and effort it takes to keep it servicing some of Queensland's most isolated residents.

After graduating, I couldn't find a job. In fact, I couldn't even get an interview after 10 job applications. So, I decided to apply for a job a little further afield, in western Queensland, and guess what? I got it. This provided a great opportunity to sharpen my skills and be exposed to opportunities like providing services in rural communities alongside the Royal Flying Doctor Service. I got to fly into communities like Cunnamulla, Thargomindah, Normanton and Mount Isa. I developed skills in Indigenous health, health promotion, clinical and community-based dietetics. These experiences helped me plan for the future. I wanted to be my own boss. I wanted my own business. I wanted to help people with lack of access to dietetic and allied health services get the care they deserved, particularly in rural locations. So, I embarked on the journey that is now Healthy Lifestyles Australia (HLA). After making the move to working full-time on the business as a solo practitioner, it took 3 months before taking on my first full team member. From there the team grew quickly. Now there are more than 32 employees in the team of dedicated allied health professionals and support staff.

HLA started with me servicing locations close to where I grew up in the Lockyer Valley. Word-of-mouth referrals soon saw nearby towns requesting our services, and we now provide services to over 120 locations throughout Queensland. We've been fortunate enough to impact positively the lives of 48,000 regional Queenslanders.

Not all the work we do is glamorous. The people who really need assistance in improving nutrition and lifestyle behaviours are often those who don't initially want our help. But if you focus on a couple of key strategies, perseverance and good dietary counselling skills, you'll be surprised by the number of people who'll be open to your message. Unless you've spent years perfecting your dietary consultation skills, you're unlikely

to hit the mark with each client. So, show some self-compassion initially when you're starting out and be in the profession for the long haul until you've learnt many of those important lessons. Don't think that within your first year you'll be impacting millions of people's lives, because those chances are slim. You need to do your time, sharpen your skills, develop a passion for helping people and learn how to provide a holistic, well-rounded dietetic service. Reflect, improve service delivery and try again, and you'll turn out to be an excellent clinician and business owner.

If you're thinking about starting a business, think outside the box and be innovative. Have a goal then go for it. You may not have had any formal training in business, and I haven't either. I got there through many hours of self-directed study, research, troubleshooting and dreaming. There's no degree that can teach you more than doing the time in your own business.

Some things I think someone starting a business from scratch should consider:

- Don't shy away from hard work and long hours
- Be passionate about your clients
- Have a consistent focus
- Develop systems, processes and procedures as your business grows
- Learn from your mistakes
- Rejoice in your wins, even the small ones.

Even though business is not the easiest career choice I could have made, I can confidently say that it was the best decision for me. I'm proud to be an Accredited Practising Dietitian, proud of my amazing team and proud that we've made a significant difference to the health of so many regional and remote people. On the day I started my business, I could have chosen not to. By taking that risk, not only have I created the job of my dreams, but I've been able to help people who wouldn't otherwise have been able to access dietetic services.

Chapter 1

self-assessment activity

1. What skills, attributes and knowledge do you have that will help you be successful in small business?
2. Do you have a big goal that you may need more financial capacity or experience to achieve?
3. What are some goals that you can start working on now?
4. After considering the questions above, do you think your business idea and plan is feasible?
 - a. If your idea/plan is feasible, what is stopping you from starting your business straight away?
 - b. If your business idea/plan is not feasible, what steppingstones can you create to make your business feasible in the future?







Chapter 2: **Finding support for your business**



“Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn’t a sign of weakness, it’s a sign of strength. It shows you have the courage to admit when you don’t know something, and to learn something new.”



– Barack Obama



Where to find support

Small businesses are a large part of Australia's economy, contributing 35% of Australia's GDP.

So, it makes sense that federal, state/territory and local governments have invested heavily in supporting small businesses and those who are self-employed. The table below shows several Australian Federal Government departments and agencies that may be relevant to your business. State/territory and local government assistance are discussed later.

Australian Government Department	Relevant Role for Dietetic Businesses	Website
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources	Gives assistance and information to support innovative businesses through expert support, funding and other incentives.	www.industry.gov.au
Australian Taxation Office (ATO)	Provides tools and services to support small business owners to get their tax and superannuation right.	www.ato.gov.au
Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC)	Provides information and services to help you start, register, run, change or transfer your business.	www.asic.gov.au
Education, Skills and Employment	Offers initiatives to help you start, grow or manage your business.	www.employment.gov.au
Prime Minister and Cabinet	If you are from an Australian Indigenous background, PM&C may be able to assist you to start or build your business.	www.pmc.gov.au
IP Australia	Provides tools and services to help you apply for intellectual property (IP) rights, trademark your business, or commercialise your IP.	www.ipaustralia.gov.au
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Provides up-to-date reports on Australia's health and welfare.	www.aihw.gov.au
Veterans' Affairs	Supports veterans to access nutrition and dietetic services.	www.dva.gov.au
Medicare	Enables allied health professionals to register as a Medicare provider, and access your clients' health care information.	www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/organisations/health-professionals
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Provides statistics and insights into economic, social, population, and health data in Australia.	www.abs.gov.au
Austrade	Provides general information about exporting and doing business in international markets.	www.austrade.gov.au
AusTender	Lists current Australian Government business opportunities and annual procurement plans.	www.tenders.gov.au



Each department's website provides learning materials and fact sheets to help you navigate their services. Spend some time reading through their websites and taking notes about how they can help you, now or at a later stage in your business. It can also be helpful to subscribe to relevant department email newsletters and follow their social media channels.

Elected representatives

Your local councillors and the members of parliament in your state/territory and federal electorates can be useful people to know. As a nutrition expert, you can share information with your elected representative to advocate for better nutrition within your community. Information from your elected representatives' offices, such as newsletters, media releases and social media, can also be helpful when making business decisions.

It can also be worthwhile reviewing the structure of the [Australian health care system](#) to understand the different responsibilities the different levels of government hold in relation to health.

Business.gov.au

The [business.gov.au website](#) is a single point of information and advice for business. It provides tips, tools, templates, how-to guides and referral services to help you plan, start and grow your small business. Their goal is to improve business sustainability and management practices.

You can also contact business.gov.au staff directly through their web chat, online enquiry form and telephone (13 28 46).

New Business Assistance with NEIS

If you are starting a business and you're currently unemployed, you may be eligible for New Business Assistance with the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS). This is a government-funded program administered by private providers. The scheme can provide you with small business training, business advice and mentoring for 12 months, as well as ongoing income support for up to 9 months. There are several eligibility requirements, but if you're eligible the scheme can provide valuable assistance and support to establish your business. Each NEIS provider promotes their program in their region and offers information sessions to provide additional information. The National NEIS Association operates the website [NEIS Now](#), which includes details on different programs operating in your area, and complements the information provided by the [Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#).

Entrepreneurship facilitators

In over 20 locations throughout Australia, [Entrepreneurship Facilitators](#) provide services to help people start their own business. This service is funded by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Each entrepreneurship facilitator program is tailored to the region they operate in, so services offered can vary.

Entrepreneurship Facilitators have a range of free services, including:

- information and advice about starting and running businesses
- tailored mentoring and assistance for individuals. This includes facilitating workshops and networking events, and providing mentoring
- referring individuals to appropriate services to help them start and run their own business, including [New Business Assistance with NEIS](#).

Australian Small Business Advisory Services (ASBAS) Digital Solutions

Small businesses around Australia can access individual support to grow their digital capabilities through [Australian Small Business Advisory Services \(ASBAS\) Digital Solutions](#).

ASBAS Digital Solutions offers small businesses affordable, high-quality advice on different digital solutions to meet their business needs.

Services include:

- websites and selling online
- social media and digital marketing
- using small business software
- online security and data privacy.

Services are delivered through a mix of one-to-one and group formats, including face-to-face and online. [Find the provider of ASBAS services for your region](#).

State and territory government assistance

Each state or territory government has different assistance for businesses. All states and territories have offices that focus on small business, and many have specific departments aimed at supporting and promoting innovation. In Queensland and South Australia, a Chief Entrepreneur has been appointed with the aim of growing entrepreneurship.

You can find out more about what advice and support you can seek in your State or Territory on the [business.gov.au website](#).

Local government assistance

Most local councils have an economic development department and economic development officers. Their role is to promote and support their region's economic development and sustainability. They focus on large projects that will deliver more jobs to the area, and on supporting small businesses. Many local councils have demographic data about your region that can assist with your market research. [See if your local council has a subscription to economy.id](#).

Many councils share information about business support in their newsletter and on their social media channels. You may also be eligible for grants to offer services within your community.

Chambers of commerce

Chambers of commerce are membership organisations that promote business and enterprise in their areas. [The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) represents over 145 business associations and represents state chambers. In some states, smaller chambers of commerce exist to support their region. The membership organisations advocate for small and medium businesses and provide support and services. Many chambers offer networking opportunities and learning activities like workshops or conferences. If you're under a certain age (usually 35 or 40), some local chambers host a young chamber and can help you form a network of likeminded young professionals.

Networking and meetup groups

Most areas have business networking groups and meetups to help you build your professional network and make friends with likeminded people. As well as attending health-related networking groups, it can be valuable to attend non-health related groups to expand your referral network and potentially find new markets to offer your services. Facebook Local, LinkedIn, Eventbrite and Meetup are valuable tools for finding suitable networking events. There are also some paid group mentoring organisations such as Business Networking International (BNI). Most of these groups have a free initial visit where you can determine whether the group suits your needs. If there are no suitable networking groups in your area, you can always start one with some colleagues and promote it through social media and your networks.

Free mentoring

Successful professionals are often asked if they can meet with people to provide mentoring or advice. Many people see it as part of the business lifecycle, where you start by receiving mentoring and then move towards providing mentoring. It's tempting to try to find the most successful people you know to mentor you. But often people who are a long way from where you are don't remember the struggle of the beginning of their business, or understand that the marketplace has changed. You may find that someone 2 to 5 years ahead of you is a better mentor. Their knowledge and experience is relevant, and they probably have more time. Remember that consulting books, listening to podcasts, watching videos and following mentors on social media are also great ways to get advice. There are also online peer groups you can join to network, provide and receive support.

Paid mentoring and business coaching

There are many business coaches, mentors and programs that may support you in building your business. It's important to be discerning before signing up to an expensive program, despite the promises of large returns. A good business coach who offers services to people at your stage of business can be very valuable. Some questions to consider before signing up to a program:

- Have you started your business and benefited from free support (mostly government funded)?
- Do you have available funds to pay for mentoring or coaching?



- Does the business coach have a niche market and/or area they specialise in?
- Does the business coach have criteria for accepting clients?
- Does the business coach have formal qualifications and/or insurance to cover their advice to you?
- Does the business coach have experience in the type of business you are trying to launch or grow?
- Do you feel comfortable with the approach recommended by the business coach?
- Is there a staged approach to working with the business coach, for example 1) free resources online 2) closed-group program 3) short package 4) long-term package)?

The decision to take on a coach needs to align with your career and business goals. Be wary of programs that have free or cheap seminars and use neurolinguistic programming (NLP) techniques (for example, anchoring, belief change, mirroring and rapport, reframing, creative visualization) to sell larger, ongoing programs. However, it's up to you to decide where you receive business support from. A business coach usually costs upwards of \$200 per hour, but because results from coaching are often only seen after a few months, many require an ongoing commitment. Most business coaches cost between \$800 and \$3000 per month. Business coaches that focus on newer, pre-revenue or early-revenue businesses may be cheaper than this, while business coaches that focus on high-end businesses or brand-building businesses can charge more than this. Federal and state or territory governments also offer financial support to see a business coach or adviser.



Case study:

Starting a business with government support

Sally Marchini

Eight years ago, I graduated from university as a mature-aged student. I had decided to study dietetics after being diagnosed with coeliac disease on top of my long-term type 1 diabetes. I had to know nutrition, and I also wanted to help others with my professional knowledge and personal experience. I always knew that I wanted to work in private practice. But I hadn't considered that I wouldn't have the opportunity to gain experience by working for someone else before deciding to start my own private practice.

There were cutbacks that year, and all the expected clinical dietetic roles suitable for new graduates failed to become available. There were also no advertised positions in the private sector in my hometown. As a mature-aged new grad, I felt my lived experience combined with my new qualification would allow me to add value to other people's lives, and that I could really help them through good nutrition and personalised advice. I had no interest in sitting around waiting for other roles to come up, so I started to look at what other options were available to me to work in the field I loved.

I spoke at length to other more experienced dietitians, such as my mentor and those I'd met through dietitian networking events, and they all encouraged me to start my own practice with a niche focus on diabetes and coeliac disease.

I didn't know where to start and what support was available. I was eligible for unemployment benefits after graduation, and a friend told me about NEIS when I mentioned I wanted to start my own business. I spoke to my Centrelink support worker, and she referred me to the local NEIS provider. After studying science for so long, I was excited to do their business course, so I decided to apply. A week later, I was informed that my application was successful, and I was on my way to starting my own business in the unique area of being a 'personally experienced dietitian in diabetes and coeliac disease'.

NEIS paid for me to attend a 6-week Certificate IV in Small Business Management course with personal support through quarterly mentoring and accountability. I found the support extremely helpful. They helped me to make a business plan, taught me all the ins and outs of running a business – finances, marketing, planning, SWOT and risk analyses and so much more. Then, with 9 months of unemployment assistance to support me financially as I set off, I was qualified to start my business, which began operating on 2 July 2012. NEIS also provided me with a series of business mentors, whom I met with regularly to discuss and overcome hurdles as they arose.

Now my business continues to grow and to evolve (as businesses tend to do). Two years ago, I teamed up with Melanie McGrice and the team at Nutrition Plus. My business is still independent, but I have the support and the backing of Nutrition Plus as a leading pre-natal dietitian with a special interest in all things diabetes and coeliac/IBS related.

Chapter 2

self-assessment activity

1. Identify which federal electorate, state or territory electorate, and local government area you live in, and the ones where your business operates.
2. Who are your elected representatives at each level of government? Note their contact details, their current roles, and interests they advocate for. Take note of when they're next up for election.
3. What chambers of commerce and industry are there in your residential and business regions?
4. What networking groups or meetups are available in your region or area of interest?
5. Identify the people or organisations in your area that are funded to provide you with support in starting or building your small business. This may include the local NEIS provider, entrepreneurship facilitator, state development officers and business enterprise centres.
6. Are there any online groups that could provide you with ongoing support?







Chapter 3: Starting your business



“There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.”



– Paulo Coelho



How to start a business

It takes more than just professional skills to start and manage a successful small business. Initially the business opportunity and market must be present (i.e. clients that require your professional services and will pay accordingly). As well as the opportunity, you need to have professional and managerial skills. This chapter covers the areas you need to consider when starting a dietetic business.

Options for starting a small business

There are many types of businesses you can start. These are outlined below. Each lists common advantages and disadvantages often cited by dietitians and other health professionals.



Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Buy an existing business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established client base Goodwill and reputation are already established Equipment and facilities may also be available with the premises Repayments on loan may be easily made with revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial large capital outlay Goodwill payment may be costly Clients may not wish to use the services of a new dietitian Dietitian from whom the business was purchased may set up in competition nearby unless limited by sale contract
Joining an established business as a partner, locum or subcontractor with a view to partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully established business, so lower costs Opportunity to learn from established practitioners, both in dietetic and business skills Ready access to colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assistant or partner may initially receive less remuneration or may have to 'establish' his or her own clientele if not employed on a salaried basis (subcontractor or locum position) Need to accept 'established professional standards' or rules of the business, including only referring to practitioners in the practice, rather than other established contacts Lack of involvement in decision-making
Renting room(s) on a regular sessional basis with other allied health professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of the room(s) is guaranteed Rent may be negotiated according to facilities (e.g., receptionist) Rent may be negotiated on a 'pay for use' basis (utilities and reception can be negotiated as part of rental) Clinic times can be advertised in advance Potential for referrals from other health professionals on the premises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referrals may be more difficult to obtain than if you have rooms in a medical centre Reception or secretarial services may not be appropriate or adequate Referrals may be limited from outside health professionals if their competitors are co-located with you Limited clinic days or sessions may be available Sharing office space can mean no permanent displays and a lack of storage space Security of tenure depends on leasing agreement
Renting rooms on a regular sessional basis within a medical practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of the room(s) is guaranteed. Rent may be negotiated according to facilities (e.g. receptionist) Rent may be negotiated on a 'pay for use' basis (utilities and reception can be negotiated as part of rental) Clinic times can be advertised in advance You may get referrals from within the practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reception or secretarial services may not be appropriate or adequate The practice may object to you seeing referrals from outside the practice Medical practitioners from other practices may be reluctant to refer to a dietitian in another medical practice Security of tenure depends on leasing agreement Sharing office space can mean no permanent displays and a lack of storage space Medical practitioner may get a new dietitian if you grow too large for the practice Access to their medical software can involve additional costs

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Independent leasing or renting of rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premises can be clearly identified with the dietitian's name • Permanent address and telephone number • Reception and secretarial assistance to suit individual needs • Permanent displays and models can be set up • Flexibility of working hours • Centralised accounting and reception facilities • More appropriate for private industry clients • Possibility of subleasing rooms if not using them every day • Enhances saleability of the practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High capital outlay (e.g. office set-up, office furniture, weighing scales and equipment) • High overheads (e.g. rent, utilities, insurance premiums, staff salaries) • Leasing agreements bind you into longer-term obligations • Security of tenure depends on leasing agreement • Lease payable whether or not room is being used
Private home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suits those wishing to work part-time • Flexible working hours • Low overheads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to ensure a professional appearance for consulting and waiting rooms • Need adequate parking and may need council approval for parking • May need council approval for the use of a private house as a business premises • Maintaining professional telephone and reception coverage is difficult • Disturbances from other family members • Client privacy may be a problem • Security at home may be a problem
Telehealth private practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can work from home or office with lower overheads (no waiting room) • Can develop niche area of practice as market can be international • Clients have less travelling time • Variety of programs that link directly with client management systems • Your practice moves with you • Flexible work hours • Able to reach larger market of individuals who need appointments outside standard hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require access to high-speed internet and microphone/camera. • Need an onboarding procedure so clients understand the technology • Difficulties with accurate clinical assessments e.g. height and weight measurements
Online programs, social media, courses and groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your professionalism, tone and personality determine how you deliver your services • Can provide information in different communication styles • Ability to create a niche and provide services internationally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to require profile before clients will take these options up • Marketing can be expensive as you're competing with unregulated professionals

Buying an existing business

When purchasing an existing business, you should understand the components of the business that make buying it worthwhile. There are many ways to value a business, but like property, the value of a business is simply the price that someone is willing to pay.

There are advantages and disadvantages to purchasing an existing business. If you'd like to buy a business but the price is too high, negotiate on components that you can remove from the purchase, or additional value (like extra training, mentoring or promotion) that the seller could provide.

For some dietitians, starting from scratch may be the best option. For others, buying an existing business can mean they are able to pay themselves immediately and have a client base to accelerate their experience. You'll meet successful dietitians who have taken both paths.

If you have the opportunity to buy a business, there are some things to think about when deciding how much you should pay.

What is the cost of acquiring the business?

Do you have this money to invest in a business, or will you need to borrow the money, or have the previous owner vendor-finance it? The price of the business is always open to negotiation, and you should evaluate the business independently of the price the seller would like. Ultimately, you're looking for the compromise where both parties are happy. It is important to note the purchase of a business is GST free if 1) the sale is for payment, and 2) the purchaser is required to be registered for GST and 3) the purchaser and seller have agreed in writing that the sale is of a going concern (i.e., that the business is operating and making a profit).

Why is the business for sale?

Why is the current owner selling? Reasons could include things like death, illness, retirement, or low-volume client load. Even if sales are decreasing, you may have ideas to make the business more successful than it has been.

How much is the business's revenue?

How much money is the business bringing in, and how much of this will continue if the current owner leaves? Will this income pay you and your loan repayment? If the business is reliant on the owner's work, you may need to reduce the predicted revenue if they leave. But you may see opportunities to increase revenue.

How much are the business's expenses?

What everyday expenses will you still need to pay, and how much do they cost? What expenses will you not have if you purchase the business? How much is the business paying the owner after tax and superannuation, and is this above or below your expected take-home pay?

What assets does the business have?

What does the business physically own, and what would it cost you to purchase these assets new, or in a similar used condition? Assets include things like buildings, scales, body composition scales, professional library, client education material, digital assets (website, social media pages), computer hardware and software.

Goodwill and emotional components

Goodwill is the money that you pay for the business over and above the cost of the assets. This may include premiums for the business's reputation in the community and potential emotional components such as giving you the opportunity to work in the area of your choice (e.g. with a professional sporting team or in a preferred supplier agreement with an aged care facility). Your accountant can determine the value attributed to 'goodwill', which will be based on factors such as how long the business has been operating, the number of new clients verses repeats, and net profit.

What are the expiry dates and conditions of current contracts?

Contracts associated with expenses (leases, employment, equipment) and income (consultancy agreements, leases) are relevant to determining whether the income predicted will be the same, more, or less than in previous years.

Who are the stakeholders in the business?

Who refers to the business, who are the suppliers and who are the clients? With the business sale, do you expect any changes to the stakeholder relationships?

What support will the previous owner give?

When buying a business, previous owners may have capacity to promote you to stakeholders, and provide staff training or mentorship.

Working in a medical practice

When your practice is co-located with a medical practice, you should establish a contract with the principal general practitioner(s) or specialist that includes terms and conditions. The conditions you should consider are:

- Cost of using the room
- Any additional costs for administration assistance, such as receipt of telephone calls, sending and receipt of faxes and client communication (appointments bookings and cancellations, reminder systems)
- Arrangements for client billing: who provides the invoices or accepts the fee payment; bulk billing, EFTPOS, credit and issuing of receipts
- Access to computer and printer facilities
- Level of access to Medical Director or similar software that can be shared between you and other medical practice staff or consultants, including your ability to enter client data in the 'results' section of the client's file (this is especially important)

- Whether you'll have access to the same consultation room each session with suitable facilities such as scales, height measures, hand-basin, storage space
- Roles and relationships with other practice staff (for example, practice manager and practice nurse)
- Inclusion in practice education and training events and inclusion in staff meetings
- Requirements for reporting back to the referring doctors.

Contract positions

Contract positions may be advertised on the [Dietitians Australia member portal](#), in local or national papers, or may be heard about through word of mouth. Occasionally, dietitians are 'head-hunted' by organisations who have heard of their expertise and work ethic. These positions are usually fixed-term consultancies and they could include the following areas:


- Employment on a sessional basis, for example, a group of doctors operating under a general practice grant
- Contract work to public or private hospitals and within group practices
- Consultancies to schools (canteens/ tuckshops)
- Lecturing to groups, conferences, or adult education classes
- Lecturing to students (universities and TAFE institutions)
- Media consultant (magazines, newspapers)
- Freelance journalism (articles on nutrition)
- Health promotion in industry and schools
- Consultancies (clinical) to private hospitals, nursing homes
- Consultancies to food industry or their agents for specified project work e.g. literature reviews or substantiation of health claims
- State or national projects, e.g. National Food Survey
- Contract work to fitness centres and gyms
- Contract work to food companies or public relations agencies.



Options for business ownership structure

	Sole Trader	Partnership	Joint Venture	Company	Discretionary Trust
Description	One person owns the business and makes all the decisions.	Two or more people, each of whom owns and is responsible for the business.	Two or more people joined for a limited time to perform a specific business activity.	Management shared by the board of directors to oversee business operations. Shareholders own a portion of shares of the business according to the amount of money they have invested in the business.	Under a discretionary trust, the trustee runs the business for the benefit of the trust's beneficiaries and is responsible for debt.
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to form and dissolve. Owner retains all profits. Flexible. You are your own boss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to form. Expands borrowing ability, financial assets and management skills available to the business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has limited purpose and existence in time with limited commitment by owners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited financial liability of owners. Expansive borrowing power. Expanded management skills available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusts don't generally pay income tax.
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No continuity if owner leaves or dies. Unlimited legal and financial liability. Resources limited to those of owner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex to dissolve. Unlimited liability of all partners. Potential for management conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can pursue only those purposes for which venture was formed. To perpetuate self must change to other business structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costly to form and dissolve. Various legal restrictions on activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costly solicitor fees to draw up appropriate trust deeds

Reference: Cross AJ. Practical and legal considerations of private nutrition practice. J Am Diet Assoc 1995;95(1)21-29. & CCIQ Definitive Guide to Starting a Small Business (2017)



Checklist for starting a private practice

- ✓ Write your business plan. Include a SWOT analysis – this will help you get started.
- ✓ Decide the business structure you are going to implement.
- ✓ Get an ABN and decide whether you'll register for GST.
- ✓ Open a bank account; organise merchant facilities if desired.
- ✓ Sign rental or lease agreement on rooms if required.
- ✓ Take out professional indemnity, public liability and property insurance.
- ✓ Connect utilities such as power, water, telephone and internet.
- ✓ Set up accounting systems and find an accountant to seek assistance and advice.
- ✓ Register with Medicare to obtain a provider number(s), depending on how many locations you work from. This will also be used for most private health insurance companies and DVA.
- ✓ Purchase business cards and printed stationery.
- ✓ Purchase equipment, general stationery, etc.
- ✓ Set up client records.
- ✓ Organise signage for premises.
- ✓ Appoint staff (optional) and register with the Australian Taxation Office as an employer.

Note that these items are discussed in detail in following chapters.



Case study: Buying an existing practice

Ashleigh Brunner: Body Fusion



I'll never forget the challenging transition from university into my first full-time dietetics job. I fainted in my clinical hospital placement. Even though I passed with first class honours, I suffered situational anxiety in the hospital environment and was grateful to even make it through placement.

After graduation, most of my university friends secured clinical jobs and I felt upset and unworthy. Eight months later I received an interesting call from a brilliant mentor: "Hey Ash, want to buy a business? I know one for sale, and I really think you can do it." So, in September 2013, aged 24, with no private practice experience or business training, I bought a business.

Honestly, it wasn't easy at first. There were times of self-doubt and sometimes I felt very alone. However, it was challenging and exhilarating being resourceful and accountable for my own efforts. I was able to connect with people from all walks of life and it gave me freedom and creativity. I also had to build different skills: social media, marketing, sales, IT, accounts and administration.

My client load in private practice varied from clinical dietetics to weight loss and elite sports (which I absolutely loved). As the business grew, I took short courses in business and gained deeper knowledge and tools for effective consulting. Other opportunities came for small contracts in menu modification, app development, wellbeing nutrition strategy and a diverse range of workshops (sports/community/corporate).

During this learning, I continued to be inspired by travelling. In March 2015 I departed on a round-the-world adventure for a year and employed another dietitian in my place. After all, if you're not willing to risk the unusual, you'll settle for the ordinary, and I never wanted an ordinary life.

On return from my trip in March 2016, I began the process of strengthening my practice and learning to become a manager. We expanded from two to five sites and I employed three dietitians. This was another steep learning curve and extremely challenging at times. Eventually I realised this wasn't really for me and I wanted to jump back into more technical dietetics.

At this time, I met a lovely dietitian at a Sports Dietitians Australia conference. I was amazed she was the only sports dietitian working at the NSW Institute of Sport. I wanted to get involved and her job sounded really interesting. We kept in touch and she linked me up with Gymnastics NSW trampoline team. I was so grateful for this and it confirmed my suspicions: sports nutrition was my new path forward.

In September 2018 I sold part of my business, closed one clinic location and only kept one staff member on. In the same week I sold part of the business, I was offered a job at the NSW Institute of Sport. I can't remember ever being so nervous for an interview; I wanted it so badly. I was able to bring a wealth of experience to the role through my exposure to clinical dietetics as well as sports interactions. I had developed strong communication, negotiation, problem-solving and public speaking skills.

Every day at work is an absolute pleasure for me and I'm involved with 6 different sports. I work with a great team of passionate people who are supporting Australian athletes to be the world's best. I couldn't be happier!

So, don't give up on your aspirations and don't compare your page 1 to someone else's page 100. Enjoy all you can and learn all you can. Also: Don't live ordinary. Calculated risk and diligence will be rewarded!

Chapter 3

self-assessment activity

1. What type of business structure suits your business now? Why?
2. Do you expect that this will be the same in 3 to 5 years? Why or why not?
3. What are some advantages and disadvantages to starting as a contractor to another dietitian or health practice?
4. Consider the following situation:

You've been working for 3 years in a private practice and your partner gets a job interstate. You love your job, but you must move. You gave your boss notice as soon as you found out, which was 12 weeks before you had to move. You enjoy your work, but you have a strong desire to work for yourself, so you've decided to start your own private practice when you move. In your spare time, you start to develop your own business systems and resources, and research the market. You have found a suitable location, have chosen a business name and have a list of potential clients to market to. You are 8 weeks away from moving and you are very proud of the pre-work you have put in to set up your business, and you have saved \$30,000 as start-up funds. Your boss is supportive of your plans and has spoken with you about the boundaries with your current role and given you advice. She comes into your office and tells you that one of her colleagues is planning on selling her business. A few facts:

- She is looking to sell for \$90,000 as a going concern
 - It currently employs 2 full-time dietitians, including the owner
 - Owner pays herself \$85,000 per year (before tax) plus 9.5% super, travel and professional development
 - Turnover is \$420,000 (excl. GST) and profit is \$90,000 (excl. GST and before tax)
 - The employee dietitian is paid \$68,000 per year (before tax) plus super
 - A receptionist/marketer is employed part time for \$37,500 per year (before tax) plus super
 - Approximately 50% of income is from contracts
 - The business has a 2-month waiting list
- a. What are some questions you may need answered to be comfortable with your decision about starting your own practice versus buying a practice?
 - b. What are the pros and cons of buying this business rather than starting your own?





Chapter 4: Business planning



“A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow. Don’t wait for an inspired ending to come to mind. Work your way to the ending and see what comes up.”



– Andy Weir



How to write a business plan

The initial step in establishing your business is to write a business plan. The business plan sets out the objectives for your small business, what resources you have, and what strategies you'll need to use to attain your objectives.

Business plans are essential, but they may not need to be as detailed as you think. You might be able to put your comprehensive business plan on hold and simply start with a 1-page business plan. Some people find value in creating a vision board or dream board. The exception is if you're enrolling in the NEIS program or applying for funding or a loan. You'll need a comprehensive business plan for these.

Alex Osterwalder's [Business Model Canvas](#) is frequently used as a 1-page business plan. The link includes a comprehensive video on the Business Model Canvas.

Vision boards or dream boards allow you to identify your principles and values. They picture what you'd like your life to be like, and how your business can serve those goals. There are many options for creating a vision board, and even apps. If you're interested in creating a vision board, Jack Canfield has written a great [blog](#) with accompanying video to get you started.

If you're going to create a comprehensive business plan, you should consider the following components. You don't need to include all of them, but sometimes the parts we don't want to do are actually the parts we need most. Don't just skip parts if a quick learning program or some light reading could help you understand this part of your business.





Brief description of the business

One concise sentence describing what you'll do, where and how.

Description of the market

A well-prepared business plan will contain details of the market analysis you've carried out before deciding where to locate your business. This may include a SWOT analysis – a listing of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to you, and opportunities and threats are external to you. You will need to consider the following points:

Identification of your market

You'll need to know about the community you intend to work in, including:

- Who are your potential clients?
- What are the clients' needs?
- What will the clients pay for a service?
- Where do the clients currently get their information?
- What is the socioeconomic status, age distribution and health status of the population?

You can get information on population numbers and types from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) (ABS) and sometimes your local library. Basic Census data is available for free, and this would be adequate for most business planning purposes. Other ABS data is available at a charge.

Proximity to potential referral sources

You need to think about how easy it will be to get referrals in your local area.

- How many doctors and other health professionals are in the area?
- What are their special interests?
- Who do they refer to now?
- Are they likely to change?

To enable the business to grow and develop you need to continually analyse your market. Markets can change due to many factors.

Services

Having identified the extent and nature of the market, you may need to develop skills to meet a need in the area. For example, you may need new skills to treat a particular type of client, such as those who have food allergies. As well as professional development, personal development should be an important part of your marketing strategy. The professional with a caring, friendly manner will often do better than a more skilled but cold and insensitive competitor.

Fees

To calculate your fees, you must clearly understand your business costs. You need to consider any fixed expenditure (regular ongoing payments such as loans, rates, rent etc.) and incidental expenses such as office expenses (stationery, phone accounts etc.) as these expenses must be covered before you make any profit.

There are various methods you can use to determine your schedule of fees, including:

- **Value-based pricing** – refers to the value you perceive your clients would be gaining from your services. The purpose of value-based pricing is to align price with the value delivered, but it requires an understanding of how your clients measure value.
- **Cost-plus pricing** – this is the easiest method of determining price for service as it requires little information. This method requires you to determine the costs of running your business, and then including an additional amount to represent profit.
- **Competitor indexing** – this involves using industry pricing as a guideline for determining your own fee for service. You'll need to consider what services are offered in your area and choose a suitable option to base your fees on, as shown below. The method chosen will depend on the return you're aiming to achieve, what services you offer above your competitor, and whether you're trying to attract new business or retain customers. Possible methods include:
 - Matching competitors' prices
 - Setting price at an amount above competitors' prices
 - Setting price at an amount below competitors' prices

- Setting price at a percentage above competitors' prices
- Setting price at a percentage below competitors' prices
- Setting price within a range of the competitors' prices

Costs

It's important to have a general idea of the business costs incurred in providing a service. Ultimately your fees must cover your business costs and personal salary. Initially, your costs of providing a consultation may exceed your fees because your activity level is too low. In simple terms, to calculate the real cost of providing a service, you need to calculate an hourly rate for providing that service which will cover your personal salary plus your business costs. It may be worth getting an accountant's advice when developing your business plan.

Description of the location

You should include a description of the premises to be used by the consultancy/business (e.g. 'practice to be located in freestanding house in 'X' suburb').

Cost and availability of premises

Costs that would be incurred to buy, lease or rent premises should be calculated and included in your business plan. If your business is online, you should determine costs of hosting and subscriptions as equivalent to your premises.



Parking facilities

Is there adequate on-site or off-street parking, or both? Are the premises accessible by public transport, and do they have disabled access? Do you need a council permit for extra parking for clients?

Security

Security details are important. Items such as fire access, smoke detectors, external lighting and locking systems, personal alarms and proximity to police and fire brigade services need consideration. Money and client files kept on the premises need to be stored securely.

Personal security for yourself and your clients is of utmost importance. Sole practitioners should take care when working after hours in low-traffic areas, particularly during the winter months when it's dark early. It may be worth considering only working hours when other staff are present.

Equipment

List each item of equipment and furniture you'll need, its cost and depreciation rate, and whether you intend to purchase it outright or lease it. The following items may need to be purchased or leased:

- Phone – landline or mobile, or both
- Answering facility or voicemail
- Internet access (may require phone line)
- Desktop/laptop computer
- Printer
- Photocopier
- Scanner
- Computerised nutritional analysis software
- Equipment needed for your services (scales, stadiometer, body composition scale, food models)
- Desk and chair
- Comfortable seating for three to four clients
- Bookshelf or display unit
- Heating and cooling equipment
- Tea- and coffee-making facilities (including refrigerator)



Description of the competition

Think about who you'll be competing against. Some questions to consider include:

- Who are your competitors?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Are your prices comparable?
- Is the business located close to hospitals or community health centres with resident dietitians?

Description of management

Who will be managing the business? Including a résumé with appropriate experience can be useful.

Description of key personnel

If you need to raise additional finance to start the business, you'll need to provide the finance institution with a brief résumé of each of the people working in the practice (i.e. details of qualifications and experience).

Financial plan

Your accountant can assist you in preparing your financial plan, which should include:

- description of funding sources
- capital equipment list
- lease or rental agreement
- balance sheet
- break-even analysis
- income and cash flow projections

Determine how much you'll need to operate the business, including how much money you need to start up, how much you can expect to earn annually in fees, and how much your annual outlays in costs will be. These data should be incorporated into your financial plan. It's important to calculate how much start-up capital you'll need. To do this:

1. List the items of furniture and equipment you need and the costs.
2. Estimate how much cash you require as working capital until you can earn revenue from the practice.
3. Add (a) + (b) and you have a rough figure for your starting capital costs.

Marketing and promotions plan

Marketing is important to promote your business and/or services. Traditional marketing, public relations (PR), digital and social media marketing are all important for dietitians. In your marketing plan, you should outline the 7 Ps:

- Product
- Price
- Place
- Promotions
- People
- Process
- Physical evidence

Good marketing plans identify how each P will be addressed through marketing. The Queensland Government has created a [good overview](#) of the 7 Ps.



Case study: Marketing in business

Simone Austin



I love our profession, and enjoy sharing with my clients, teams and businesses I work with. I'm proud to be the president of Sports Dietitians Australia and media spokesperson for Dietitians Australia. I love seeing teams and athletes (as well as everyday people) perform at their best with help from a dietitian. Effective marketing of their services is one thing that successful people in business do well and even though I have experience with my business, profession and products, I'm still learning to be better at it every day.

I've been fortunate to work for a number of large organisations. These include elite sports organisations, such as Hawthorn Football Club, Cricket Australia, Melbourne Storm rugby league club, Melbourne City soccer club. I've also worked in the corporate world with Swisse Wellness and Rokeby Farms, and in aged care facilities. Sometimes it seems unusual to have expertise in so many areas, but ultimately for me it comes down to performance – whether that's performance on the footy field, in an office or in improving your medical conditions. That's one reason why I wrote my book, *Eat Like An Athlete*, as I believe we can all use nutrition to perform at our best and dietitians need to get their message out there in a positive way.

In my roles, I've had to market myself and our profession – what does a dietitian provide? What is the 'product' we sell? Why are dietitians or sports dietitians valuable? What is fair remuneration and adequate hours to ensure a service can be provided to meet performance outcomes?

Sometimes the roles I've held involved an application process; these organisations realise the benefits of having a dietitian on their team. Over time, with success (and accompanying data), clients can see the return on their investment, and they continue to keep you on and in some cases increase the work that they want you to do. I've learned that so often people don't realise the worth of a dietitian as they're not clear about what we are actually 'selling' and we tend not to 'brag' about the outcomes we achieve. I've won other roles by putting myself out there and showing organisations that I could help them achieve the performance they were looking for. I started to see success in my business when I started to effectively showcase why people (individuals, teams and organisations) needed us.

Changes to management or coaching staff (or budget cuts) do occur and it may mean you lose a contract. That has happened to me, but as one door closes, another door opens! It has forced me to move out of my comfort zone and on to

new challenges, bringing in more opportunities. A private practice I was working at closed after I'd been working there for 25 years. It forced me to find another practice and gave me the opportunity to make some changes in my business. I decided to hand over the billing and appointment-making, and I realised that I should have done this 20 years earlier! Taking the admin out of my business meant I had free time to work on the bigger-impact items of my business.

When you lose a contract, having the security of income from several different sources is a blessing. My income comes from one day as an employee, contracted to my AFL team, consultancy work on a project basis, a retainer for yearly consultancy, individual consultations at a GP practice, book sales, articles, running my own events, and one-off projects. It keeps me motivated, challenged and satisfied in my work.

In 2019, I published my first book. Books are a good marketing tool even if royalty cheques on sales aren't flooding in! It gives you credibility to bring in other work – for me, that's more public speaking and media work. Writing the book was hard. But learning how to use it not only to market the book effectively but also myself was the hardest part, as marketing was something I was much less familiar with. I quickly learned the needs of marketing and I'm loving this aspect of my work. It feels like a new career.

My role in corporate organisations also incorporates science-based marketing. I've been a spokesperson at events, and on social media, radio and television. I love that every day is completely different, and that I learn from other people in different industries such as business, marketing and advertising. I think this is something all dietitians can do. My professional development is no longer focused purely on dietetics, but now includes media training, effective communication, networking and marketing.

As much as I'm an advocate for getting paid your worth, and negotiating fair pay for your work, I'm also a big believer in volunteering to help career success. I've always found that the benefits of volunteering go both ways. In my early years, I would volunteer to increase my experience. Now, I volunteer in leadership positions (such as Sports Dietitians Australia and Dietitians Australia) and in organisations that support my children. Through volunteering I've made friends for life. Payment comes in life opportunities, including some that lead to paid work, and I'm also learning from likeminded, motivated people.

Chapter 4

self-assessment activity

1. Describe the ideal work that you'd like to create by building your own business.
2. With the end in mind (your big goals), what are steps to getting there?
3. You can complete all the planning activities below, or just the ones that resonate with you.
 - a. Watch the lecture on [Business Model Canvas](#) and create a one-page business plan for your business.
 - b. Watch [Jack Canfield's video](#) on vision boards and create your vision board.
 - c. Review information on [business.gov.au](#) for [business planning](#), [marketing planning](#) and [social media planning](#)., and complete relevant plans for your business.
4. What is the difference between cost-plus pricing and value-based pricing?
5. What are the strengths, benefits and weaknesses of time-based billing, and fixed-fee (or project based) billing?







Chapter 5: Business basics



“Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals.”



- Jim Rohn



Getting started

Once you've chosen the location of your business and have written your business plan, then you need to consider the following points.

Registering a business name

If you are a sole trader and practice under your own name (or the name of your partner), registration of your business name is optional. If you have an alternative business name, you must [register](#) this with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC). Before registering a business name, you'll need to check that the name hasn't already been registered by another business. You can do this by performing a [name check availability](#) search through the ASIC website.

Before 28 May 2012, there were different business registers for each state and territory, but all business name registrations are now managed by ASIC. Business names registered with states and territories have now been transferred to the new system. There are [fees to register and renew](#) your business name. You can register or renew your business name for a period of either 1 or 3 years. Different fees apply for each option.

If you are operating as a company, then you need to register a company name. A company name gives you the advantage of holding exclusive rights to that name in Australia, without having to register in each state. As with a business name, you can only choose a company name not already registered to a company or business. Special approval is also required to use certain words. If your company conducts business in a name other than your registered company name, you must also register the business name. The ASIC website has [details on registering a company and company name](#).

It is important to note that registering a business or company name does not in itself give you any exclusive rights over the use of that name. If you want to have exclusive use of your name now and in the future throughout Australia, you will need to [apply for a trademark](#). It takes a lot longer and costs more to register a trademark than to register a business or company name. The size of your business might influence some of these decisions, particularly from a financial viewpoint.



Obtaining an ABN

All companies, government departments and agencies, and entities carrying on an enterprise in Australia are required to have an Australian Business Number (ABN). This is a single identifying number that's used for all dealings with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and other government departments and agencies.

The ABN doesn't replace personal or business tax file numbers. Companies will continue to use their existing tax file numbers when lodging tax returns, and your personal tax file number will be linked to your ABN in the ATO database.

You can register for an ABN:

- By completing an Application for ABN registration for individuals (sole traders) (NAT 2938) (paper copy) or calling **1300 720 092**
- Online through the [Australian Business Register](#)
- By having your tax agent lodge your registration electronically via the Electronic Lodgement System (ELS).

Note: Use the phone number or link provided, or your tax agent, to apply for an ABN and beware of scam companies that offer to handle the registration for a fee. Applying for an ABN through the Australian Business Register is free.

Registering for GST

All entities carrying on a business must register for the goods and services tax (GST) if their turnover is at or above \$75,000. Businesses need to pre-register for GST if the business is forecast to earn \$75,000 in its first year. Be aware that time restrictions apply and you only have 21 days to register for GST once you've earned \$75,000. If your turnover is less than \$75,000, registration for GST is optional. Registration for GST means that you charge GST on all taxable sales and you can offset any GST paid on business purchases against the GST you collect on taxable sales. If your business isn't registered for GST, you can't charge GST or claim GST paid on business purchases.

To assist you in deciding whether to register, estimate the GST tax credits you would be entitled to and compare this with the cost of complying with the GST. Consult your accountant for advice on your specific circumstances. Further information can be found on the ATO [GST for Small Business](#) page. Note if you are buying an existing business and do not want to pay GST on the purchase price, you must register for GST.

Obtaining professional indemnity and public liability insurance

Before you start operating, you'll need to get the relevant insurance. For more information, see [Chapter 10: Insurance](#).

Registering as a Medicare provider

Under the Medicare Allied Health Initiative, individuals under a GP Management Plan and a Team Care Arrangement for a chronic health condition can receive Medicare rebates for certain allied health services. Eligible clients can access up to 5 consultations per year with registered dietitian service providers or other allied health providers. APDs can apply to be a provider under this initiative, and this allows eligible clients to get bulk-billed consultations or a rebate for their consultation through Medicare. You'll need to register with Medicare for a Medicare provider number to offer this service to clients. If you work from multiple locations, you'll need to apply for a provider number for each location. You can have a roaming provider number if you conduct a home visiting service. If you work from one location and move in the future (e.g. move office buildings), you'll need to apply for a new provider number.

Information on how to register, and detailed information relating to the initiative, is available from the [Medicare website](#). You can also [download the application forms](#).

Also see the Medicare checklist in [Chapter 5](#).

Registering as a provider with the Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) pays for health care services provided to veterans, their widows and, in some cases, their families. This means you can see these clients and seek reimbursement through Services Australia (DHS). While your service is free to the client, they will first need a referral from a doctor. In 2019, the criteria for allied health care providers to see DVA clients changed. These rules evolve, so make sure you check them regularly.

DVA expects all dietetic providers to meet the professional and ethical standards set by Dietitians Australia. DVA uses the Medicare provider number, so once you are registered with DHS (i.e. you have a Medicare provider number) you are automatically registered with DVA. However, DVA does advise that you read their notes for allied health providers before commencing work with DVA clients and organise the required stationery. See the [DVA website](#) under service providers – allied health professionals and [Chapter 7](#) for more details.

Registering as a provider with private health funds

Most private health funds give partial rebates for dietetic services to members with a certain level of cover (usually full extras cover). You'll need to register with each of the health funds to enable your clients to claim a rebate. Most health funds now use Medicare provider numbers; however, a few still issue their own provider numbers. You'll need to contact each of the major health funds in your state or territory to find out their requirements and register with them.

The Australian Government Private Health Insurance Ombudsman maintains a [list of private health funds operating in Australia](#). The list includes details on which state or territory they operate in, whether they have open or restricted membership and the contact details for each fund.

Registering for a healthcare identifier

To be able to access a client's Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR), you'll need to apply for a Healthcare Provider Identifier – Individual (HPI-I). You must be an APD to apply for an HPI-I and will be required to provide either a copy of your APD certificate or Medicare provider number. See [Chapter 6](#) for more information on PCEHR. Further information, including details on how to register, is available from the [Medicare website](#).

Office systems

An efficient office system is central to the success of your business. Basic considerations are:

- How will clients' referrals be received?
- How will the clients' records be kept and stored?(See [Client records](#).)
- How will telephone enquiries and messages be recorded (receptionist, virtual assistant, voicemail, mobile phone)?
- How will the clients be billed and receipted? (See [Finances and accounting](#).)
- What procedure will be used to review and collect [unpaid accounts](#)?
- How will you do your bookkeeping? (See [Finances and accounting](#).)
- How will GP letters and reports be sent?

Basic office requirements

You'll need these basic items and systems in place to get started:

- Electronic diary or appointment calendar with online bookings available.
- Website and/or social media pages
- Dedicated email address
- Letterhead, 'with compliments' slips and envelopes (if using the APD logos see [APD Logo and Branding Guidelines](#))
- Business cards or appointment cards, or both (refer to the [APD Logo and Branding Guidelines](#) for use of logos)
- Client records (electronic or hard copy)
- An invoice system with dietitian's name and provider number(s), ABN, and GST information if registered.
- An accounting system to record income and expenditure ([see Chapter 11](#)).

Medicare



Since 2001, Australians with a chronic condition of longer than 6 months' duration have been entitled to [Medicare rebates for up to 5 allied health visits per year](#). The GP needs to complete a GP Management Plan (GPMP) or Team Care Arrangement (TCA) for the client and decide how to split the 5 allied health visits across allied health professionals. They then need to complete an allied health referral form noting the total number of visits approved for the dietitian and provide you with this form. Medicare will only rebate a total of 5 allied health visits per calendar year. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients can access an additional 5 visits to allied health professionals if they register under the [Practice Incentives Program \(PIP\)](#) with their GP. Once they've registered and have a GPMP and TCA in place, these extra visits are available if needed.

Note that clients can be seen for additional appointments, but they won't receive a rebate from Medicare and must pay the full fee themselves or may claim a rebate from a private health fund.

Registration

For clients to be eligible for these rebates you will need to register as a provider with Medicare.

Recordkeeping

The allied health referral form should be faxed or posted by the GP or brought by the client and must be completed correctly to be valid. This includes being signed and dated. The box at the top must be ticked to indicate a GPMP or TCA has been developed, and the number of visits to the dietitian indicated in the appropriate box. Although the GP completes the form, Medicare holds you responsible for ensuring it's correctly filled out – if you're audited and the form is incomplete, you'll be penalised.

Reporting

You need to keep accurate records of your consultations with the client and write a report to the referring GP after the first and last visit, and more frequently if required for the care of the client concerned.

Billing

There are three options for charging clients seen under a Medicare referral – bulk billing, charging an upfront fee with a gap, or charging an upfront fee without a gap.

Bulk billing

This refers to establishing a bulk-billing link with Medicare and asking clients to provide their Medicare details only. The claim is processed with Medicare at the time of appointment and the client is not required to pay upfront. If you bulk bill, you'll only receive the [allowed rebate from Medicare](#). Medicare will make a payment to you once their computer system shows that the doctor has completed a GP Management Plan (Item No: 721/723) or a TCA (Item No: 732) and once Medicare confirms that the client has not used all 5 allowed allied health visits per year. If in doubt, you can call Medicare on 132 150 (Medicare professionals' helpline) to confirm that a client is eligible and that you'll be paid. There is usually a time lag between when you post the claim form to Medicare and when the claim is processed and paid to you.

Upfront charge

If you charge the client a fee up-front and then the client claims the rebate from Medicare (in-person at a Medicare office or via mail) you can charge the Medicare rebate fee or a higher amount (i.e. a gap). You'll receive your payment on the day of the consultation, and it is up to the client to do any paperwork required by Medicare to claim the rebate. Medicare can provide you with the claim forms that clients need to sign and send to Medicare. Having some Medicare claim forms handy for your clients can assist with claiming, as they can post it if they're unable to get to a Medicare office. If payment is made using an EFTPOS terminal, you can partially bill. The client will pay the gap only and Medicare will send them a cheque for the rebate made payable to you, which the client then forwards to you.

Checklist for working with Medicare

Online claiming

To process claims online, you'll need to speak to a business development officer at Medicare to have your business's medical program linked with Medicare. Clients will then pay your full fee at the time of consultation. The claim is made immediately online and the Medicare rebate is paid straight into the client's nominated bank account. Both your business and your client need to be registered with Medicare online to do this. Another payment option is MediClear through an EFTPOS terminal. If you're bulk billing, the money is deposited into your account the next day (once approved by Medicare). This saves all the paperwork and posting of Medicare slips. There is a monthly fee for an EFTPOS terminal. Alternatively, if you use a HICAPS terminal, clients can pay the fee with an EFTPOS card and then the rebate can be paid straight back into their account. Newer HICAPS terminals process EFTPOS, many health fund rebates and Medicare Easyclaim transactions. For clients with a GP Management Plan and referral to you, you can bulk bill via Medicare Easyclaim or, alternatively, charge the full fee then process the Medicare rebate into the client's transaction account.

Invoicing

Invoices for clients seen under an allied health referral must include the item number 10954 for individual dietetic consults, the details of the GP who referred the client (including their name and provider number), the referral date, and your Medicare provider number.

Compliance

Services Australia (DHS) monitors the practice profile of all providers who render Medicare services. In this way, DHS can determine variances amongst peers that may indicate inappropriate practice. Since 1 January 2013, dietitians have been recognised as practitioners who may be referred to the Director of the [Professional Services Review](#) by DHS for potentially inappropriate practice.

The [Medicare Billing Assurance Toolkit](#) is available online to help support practices to better understand and meet their legal obligations when claiming under Medicare, and to reduce the risk of inaccurate billing.

- ✔ Register as a provider with Medicare (this requires you to be an APD and have a minimum level of professional indemnity insurance).
- ✔ If you practice in more than one location, apply for an additional provider number for each location.
- ✔ Decide on how you will charge clients – i.e. bulk bill or upfront fee.
- ✔ Organise online claiming.
- ✔ Organise Medicare Easyclaim, if you charge an upfront fee and wish to provide this service to clients.
- ✔ When a referral is received, check that it is completed correctly – if not, contact the referring GP to ensure you receive a correct copy.
- ✔ Keep a copy of the referral in your client's file.
- ✔ See the client for the number of visits allocated and provide the correct receipt (including the referral name and provider number, your details, including your provider number and the item number '10954' for the consultation). Clients can be seen for additional appointments, but they won't receive a rebate from Medicare and must pay the full fee themselves or may claim a rebate from a private health fund.
- ✔ Provide a written report to the client's GP after each appointment, if the client has been referred for a single appointment, and after the first and last appointment (or more often if clinically necessary) if the client has been referred for multiple appointments.

Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Accredited Practising Dietitians may provide nutrition services to entitled persons as a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) provider. As information from DVA is regularly updated, it is best to refer to the [DVA website](#) for the latest information and forms.

Registering

Registering as a Medicare provider now gives you automatic registration with DVA. Although this is automatic, there are additional steps you need to take before providing services to eligible veterans. See the DVA website for further information on [becoming a DVA provider](#).

Notes for dietitians

DVA has produced [notes for allied health providers](#) and [notes for dietitians](#) that you need to read and understand if you would like to provide services to eligible veterans. These resources together explain the procedures to follow when providing healthcare services to eligible veterans and their families. It is important that you read these notes before you offer services to these clients. By providing services to veterans and direct-billing DVA, you as the provider, are agreeing to work compliantly within the guidelines.

Treatment cycle

On 1 October 2019 DVA introduced a [treatment cycle procedure](#). This treatment cycle requires dietitians to complete a care plan following the initial consultation and provide this to the referring medical practitioner. Up to 12 sessions can be claimed in a treatment cycle. Following the treatment cycle, you should provide a report to the referring doctor, including progress and effectiveness of treatment. If the client requires an additional treatment cycle, the medical practitioner needs to complete a new referral, and you need to prepare a new care plan to provide to the treating doctor.

Fee schedule

DVA pays a specified fee for consultations for eligible veterans. You must claim this fee through DVA. You can't charge a gap to the client. Additional amounts are paid for extended consultations for complex conditions and travel for home visits. As per the DVA notes, DVA does not fund mobile businesses, and clients must have a genuine need for home visits for you to be able to claim home consultations and distance travelled. The latest [schedule of fees](#) is available on the DVA website.



Checklist for working with DVA

Claims for payment

Fees for clients seen through DVA must be claimed directly from DVA rather than the client. This can be done online or manually.

Online claiming

Email: onlineclaiming@dva.gov.au

Enquiries: 1300 550 457 (metro) or 1800 550 457 (non-metro).

Manual claiming

Send all claims for payment to:

Veterans' Affairs Processing
Department of Human Services
GPO Box 964
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Enquiries: 1300 550 017

Request for nutritional supplements

DVA will pay for nutritional supplements if, following your assessment of a veteran, you decide they are needed. To arrange this for your client you'll need to complete a request form. A copy of [Form D9165: Request for nutritional supplementation](#) is available on the DVA website, along with an explanation of the procedure for obtaining supplements.

Veterans' transport arrangements

Under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA), veterans and war widows/widowers who travel for approved medical treatment may be eligible for reimbursement of certain expenses. Reimbursement may also be made for travel in connection with a claim for a disability pension or service pension. More information on [transport arrangements](#) can be found on the DVA website.

- ✔ Register as a provider with Medicare, which provides automatic registration as a DVA provider (this requires you to be an APD and have a minimum level of professional indemnity insurance).
- ✔ If you practice in more than one location, apply for an additional provider number for each location.
- ✔ Read the 'Notes for Allied Health Professionals' and the 'Notes for Dietitians' so you understand your obligations and the procedures involved in seeing DVA clients.
- ✔ Organise online billing.
- ✔ Obtain the correct referral (D904) from the referring medical practitioner, to ensure the client is eligible to be seen through DVA.
- ✔ Keep a copy of the referral in your client's file.
- ✔ See the client and complete a care plan to send back to the referring doctor.
- ✔ Process your claim to DVA online or manually.
- ✔ If nutritional supplements are required, complete the appropriate form and send to the GP for the client to obtain a pharmacy prescription.
- ✔ Write a report to the referring GP after your client's initial consultation and at the completion of their treatment cycle.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)



The NDIS provides Australians who have disabilities with [funding for appropriate support and services](#). People who are eligible for funding are provided with a treatment plan, which determines the support that will be provided. The NDIS website provides helpful information for providers about what participants need from the NDIS, meeting quality and safeguard requirements, and what's involved in becoming a registered provider.

NDIS pricing and payment

The funding model for NDIS is designed to be flexible so that participants can access services that increase their independence, inclusion and social participation.

Prices for support services are negotiated and agreed between a participant and a provider up to a maximum price limit. A participant may choose a more expensive option at their own expense, and self-managing participants do not have to follow the pricing arrangements in the [NDIS Price Guide](#).

Billing of non-direct services (such as travel)

Providers can only claim travel costs from a participant in respect of the delivery of a support service if:

- the support catalogue indicates that providers can claim for Provider Travel in respect to that support team
- the provider has the agreement of the participant in advance (specifying travel costs)
- the provider is required to pay the worker delivering the support for the time they spent travelling because of the agreement under which the worker is employed



Checklist for registering with the NDIS

NDIA reporting

Providers must provide progress reports to the participant and the NDIS at agreed times. A provider may charge for the time it takes to write a therapy report that is requested by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), and claim this against the appointment at the hourly rate of the relevant support item. A report requested by the NDIA should outline:

- plan objectives and goals
- plan reviews (which measures outcomes against the original goals)
- recommendations for ongoing identified needs

Becoming a registered NDIS provider

To deliver services to NDIS participants, you don't have to be registered with the NDIS. However, being a registered provider will connect you with a wider range of participants and can show that you have met specific quality and safeguard requirements. You need to be registered with Medicare and [Provider Digital Access \(PRODA\)](#) to be eligible to register with the NDIS.

If you register, you'll have to choose a 'registration group(s)' to apply for, which indicates the types of services you offer. There are [15 support categories](#) under the NDIS. As dietitians, we fall under the category of "Improved Health and Wellbeing".

Before you register, it's helpful to review the information in the [NDIS Provider toolkit](#) to understand how you and your business can serve the needs of NDIS participants.

- ✓ Register for a [PRODA \(Provider Digital Account\)](#) through the Myplace portal on the NDIS website
- ✓ Create a [Myplace account](#)
- ✓ Submit an 'intent to register' through Myplace
- ✓ Select the registration groups you wish to register for
- ✓ [Nominate the profession/s of people who will provide services](#) in each registration group
- ✓ Read and sign the 'Declaration of Suitability'
- ✓ Provide supporting evidence and documentation as required. This must be supplied before the assessment process can be completed.
- ✓ Once you've completed your registration, you'll receive a notification whether:
 - ✓ your application was successful
 - ✓ further documentation is required
 - ✓ your application is pending
- ✓ You can only begin contacting participants to make service agreements once you've received your certificate of registration.

Practice software programs

Many dietitians are now using electronic practice software programs for keeping client consultation notes, and for overall practice management. These programs provide a variety of features, including appointment books, client consultation notes, invoicing, SMS and email reminders, reporting and statistics. The right program can save you time and streamline the running of your business. If you work in multiple locations, you can easily access your files wherever you are, and there is the option of secure online backup. Some programs are completely customisable so you can set up the client consultation notes exactly as you like them. You can also set up your own templates for doctors' reports and client action

and meal plans. Some practice software programs are installed on your computer or server, while others are only available in a hosted environment (online), which means you'll need to have a very reliable internet connection – this is an important consideration in your decision-making.

Most companies offer a free trial version so you can get a better idea of how the program works and whether it suits your needs. Talking to others who are using the program can also be helpful when deciding whether to purchase one. Below is a comparison of popular Practice Management Systems.



	Clinko	Halaxy	Nookal	Omnify	Power Diary	Core Plus	TM2	Jane	Best Practice	Smart Soft	Kalix
Website	cliniko.com	Halaxy.com	Nookal.com	Getomnify.com	PowerDiary.com	CorePlus.com.au	insideTM2.com.au	Jane.app	Bpssoftware.net	SmartSoft.com.au	KalixHealth.com
Integration of Client Notes & Information	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Integrated Calendars	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Group Appointments	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Not specified	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not specified	Yes	Not specified
Booking Platform	Online Facebook	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online Facebook	Online	Online	Yes
Business Growth Reports	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Payment Systems and Accounting Programs	Xero	None	Xero MYOB	PayPal	None	TYRO	TM2 payments	Jane pay- ments	MYOB Xero TYRO/ TYRO Private Health	TYRO Xero ANZ	Stripe Square
Claiming Systems	No	No	Medicare DVA	No	Medicare	Medicare DVA	HICAPS Medicare DVA	Health insurance claiming	Medicare	Medicare HICAPS DVA WorkCover QLD	No
System Integration	Mail- Chimp Facebook	Calendars	Mail- Chimp Nextin Physitrack	Google Calendar Gmail MailChimp Drip WordPress Zapier Active Campaign	No	No	No	Mail- Chimp Physitrack Bench Foto Pacific Blue Cross Facebook Google Analytics Google Tag	Argus Referral Net Medical Objects Secure Messaging	Mail- Chimp Physitrack Microsoft Office Dymo	MailChimp Microsoft Office Nutrition Practice Manage- ment
Staff Management Systems	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not specified	Yes	Yes
Data Security	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Encryption	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Phone Support	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online Support	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
System Platform	Online	Online	Online	iOS & Android supported mobile app	Online	Online	Software	Online	Online and desktop options	Online	Online

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Resources

The following resources may be useful to a private practice:

- Scales (for weights of up to 300kg)
- Height measure
- Metal tape measure for large girth (200cm/79 inch)
- Nutrition analysis software
- Food models and or pictorial representations to support your client education
- Nutrition books (for reference or for sale to clients)
- Appropriate seating for people of all sizes and mobility levels
- Client education materials
- Waiting room/office toy box and toys (appropriate for pre-schoolers and easy to disinfect), colouring books, pencils, stickers
- Appropriate waiting room reading material

Nutrition analysis programs

Program	Website
Foodworks	www.xyris.com.au
Menu Sano	www.menusano.com
Easy Diet Diary	www.xyris.com.au
My Fitness Pal	www.myfitnesspal.com
Nutrium	www.nutrium.io
Nutritics	www.nutritics.com

Technology to help your business

Technology	Description
Telehealth	
Zoom	Zoom offers video communications with a cloud platform. Zoom is useful for holding video conferences and seeing clients.
Skype	Skype provides video chat and voice calls that can be accessed from multiple devices. Skype also has instant messaging services.
Coviu	Coviu offers video consultation services for health practitioners where you can have individual meeting rooms for each client, share PDFs and images, share whiteboards, screen-share, and annotate snapshots.
CRM systems	
Streak	Streak is a customer relationship management platform that integrates with Gmail. It allows you to mail merge, track when recipients receive and open emails, schedule emails, and access a library of frequently written emails.
Accelo	Accelo is a cloud-based business management system that provides email and ticket tracking, team scheduling, automatic billing and notifications, timesheet reports for employees, project management with Gantt charts, and collaboration, as well as allowing you to run a sales process while tracking opportunities and sending project quotes.
Ontraport	Ontraport is a visual marketing automation and reporting tool. It allows you to map the entire customer journey in a single map; gives you data on when and where your clients are coming from to help marketing strategies; and allows you to build your campaigns from a library of templates that include pre-designed pages, emails and everything else you need.
CRM software	
Intercom	Intercom is a customer messaging platform that integrates with your website and social media platforms, or on your app to engage with visitors. The chatbot will start conversations with your customers and provide responses for them to click to find solutions to their queries.
Botsify	Botsify is a chatbot that provides customer support solutions. Its live-chat capabilities allow it to answer basic questions from website visitors instantly. You can set the answers to common questions, and it only takes a few days to train your website chatbot.
Collect.Chat	Collect.Chat is an interactive, automatic chatbot that collects data from website visitors. Anyone can build a chatbot and set the questions you'd like it to ask your website visitors. Collect.Chat is a good replacement for static webforms on your website.
Task & team management	
Calendly	Calendly is an appointment and meeting scheduling cloud software. Calendly can connect up to six calendars to automatically check availability, and has billing capabilities.
Trello	Trello is a project management and collaboration tool that organises projects into boards. You can share these with colleagues, create checklists, and 'watch' progress.
Slack	Slack is a cloud-based set of team collaboration tools and services. It offers the ability to have conversations organised by team, topic, project or whatever makes sense for your business. You can send and share information such as files, photos, links, and integrates with useful services such as Dropbox and Google Drive.
Google Keep	Google Keep is a Google Drive application that has a variety of notetaking tools. Available on both the web and mobile, the application makes it easy to create checklists; collaborate with others; voice record; and input photos, links, or files. This is a great individual project management tool.
Flowdock	Flowdock is a group and private chat platform. It allows for team inboxes that channel notifications from customer support tools. This tool is great for small businesses where all team members are involved in customer service support.
GoToMeeting	GoToMeeting is an online video conferencing software that allows users to schedule meetings and share screens with others.

Technology	Description
WebEx	WebEx provides personalised meeting rooms where users can host and join meetings. It's a useful tool for team collaboration, creating webinars, team training, and customer support.
Confluence	Confluence is a team collaboration software that facilitates project planning, meeting notes, project requirements, marketing plans, and blog posts. You can share information with different teams, comment on documents and posts, and share calendars. Confluence is a great project management software that is easy to use.
Social media scheduling & content creation	
Sked Social	Sked Social is a planning and editing tool that takes the effort out of creating an eye-catching Instagram feed. It features a visual planner with automatic posting, a scheduling calendar, scheduling of location tags, and scheduling stories. It also offers analytics of post engagement, as well as a professional photo editor and hashtag templates.
Latergram	Latergram is a planning and scheduling tool for Instagram. The visual content calendar makes it easy to plan your social media posts. Latergram also offers analytics of your post engagement and performance, and allows for a shoppable Instagram feed.
Canva	Canva is an online graphic-design tool which enables anyone to create content for marketing, social media, or any form of print media. The tool has a range of access: a free version, and pro versions for a monthly subscription fee.
Planoly	Planoly is a visual planner and scheduler for Instagram that has end-to-end management of Instagram. Planoly can manage your marketing campaigns and content visually prior to posting. It tracks post engagement and comments. You can schedule your posts months in advance, auto-populate hashtags and Instagram handles, and plan your feed as well as stories.
Interactive content	
Teachable	Teachable is an online course builder platform where you can deliver online course education through videos, audio, presentations, images, and text. Teachable also allows for easy quiz creation and personal branding of your online 'school'.
Course Builder	CourseBuilder is an online learning platform, empowering you to deliver training to your organisation simply, quickly and without the prohibitive start-up cost. Create training for future employees, or education for clients.
Email software	
Campaign Monitor	Campaign Monitor is an automated email marketing platform where you are able to create engaging emails through easy drag-and-drop templates. The platform also allows for creating customer journeys depending on their action from your marketing campaign.
Mail Chimp	MailChimp is a marketing automation platform and an email marketing service. It provides marketing tools that reach customers through email, Facebook ads, Instagram ads, landing pages, Google ads, sign-up forms, and postcards. MailChimp is designed to make your business stand out.
Boomerang for Gmail	Boomerang can schedule emails, remind you to send follow-up emails, and allow you to archive messages until a later date when you need them. Boomerang also offers several other features such as 'responsible', which measures the likelihood that the recipient will reply based on word count, readability, and question count.
Microsoft Outlook	Outlook has an in-built scheduling system, if all you require is email scheduling without additional features such as tracking or marketing. When sending an email, you can schedule the message to send later.
Cloud Storage	
Google Drive	Google Drive is a file storage and synchronisation service that allows users to store, create, and edit files in a range of formats as an individual or team. Create content that can be shared with anyone else to view or edit. Access your files from anywhere by logging into your Drive from any device online or through the app.
Dropbox	Dropbox is a secure file-sharing service where you can upload files and folders to share instantly or store. You can store any kind of file on Dropbox through the app or via your desktop. This storage cloud system is great for storing and sharing files, but it doesn't allow you to edit the file in the cloud.
OneDrive	Similar to Dropbox, OneDrive offers secure cloud storage. You can store any file type in the cloud and access the system from Apple, Windows, Android and Xbox devices. It has automatic file sorting to put files in their correct folders.

Technology	Description
Cloud Accounting	
Square	Square is an all-in-one device for payments and receipts. The Square device comes with free point-of-sale software that makes for easy payment flow and keeps track of customers' purchase history. Square also provides sales reports and allows for team sales tracking.
Xero	Xero is cloud-based accounting software that lets you create, send and reconcile invoices; create expense claims; review reports; and manage salary payments and financial positions.
MYOB	MYOB is a cloud-based accounting software that tracks invoices, manages bills and expenses, integrates with the ATO to make tax time easier, and offers support teams 7 days a week.
Stripe	Stripe is software that allows businesses to receive payments online. Stripe provides the technical, fraud prevention, and banking infrastructure required to operate online payment systems.
PayPal	PayPal is an online platform that offers secure payment processing in person, online, or on mobile. PayPal keeps financial data secure for you and your customers, and analyses payments for fraud prevention.
Helpful Apps	
ATO app	The ATO app makes tax and super information easier to access. The app allows you to record tax-related information such as deductions.
Expensify	Expensify is an expense-reporting tool that helps small business owners track and streamline the way employees report expenses, approval processes, and the process for using that data in accounting software.
ReceiptBank	ReceiptBank helps small- to medium-sized businesses, sole traders, and individuals save valuable hours by pulling information from receipts and invoices quickly, accurately, and efficiently through cloud storage. You can also send receipts and invoices on the go, and allow access to an entire team.
Scanner Pro	Scanner Pro is a document scanning application for iOS devices that turns your documents into PDFs.
CamScanner	CamScanner is a document scanning application for Android devices that turns your documents into professional PDFs.

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Case study: Starting in business after another career

Peter Clark: Healthier You



As an overweight marketing director in the pharmaceutical industry, I sought the help of a dietitian to lose weight. I lost 15kg and felt great. But as time went on, I gained it again. I saw another dietitian, but she couldn't help me. I met with some local GPs and they said their biggest problem was they needed more dietitians. I said to my wife that if I went back to university and did a second master's degree (I'd already done a MSc 20 years earlier), I could be part of the solution. So, after 17 years in the pharmaceutical industry in senior sales and marketing roles, I considered a career switch. I rang Associate Professor Ben Desbrow at Griffith University. He explained the application and interview process. I applied and eventually received an offer.

Two years of study flew by and, on graduation day in fact, the referrals started coming in. In the first week I saw 20 clients and by the end of the year I was seeing 20 clients per day. The business is now 14 years old and, in that time, I've completed more than 75,000 consultations on over 11,000 clients. After my second year, I realised that I needed help. I hired another dietitian, who shared the workload with me. The dietitians I recruited were new graduates trying to learn the profession. The primary focus for a new graduate is to develop confidence in translating all of the technical knowledge into a consultation that a client values. In private practice, one key measure of success is client retention. Focus on developing a relationship with your client so they will come back. The best way for a new graduate to develop confidence is to work in a supportive environment with all the resources you need and then focus on doing the job. Over time, I've employed other dietitians for various lengths of time. Although new dietitians are generally less productive than their more-experienced counterparts, they offer a variety of different approaches and I learned a lot about the way other people approach the same problem. To formalise what I've learned and understand more about the critical outcomes in private practice, I'm starting my PhD. I'm looking at defining and measuring the appropriate outcomes in private practice dietetics,

What have I learned so far? I do a regular segment on my local ABC radio. ABC management tells me that people love lists, but they can generally only remember 5 things. So, my top 5 so far:

1. **People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.** Dietitians are people-focused and your key job is to connect with the person in front of you. When you make a good connection, not only does this help in giving good service, but your clients will also return.
2. **Nutrition knowledge is only 5% of your consultation.** 95% of what you do is your communication skills to connect with the client. However, of the other 5%, you need to know 100% – you need to be the nutrition expert.
3. **People respect being kept on track.** Measure as much as you can to see change – food diaries help to keep people focused and to measure change.
4. **Keep learning.** You need to continue to innovate and find different ways. Never stop learning from your peers, your manager and, most importantly, your clients.
5. **Never give up.** It's challenging to get people to change their habits and it requires persistence. By being persistent, you will likely overcome any resistance.

Chapter 5

self-assessment activity

1. If you've chosen a business name, go to the ASIC website, check your business name is available and register it. If you haven't finalised a business name yet, it's a good time to go to the website and familiarise yourself with the process.
2. What's the difference between an ACN, an ABN and your Medicare provider number?
3. If you practice in multiple locations, are you able to use the same Medicare number at each location?
4. What strategies will you use to manage your time and schedule?
5. Are dietitians a registered profession? What's the alternative, and what rules and regulations apply to you working as a dietitian in Australia?







Chapter 6: **Client services**



“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”



- Maya Angelou



Dealing with clients

Client records

Good records are essential to your business. You should use a system that's simple and well organised. Adult client records must be kept for at least 7 years. Children's records should be kept until they are 25 years old (i.e. 7 years after they turn 18). There are specific requirements for the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' records in different States and Territories. Most jurisdictions recommend that records of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients who were born in or before 1970 be kept for life. This is in recognition of their cultural and historic significance and reflects the recommendations made in the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Bringing them Home Report \(1997\)](#). You need to check local laws to make sure you are keeping records for the appropriate period.

Records are required for the following reasons:

- To provide continuity of client care on subsequent contacts
- To provide proof that a specific treatment has or has not been given
- To meet health record privacy principles
- To provide evidence that a referred client has attended an appointment
- To provide data for other health professionals, such as those who have referred the client or to whom you may refer the client
- To provide evidence of intent of client and dietitian (if records are [subpoenaed](#) for court proceedings).

While the information you include in your files will vary according to the type of clients you are seeing and the services you provide, this table gives a general guide to the details you would include in client files.

Initial consultation	Follow-up consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client's name, DOB and contact details • Referral source • Medicare, private health cover, Veterans' Affairs or pension card • Reason for consultation • Weight history (if relevant), body mass index (BMI), waist/hip ratios, and skin folds • Weight goals – initial, long-term, short-term (if relevant) • Medical history • Medications, supplements • Biochemistry • Family history • Social history • Previous dietary advice/education • Diet history, nutrient intake • Exercise history • Summary of advice given and resources provided • Next appointment date • Referrals made • Amount paid or invoice given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals achieved/changes made (diet, exercise, behaviour, lifestyle) • Weight, change in weight (if relevant) • Biochemical/clinical changes/improvement in symptoms • Barriers to change • Summary of advice given and resources provided • Ongoing goals • Next appointment date • Referrals made • Amount paid or invoice given



International dietetics and nutrition terminology and the Nutrition Care Process

The Nutrition Care Process (NCP) is a standardised model intended to guide dietitians in providing high-quality nutrition care. Nutrition Care Process Terminology (NCPT) is the standardised language used to support the nutrition care process. Both the process and terminology were developed in the US, where the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly known as the American Dietetic Association) has led implementation. While NCPT is largely being implemented in the hospital setting, it can also be used in private practice as part of your client records and reports. Dietitians Australia is keen to support members in implementing the NCP and NCPT in practice in Australia and has a range of resources available to help. The eNCPT Reference Manual (formerly IDNT) and other NCP resources are free to Dietitians Australia members and can be accessed on the [Nutrition Care Process Terminology](#) page on the Dietitians Australia website.

Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record

The Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record (PCEHR or My Health Record) is a secure, voluntary, electronic record accessible to the patient, the patient's authorised representatives, and treating health care providers. The My Health Record gives health care providers access to a patient's health information, making continuity of care easier and contributing to improved treatment

decisions. To access My Health Records, dietitians need to apply for a Healthcare Provider Identifier – Individual (HPI-I) through Services Australia – for details on how to apply see [Chapter 5](#). To upload data and interact with My Health Records, you need [conformant clinical software](#). Without it, you can only view the PCEHR.

For further information on My Health Records, conformant software and applying for eHealth documents visit the [MyHealth Record website](#) and the [Australian Digital Health Agency website](#).

Client reports

Written reports are an important method for communicating with referrers, reporting on client goals, assisting other healthcare professionals in supporting the client, and marketing yourself. A good report:

- will include only the important details
- will be provided in a timely manner
- may use standardised language
- may be in point form.

If you're seeing Medicare or DVA clients, you must follow specific reporting requirements. For clients who are referred under Medicare Chronic Disease Management services, you must provide a written report to the client's GP after each appointment, if the client has been referred for a single appointment, or after the first and last appointment (or more often if clinically necessary) if the client has been referred for multiple services. For DVA clients, clinical notes must be maintained, and a care plan created after

the first appointment. The referring medical practitioner can request a copy of the care plan at any time and you should provide the plan when requested.

Reports may be mailed, faxed or emailed; however, you should consider security and privacy, particularly with email. Programs such as Argus allow you to send letters and reports to and receive referrals from GPs, specialists and hospitals that are also using the service. Some practice software programs allow you to send letters via Argus directly from your letter-writing facility via secure email. Subscription costs are calculated according to the number of practitioners in your business. Whether it is worthwhile using Argus will depend on how many of your referring doctors are also using the program.

Privacy and confidentiality

All care must be taken to ensure client confidentiality. Files must be kept in a secure place. All staff handling client records must always understand the duty to ensure confidentiality.

Medical records are given greater protection under the private sector privacy legislation ([Privacy Amendment \(Private Sector\) Act 2000](#)). This includes a distinction between personal information, and sensitive information like religious and political beliefs, sexual preferences and health information. This legalisation forbids the use of sensitive information like health information for direct marketing purposes. All Australians can access their own medical records held by private hospitals and doctors, unless providing access would pose a serious threat to the life or health of any individual.

Where a client can give consent, health professionals are permitted to share health information about a person with the client's family where it is necessary to assist treatment and to provide better care. However, you must get permission from the client first (see below for information on how to obtain a signature for this). Where a client is unable to give consent, health professionals may provide the client's family with information to help them to provide care or treatment, or for compassionate reasons.

Most small businesses (those with an annual turnover of \$3 million or less) are exempt from the Privacy Act, but this doesn't apply to health service providers. All health service providers, regardless of size, must comply with the Privacy Act.

To meet the requirements of the Privacy Act, dietitians should have a privacy consent form for each client to sign that explains how and why their information is being collected, and should include the fact that you'll be writing back to their medical practitioner if you intend

to do so. Even if they've been referred to you, you are not legally able to write back to their referring practitioner without obtaining permission. If you see Medicare or DVA clients, you must also make them aware that Services Australia or DVA could request to see their medical records. Private health funds can also request access to client files for proof that a consultation has taken place. You also need to have a privacy policy outlining your policies on handling personal information. The [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners](#) has some useful guidelines on what needs to be included in your privacy policy.

If the equipment (e.g. computer, tablet, digital recording devices) on which you store your client or confidential data is damaged or needs repair, please be mindful of the security of this data and ensure that the repairer agrees to adhere to privacy and confidentiality regulations when handling your information. If necessary, ask the repairer to put this in writing before handing over your equipment to them.

Further information and resources

The [Attorney-General's Department](#) includes information on privacy legislation and privacy principles.

The [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner](#) website has a range of resources on privacy.

[Quality Health Records in Australian Primary Healthcare: a Guide.](#)

Developed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, this guide is designed to assist health professionals to produce, to manage and to use high-quality health records that are fit for a range of purposes, including safe clinical decision-making, good communication with other health professionals, trustworthy partnerships with patients, and effective continuity of patient care. It covers electronic, paper-based and hybrid systems.

Privacy and the electronic environment

The Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 requires website operators who collect personal information online to take reasonable steps to ensure that internet users know who is collecting their information and how it is used, stored and disclosed. This legislation allows people to access their records and to correct those records if they are wrong. Organisations must protect personal information they hold from unauthorised access and disclosure. Website operators who handle personal information therefore must address issues of data security, such

as encryption. The legislation also requires organisations to have a publicly available privacy policy. In practice this means that all websites must include a clearly identifiable privacy statement. The legislation, which came into effect on 21 December 2001, establishes minimum standards for the protection and handling of personal information in the private sector. It applies to both print and electronic records.

The legislation also applies to direct marketing by email. It allows the use of personal information for direct marketing purposes, provided the individual is given the opportunity to opt out of receiving any further direct marketing. This regulates spamming (the sending of unsolicited messages) from Australian private sector organisations.

Electronic clinical consultation

Technologies such as video conferencing and teleconferencing are now used widely by healthcare professionals and can be used by dietitians to provide consultations to clients. Telehealth services provide many benefits, but there are extra considerations about privacy and client assessment that may not be issues when providing in-person care. Dietitians Australia has published the [APD Telehealth Guidelines](#) and [APD Checklist for Telehealth](#) to help dietitians navigate this emerging service delivery method. You can also refer to the [Department of Health Privacy Checklist for Telehealth Services](#) and the [Centre for Online Health Quick Guides for Telehealth](#).

Dealing with difficult clients

Dealing with difficult clients is an inevitable part of running a business. In this situation it's important to stay calm, listen and try to understand why they're upset. Realise that clients may be unwell or anxious when they come to a consultation and this can lead some people to become angry or upset. These are some useful resources to help manage difficult clients:

- Rural Health Education Foundation. [The Discomfort Zone: a Guide to Managing Difficult Consultations](#) (video and podcast).
- RACGP. [General Practice – a safe place](#) (guidelines for dealing with aggressive and violent behaviour).
- Kerry Patterson and others' book *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*
- Most State health departments have guides on responding to complaints.

Client education materials

You'll need a variety of client education materials and you'll need to decide if you'll develop these yourself or get them elsewhere. There are a variety of free and low-cost educational materials available from food companies, industry bodies, pharmaceutical companies, community organisations (such as Diabetes Australia, Heart Foundation, Cancer Council, Coeliac Australia) and federal and state government health departments that can save you time and give you access to up-to-date and professionally presented materials. However, you'll need to decide if the information in these resources is consistent with the messages you're promoting and, for resources from food and pharmaceutical companies, whether you want to be recommending their products if they're mentioned in the resources.

Dietitians Australia members can also access a variety of client education resources in Dietitians Australia's [online Resource Library](#). You can search for specific resources, including those produced in different languages, those that have been endorsed by Dietitians Australia, and those that are free.

When producing your own education materials, you must ensure they're original (unless you have the author's written consent) and well presented. They should be simple to understand and include graphics if possible. Your name and contact details should be included on all education materials. See [Chapter 8](#) for more information on copyright.

Customer service

In a dietetic business, you may have customers (such as referrers, schools, hospitals, aged care facilities) that are different to your end-users (patients and clients). Managing the relationships with customers (those paying the bills) and users (those whom you provide the service to) is important. A small business that is customer-centric often has a customer service charter that outlines what your customers should expect from you, how they can provide feedback (or complain), and what your customers can do if you don't meet the expectations you've set.

Serving your customers well should be at the forefront of your business. Without customers, you have no business. Good service includes delivering professional, helpful and high-quality services that meet the needs of your customers and clients. The quality of service needs to match the expectations of a reasonable client. You may not be able to meet everyone's expectations, but if you can



predict what these may be, you can try to manage them. For example, you may only have part-time reception and phone cover. You can manage expectations by noting this on your website, having a voicemail service and noting part-time reception hours in its message.

You can regularly measure customers' satisfaction through surveys or in-depth interviews. In private practices, customer satisfaction can be assessed through reviewing new to follow-up metrics.

Some tips for good customer service:

- Develop a customer service charter
- Ensure all your staff understand your company values
- Greet customers when they come into your space
- Ensure the first and last person a client sees is friendly
- Answer phone calls as quickly as possible
- Make it easy for your clients to find you, and provide information to manage expectations before the appointment
- Include unavailability and other business practices (e.g. closure times) on your website or Facebook page.
- Provide multiple ways for people to book a time with you
- Create policies and systems to enhance customer service
- Take opportunities to let your clients and customers know that you appreciate them
 - Birthday cards and vouchers
 - Achievement of goals
 - Thank you for referrals
- Send regular updates to referrers such as doctors or coaches
- Have another staff member call 10 clients every month to get feedback

Working with customers online

If you have an online business, or use social media to promote your off-line business, you need to provide good customer service. This helps keep people happy and is rewarded by many social media platforms. It can be difficult to prioritise your customer service efforts to paying customers over online followers and friends, but being generous with help can promote your name and cement your reputation as someone that people will want to work with. Good customer service online can look like this:

- Respond to comments on posts as promptly as possible
- Include contact information on your profiles
- Include a disclaimer on your website or on a landing page regarding nutrition advice and detailing your philosophy towards promotion of products/services
- Keep comments positive and try to leave the negative comments to other people
- Righteousness doesn't have a place in inclusive healthcare, so be cautious when responding to misinformation to ensure people read your comments with the intent you had for the comment
- Answer questions (or refer to an online article)
- Provide other people recommendations on LinkedIn
- Review services you have used and had a good experience with
- Join reputable online interest groups or forums and be helpful to others
- Employ staff or the services of a professional freelancer to manage your social media
- Remember that, although your message may not be new, you're a new messenger, and more APD voices will result in us having a louder collective voice online

Case study: Building a high-profile business

Lyndi Cohen: The Nude Nutritionist



Being a dietitian really isn't what I thought I'd be. For starters, I didn't realise that no one knows how to spell the word dietitian properly, and that people would openly share every bowel motion with me 2 minutes after first meeting. I also didn't realise how critical business skills would be to my nutrition career.

I learned quickly that even if you're a brilliant dietitian, if you don't understand your audience, don't like self-promotion or can't manage cash flow properly, few people will benefit from your services.

When I graduated in 2011, there were just a handful of dietetic jobs available. My first job out of university was never advertised online (which I now know is not unusual) but was acquired through a friend of a friend of my uncle – proving that it pays to network.

This foot-in-the-door, very part-time role saw me working at a small start-up food company as a marketing coordinator. This basically meant I did coffee runs, dealt with customer complaints and compliments, took meeting minutes, and managed the brand's social media accounts.

While initially I felt frustrated by not using my nutrition skills, these 'soft' skills would turn out to be crucial to running my own business.

Two years later, I'd become the company dietitian and spent the other 2 or 3 days a week volunteering with the Cancer Council's nutrition division, Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution and the Dietitians Australia's Mental Health advocacy group.

In 2013 I started my business, The Nude Nutritionist. I registered my business name, bought a domain name and taught myself how to build a website. It was a very average website, but I believe that done is better than perfect.

I began by sharing blurry food photos and my nutrition approach on social media. My spelling was terrible, my writing was vague, and I knew I wasn't good... yet. I started before I felt 'ready' (or I'd still be waiting).

I taught myself many of the skills I needed to run my business: how to write a press release, blog posts and media articles. While friends went out, I studied search engine optimisation (SEO) and learned tech integration. I practised recipe development, food photography and writing – and slowly improved.

More than anything, I listened to my followers. I became obsessed with what they liked and didn't like. I wanted to hear their stories, answer their questions and help them live the life they wanted, and love the body they had. My audience was my greatest teacher.

Over time, my study, experience and audience helped me to refine my message. I started contributing comments in the media by pitching ideas to blogs or local websites. As my confidence, skills, connections and profile grew, so did the publications I contributed to.

I'd use every opportunity to practice my media skills. I often responded to requests from nutrition students and practised giving my best responses to unsolicited nutrition questions at dinner parties. Three years later, I got a call to audition for the Nine Network.

I didn't get paid for media work for a long time – and even now, it doesn't come close to paying my bills. If you want to work as a media nutritionist, you need a strong business that supports your passion for media work.

In 2013, I also started seeing private clients in my 'clinic'. By 'clinic' I mean I drove to clients' homes, carrying my notes and nutrition resources I'd created. This way I kept my overheads low, was flexible to cancellations and offered something my competitors didn't.

I grew my client base through strong word-of-mouth referrals and even stronger SEO. At some point, I got too many clients to keep up with demand, so I created two online programs, Back to Basics and the Keep It Real Program, which now provide nutrition services and support to thousands of people around the world. In 2019, I wrote my book, [The Nude Nutritionist](#), which is now sold around the world (and which my mum highly recommends).

I won't sugar-coat things. I work really hard. And sometimes, my team and I work really long hours. I employ many freelancers and specialists around the world, freeing me up to do what I do best (and what I love).

If you're just starting out, you've got to remember that dietetics is such a new profession. Do not fear that 'it's all been done before'. If it had been done, there wouldn't be so many people still struggling with food and health. There's plenty of space for innovative thinkers with grit in the nutrition world. And don't forget that, just because it's the way it's always been done, it doesn't mean it's the best way forward for you.

Chapter 6

self-assessment activity

1. If you're starting your own dietetic practice, understanding all aspects of client confidentiality and the role you play in keeping medical records is important. Review the Privacy Amendment Act 2000 and ensure your system for storing client data is secure.
2. Establish a protocol for all members of your practice to follow for storing client information.
3. Establish a privacy policy and social media policy for your business that you give to all clients before their first appointment.
4. If you plan to conduct electronic clinical consultations (telehealth), read Dietitians Australia's position statement, Guidelines and Checklist.
5. Develop a customer service charter or philosophy for your business.







Chapter 7: Professional conduct and scope of practice



“Strengths are not activities you’re good at, they’re activities that strengthen you. A strength is an activity that before you’re doing it you look forward to doing it; while you’re doing it, time goes by quickly and you can concentrate; after you’ve done it, it seems to fulfil a need of yours.”



– Markus Buckingham



Codes of conduct

Dietitians Australia Code of Conduct

As an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), you must abide by Dietitians Australia's [Code of Conduct](#). If your professional conduct varies from the values outlined in the code, you should be prepared to explain and justify your decisions and actions and you may be subject to disciplinary processes as outlined in the By-Law Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures. Serious or repeated failure to abide by this code may have consequences for your membership and/or credential and may be considered as unsatisfactory professional performance, unprofessional conduct or professional misconduct. The [Dietitians Australia By-Law Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures](#) outlines what happens if a complaint is made against you.

The Code of Conduct for Dietitians sets out the legal requirements, professional behaviour and conduct expectations for all dietitians, in all practice settings, in Australia. It describes the principles of professional behaviour that guide safe practice, and it clearly outlines the conduct expected of you by your colleagues and the broader community.

The code recognises that you have your own personal beliefs and values. However, it outlines the specific standards that you are expected to adopt in your practice. You have a professional responsibility to understand and abide by the code. In practice, you also have a duty to make the interests of your clients your first concern, and to practise safely and effectively.

The code includes seven principles of conduct, grouped into domains, as follows:

Domain: Practise Legally

1. Legal compliance

Domain: Practise safely, effectively, and collaboratively

2. Client-centred and evidence-based practice
3. Cultural practice and respectful relationships

Domain: Act with professional integrity

4. Professional behaviour
5. Teaching, supervising, mentoring and assessing
6. Research

Domain: Promote health and wellbeing

7. Health and wellbeing

Underpinning the code is the expectation that dietitians will exercise their professional judgment to deliver the best possible outcomes in practice. Practitioners have a responsibility to inform Dietitians Australia of violators of the Code.

Scope of practice

Part of practising ethically and abiding by the code of conduct is ensuring that you operate within your scope of practice. Dietitians' roles are constantly changing and expanding into new areas and you must always practise within the limits of your qualifications and expertise. Dietitians Australia has produced a [Scope of Dietetic Practice Framework](#) incorporating a scope-of-practice decision tree, which can help you decide whether a certain activity is within your scope of practice.

Several Dietitians Australia Interest Groups have developed [role statements](#) to summarise the key responsibilities and activities for dietitians working in different areas of practice



NSW Code of Conduct

The NSW Government Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) has a [Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Practitioners](#) (including dietitians) that requires practitioners to provide services in a safe and ethical manner. If you breach the code, the HCCC can impose a prohibition order banning you from providing health services or placing conditions on your provision of health services. They can also issue a public statement about you and your services. If a prohibition order is placed on you, you must let clients know of the

existence of this order before you can treat them. An A4 copy of the Code and information about the HCCC's complaints handling and investigation process is available on the [HCCC website](#).

The Code is also now available in [20 languages](#) on the HCCC website if you are working with clients for whom English is not their first language. You can select a language at the top of every page of the website.



FAQ: Can I sell products to my clients?

There is no clear-cut answer to this question – it depends on the products and services you are selling and the circumstances in which you’re selling them. Dietitians Australia doesn’t have a written position on this matter, but the [Statement of Ethical Practice](#) does provide some guidance.

According to the Statement, you must:

- ensure that you don’t exploit relationships with clients for financial gain
- identify and manage conflicts of interest
- not use inaccurate or misleading ways to promote your services or products, or accept undisclosed private financial benefits
- provide services within the legal requirements of occupational health, welfare and safety, and workplace requirements.

The NSW [Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Professionals](#) also contains some relevant guidelines, including:

- A health practitioner must prescribe only treatments or appliances that serve the needs of the client.
- A health practitioner must not provide services and treatments to clients unless they are designed to maintain or improve the client’s health or wellbeing.
- A health practitioner must have a sound understanding of any adverse interactions between the therapies and treatments he or she provides or prescribes and any other medications or treatments, whether prescribed or not, that the health practitioner is aware the client is taking or receiving.

If you wish to sell products to clients, for example, books, resources or supplements, it’s important to consider these guidelines:

- Are you selling them to provide a valuable service to your clients or purely for financial gain?
- If you’re making a profit from selling these products, are you transparent about this and are your clients aware that they could purchase them elsewhere?
- Are you recommending a particular product because professionally you believe it to be the most appropriate for your client, or because you receive a financial benefit when they purchase the product?
- If you have an interest (ownership, partnership, shareholding, consultancy, franchise or profit-sharing agreement) in the company that manufactures or distributes the product you must explicitly declare this interest to any client.
- Avoid products that are part of a ‘pyramid selling’ enterprise or multi-level marketing (MLM) scheme. Pyramid selling is illegal. While MLM schemes are not illegal, they are unethical in some of their practices and should also be avoided.
- Is recommending this product within your scope of practice and is there an evidence base for it?

It is important to consider all these factors when deciding whether to sell products to clients, to ensure you’re acting ethically and not breaching professional codes of conduct.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission also provides [information for consumers](#) on dealing with professionals and professional services, which can be used as a guide.

Case study: From public health service to private sector

Maree Ferguson: Dietitian Connection



Starting my own business was never a career goal. I certainly didn't think I had the courage to take the big leap, mainly because I was afraid of giving up an extremely well-paid job I enjoyed for the big unknown and a high probability of failure.

In 2011, I was fortunate to take a few weeks' holiday and ticked off one of my bucket-list items – an Alaskan cruise and Rocky Mountaineer train trip across the most beautiful parts of Canada. The trip gave me a much-needed time out from the busy everyday world to reflect on what I really wanted to do with the rest of my life. The other big driver in this quest to determine my future destiny (trust me, I don't spend every day thinking about my future!) was the looming birthday of the big 4-0.

My trip culminated in attending the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics conference in San Diego, perfectly timed to coincide with the last Alaskan cruise of the season! I love to attend the American dietetics conference every year, as I find the keynote speakers so motivating and inspirational. That year's speaker was Jack Canfield, best-selling author of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series and the *Success Principles*. His presentation undoubtedly changed my life. I decided there and then I was going to start my own business. I didn't want to come to the end of my life regretting that I never had the courage to realise a dream.

So the next question was, what kind of business should I start? I still needed the income from my day job, so I decided I needed to start a business that could be done out of business hours and didn't require a huge cash investment to get it up and running. I decided an internet-based business model was the ideal solution. I also wanted to bring together my unique skills and experience in clinical dietetics, research, management and business. The vision for the new business was to 'inspire and empower dietitians to realise their own professional dreams'. The mission is to provide a central hub of clinical, business and management resources for busy professionals to assist them to be successful nutrition leaders, via our free weekly e-newsletter, podcast, webinars, digital magazine and annual event.

I spent the Christmas break of 2011 designing the website, brainstorming a business name, developing a logo, registering the business and wondering what the hell I was doing – I had no clue how to start and run a business! The next 6 months were spent liaising with the web developers until the big day on July 11, 2012 when www.dietitianconnection.com went live! It was just in time for the official launch of Dietitian Connection at the International Congress of Dietetics, coinciding with my 40th birthday, in Sydney. Let's just say it was a big week of celebrations!

And that's the story of how Dietitian Connection began!

Today we operate across the world and have a business model that includes several income streams. We offer professional development, events and coaching, and connect the food industry to influential dietitians. We aim to keep our offerings cost-effective and we're focussed on providing outcomes to dietitians and their clients. Coming from the public sector and having formal training in business (MBA) and governance (Australian Institute of Company Directors) has meant that I take good governance seriously. I ensure that all our dietetic professional development is delivered by appropriately trained professionals, and our governance structure includes a clinical advisory board. All information about products and services provided to our members and participants in workshops or events must go through our clinical advisory panel to ensure that the information is evidence-based. It makes me proud to connect people and keep dietitians up-to-date and positive about the future they have.

If you've been thinking about starting your own business or private practice, I've written an article on [eight crucial steps before starting your own business](#). These are the things you need to do before you even order that first business card or see that first client.

Chapter 7

self-assessment activity

1. Review and become familiar with the Dietitians Australia Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures, the Statement of Ethical Practice, and the Dietitians Australia Code of Conduct. Along with these requirements as part of the APD program, it can be worthwhile considering your personal values around your career and practice.
2. Locate information on 'scope of practice' for an APD. Are you working to full scope of practice? Is there anything you're doing that's outside your scope of practice?
3. Consider the following situation:

You've started your private practice and have decided to share recipes on your Instagram page. You're increasing your following and have started to receive free products in the mail.

- a. In which instances will you promote the products, and in which instances will you not?
- b. If you do promote the products, what do you need to be mindful of?
- c. If you receive compensation for promoting a product, what do you need to do to alert your audience of the sponsorship?







Chapter 8: Legal issues and insurance for dietitians



“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.”



- Warren Buffet



Legal issues to consider

There are several legal issues to consider when you start your own business – this includes issues relevant to your roles as a business owner, practitioner and employer (if you employ staff).

This chapter gives you general information, but it's a good idea to find a lawyer who can give you detailed legal advice appropriate to your situation. To find a lawyer, contact the Law Society in your state or territory or the [Law Council of Australia](#).

Some of the legal issues you need to consider include:

- Are you practising ethically and within your scope of practice, and what are the implications if you aren't?
- Are you keeping accurate client records, storing these securely, and ensuring they're kept confidential? Are you aware of how long you need to keep these and how to dispose of them?
- Do you know what to do if your records are subpoenaed?
- If you're registered as a provider with Medicare, DVA or private health funds, are you abiding by their requirements with respect to referrals, client records, reporting, minimum consultation lengths and billing/invoicing?
- Are you aware of your taxation obligations and are you keeping the required financial records?
- Are you familiar with and adhering to privacy laws (for clients, staff and any online activities)?
- If you employ staff, are you aware of your legal obligations, including providing a safe workplace, paying award wage rates, providing entitlements (e.g. holiday and sick leave) under their award, ensuring privacy of employee records, and taking action against discrimination and bullying in your workplace?
- If you operate as a company and are the director of that company, are you aware of your legal obligations as a director?
- Have you obtained the appropriate state or territory criminal record checks and registrations for yourself or your staff who are working with children, residents in aged care facilities, people with disabilities or other vulnerable people?
- Are you aware of the laws around intellectual property protection and copyright and ensuring that you aren't breaching them?
- Are you aware of the Competition and Consumer Act and ensuring that you aren't breaching it?
- Have you considered what would happen to your business, and your clients if you're suddenly unable to work (due to illness, disability or death)?





The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights

The [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care \(ACSQHC\)](#) is a government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in safety and quality in health care across Australia. The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights was developed by ACSQHC in 2007 and 2008 and has been endorsed for use across the country.

The Charter specifies the key rights of patients and consumers when seeking or receiving health care services. It applies to all health settings in Australia, including public and private hospitals, general practice and other community environments. It allows patients, consumers, families, carers and service providers to have a common understanding of the rights of people receiving health care.

For details on the seven Charter rights and guidance on how you can ensure these rights are upheld as a health care provider download a copy of the booklet [The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights: a guide for healthcare providers](#).

Recordkeeping

As a healthcare practitioner, you must keep accurate records, including records of your consultations and contact with clients, and your business finances.

- [Financial records](#)
- [Client records](#)

Subpoenas

A subpoena is a legal document issued by a court that compels a person to produce documents or give evidence at a hearing or trial. If you're subpoenaed, you must comply with the subpoena. You must provide information and/or evidence as requested. However, there may be some exceptions – refer to your specific state or territory legislation.

National information can be found within the [publications, brochures and fact sheets section](#) of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia website.

Open Disclosure Framework

Open Disclosure is open discussion with a patient regarding an incident that occurred while receiving health care that resulted in harm to the patient. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has released the [Australian Open Disclosure Framework](#). This document provides a framework to help organisations develop policies and procedures for open disclosure.

Police checks and Working With Children checks

If you employ staff in your business, you may need to have police criminal record checks and working with children, or working with vulnerable people, checks for your employees. These are required if these employees will be working directly with minors (aged 18 years or under), in residential aged care facilities or with other vulnerable populations. You will also need to organise these checks for yourself if you work with these client groups.

There is no single national framework setting out the requirements for obtaining Working With Children checks or police checks. Each state and territory has its own procedures and you must fulfil the requirements in the jurisdiction(s) in which you are working.

There are 3 types of screening programs operating in Australia. In South Australia, the onus is on employers to carry out background checks on prospective employees or volunteers. The individual must undergo screening each time they start a child-related position. In other states, individuals can apply to be certified to work in child-related work and certificates are valid for a period of time. In the ACT, there are 3 types of screening offered that include general

certification, role-related certification and conditional certification.

Information on [police checks and Working with Children checks](#) is available on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website, including detailed information on the requirements in each state and territory and links to the appropriate screening bodies. Further information on police checks in Australia is available on the [National Crime Check website](#).

The Department of Health provides information on [police record checks in aged care](#).

Intellectual property (IP)

According to [IP Australia](#), intellectual property (IP) results from the application of someone's mind or intellect to create something new or original. Intellectual property can exist in various forms: it can be an invention, brand name, book, film, trade secret or artistic design.

Intellectual property rights give you the exclusive legal right to take advantage of your IP and prevent others from infringing it. There are different types of IP protection in Australia, each with its own legislation. These include trademarks, patents, copyright, confidentiality agreements and trade



secrets. Some IP rights are automatic, while others are granted only after application and examination against the relevant criteria by government agencies. IP Australia administers patents, trademarks and designs. Copyright protection is free and automatic in Australia and is administered by the Attorney-General's Department.

Copyright

Copyright is automatic in Australia, so there's no official registry or application process for copyright protection. For information pertaining to copyright, whether you hold the copyright or you wish to copy something that is copyright, refer to the [Australian Copyright Council](#) or the [Copyright Agency](#).

Using background music

If you play background music or use music on hold in your business, you will need to obtain a copyright licence as there are legal responsibilities relating to using copyright music. Visit [APRA AMCOS's website](#) for more information.

The Competition and Consumer Act

The Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (CCA) (formerly the Trade Practices Act 1974) is a federal law that governs how all businesses in Australia must deal with their competitors, suppliers and customers. The law is designed to enable all businesses to compete on their merits in a fair and open market, while ensuring consumers are also treated fairly. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) provides a publication, [Small Business and the Competition & Consumer Act: Your rights and responsibilities](#), which explains your rights and obligations as a business. This includes dealing with your customers, advertising and promoting your business, working with other businesses in the supply chain, and competing fairly. It also outlines how the ACCC investigates and handles complaints.

The CCA contains protections for consumers in their dealings with professionals, including health professionals. Among other things, the CCA requires that health professionals:

- inform their patients about the cost of the services they provide and obtain informed financial consent
- avoid making representations to consumers in relation to services and the likely outcome of the provision of the services when those representations are not honoured or fulfilled in the future, or the services change without warning

- disclose their commercial or financial interests in other service providers that they refer clients to, or inducements they receive from suppliers of products they recommend and use
- do not provide misleading information about their credentials and qualifications
- do not, in their promotional activities, act in a way that is misleading or deceptive.

More details on the Australian Consumer Law for professionals can be found on the [Australian Consumer Law website](#).

Contracts

You'll need to have contracts in place for things such as leasing a room or office and employing staff, and for consulting or writing work that you do. It is important that you get your own expert legal advice when developing or signing a contract. For standard contracts, there are websites available you can buy a contract template and edit it to suit your requirements. This can significantly reduce your legal costs for developing a contract. [Net Lawman](#), for example, has a range of contract templates for business use in Australia.

As a business owner, you may also be subject to contracts from other businesses and parties. The ACCC provides information and guidelines on [unfair contract terms](#) should you feel a contract is unfair.

Professional wills

Most people are familiar with the role of a personal will, but you may not have thought about a professional will. Have you considered what would happen if you die or are incapacitated? What would happen to your business, your clients and your employees? Would someone else know how to ensure your clients and employees are taken care of and your business finances sorted? This is the role of a professional will. A detailed discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this manual and requires professional legal advice. However, these are some useful articles and resources that explain more about the role of a professional will and how to write one:

- American Psychological Association. [How to prepare for the unexpected. Creating a professional will can help you protect your patients and put your affairs in order.](#)
- The Centre for Ethical Practice. [Preparing a Professional Living Will.](#)
- Pope KS. [Therapist's Guide for Preparing a Professional Will.](#)
- Steiner A. [The empty chair: Making our absence less traumatic for everyone.](#)



Further information and resources:

[The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission \(ACCC\)](#)

The ACCC Small Business Helpline 1300 302 021

Law Council of Australia www.lawcouncil.asn.au

The Law Society of ACT www.actlawsociety.asn.au

The Law Society of New South Wales www.lawsociety.com.au

Queensland Law Society Inc www.qls.com.au

Law Society of South Australia www.lawsocietysa.asn.au

Law Society of Tasmania www.lst.org.au

Law Institute of Victoria www.liv.asn.au

Law Society of Western Australia www.lawsocietywa.asn.au

Insurance

For each of the types of insurance below, losses covered depend on the insurance company, the policy wording, and any imposed limitations. This information can be obtained by talking to the insurer and reviewing their policy documents.

Public liability insurance

Public liability insurance protects you and your business against the financial risk of being found liable to a third party (e.g. a client or member of the public) for personal injury or loss/damage to property resulting from your negligence.

If you run a business where you're dealing with people, then you'll need public liability insurance.

Professional indemnity insurance

Professional indemnity insurance indemnifies professional people (e.g. dietitians) for their legal liability to their clients and others relying on their advice and/or services. It provides cover against the financial cost of being found liable if a client suffers a loss – material, financial or physical – that is directly attributed to negligent acts by you as the professional.

If you provide professional services to people, then you'll need professional indemnity insurance.

Income protection insurance

Income protection insurance pays you a benefit if you are unable to work for a period because of injury or illness. The cover is normally for a set amount and available for the period agreed in the policy.

If you're self-employed or run a small business, have dependent family members relying on your income or have debts such as a mortgage, you may benefit from income protection insurance.

Product liability insurance

If you sell or supply goods, you may need cover against claims of those goods causing harm to others. Product liability insurance covers you against the financial risk of being found liable to a third party who is harmed by the failure of your product or the product you are selling or supplying.

If you provide goods, or advice on goods, to people, then you'll need product liability insurance.

Business insurance

Business insurance encompasses a range of covers to protect business owners against financial loss to the business caused by physical damage, theft, fire, interruption to trading and other circumstances. Typical covers provided under business insurance include:

- damage to buildings and contents
- burglary and theft
- business interruption
- equipment breakdown
- loss of records and documents
- loss of money
- damage to glass
- property and contents in transit.

Business insurance is an essential risk management factor of running any business.

Workers' compensation insurance

If you employ people, then by law you must have workers' compensation insurance for them. Workers' compensation insurance protects business owners and their employees in the event of a workplace-related injury. Each state sets out individual requirements and responsibilities regarding workers' compensation.

If you employ people, then by law you must have workers' compensation insurance.

What should you consider when choosing your insurance?

Dietitians Australia is often asked about how to select the right insurance, specifically in relation to professional indemnity insurance. There are many considerations when it comes to choosing the right insurance. Common aspects of insurance that you may wish to consider are:

1. How much is the excess or deductible? An excess or deductible is the amount of a loss that will be paid by you when you make a claim.
2. Is the insurer Australian owned and operated?
3. Will you be dealing with the insurer directly or through an insurance broker?
4. Can you pay your premium by the month? Are there additional fees to do so?
5. Where is the insurer located? Do you have easy access to customer service staff?

Professional indemnity insurance considerations:

1. Can you choose your limit of cover? Is the limit of cover sufficient for you?
2. Does the policy extend to cover you if you take maternity leave?
3. Does the policy extend to cover you if you cease work as a dietitian or retire?
4. Will you be covered for inadvertent breaches of workplace health and safety or environmental laws in the delivery of your professional services?
5. Will you be covered against claims arising from breaches of copyright, trademarks or patents in the delivery of your professional services?
6. Will you be covered for the loss of business documents, including client records?
7. Will you receive legal fees cover for disciplinary proceedings from bodies such as the registration board, statutory regulatory authorities, tribunals or any disciplinary committee of an association you're a member of?
8. Does the insurer cover other dietitians? Do they have experience with our field of work?
9. What legal practitioners does the insurer use? Do they have experience with our field of work?
10. What reputation does the insurer have for paying claims?

Free run-off cover

Some claims aren't made until years after the event, which means that when you retire or cease practising you could still be at risk. If you decide to retire from private practice, it's important to continue with 'run-off' cover. Dietitians Australia's principal insurance partner, [Guild Insurance](#), includes run-off cover in its insurance policies for dietitians.

If you have cover through Guild Insurance and you are planning a break from private practice with the aim of returning, you can [speak to a consultant](#) to explore your insurance options.

Insurance brokers

An insurance broker may help you identify the specific insurance you require, and the level of cover needed. They can also assist you when making a claim. Your invoice will be with the insurance broker, and the insurance will be held with a different company. Dietitians Australia has a subscription to [Member Advantage](#), which provides benefits to Dietitians Australia members including several insurance types.



Case study: Nutrition communication

Lisa Yates: Consultant dietitian



I left my role as Program Manager of Nuts for Life – a health education initiative of the Australian Tree Nut Industry – in 2017. I led the program for nearly 13 years.

There comes a point in your career when you realise you need change. I achieved what I set out to achieve at Nuts for Life – a doubling of tree nut consumption in Australia. Nuts for Life was evolving, yet I no longer felt part of its future, so with no other job to go to I shocked everyone (including myself) by resigning. Three months later I walked through the Nuts for Life front door for the last time.

But who was I now and what was I going to do? Sometimes you just need to trust yourself and take the leap into the unknown. Make room in your life for opportunity to come knocking.

I had money in the bank and my sister was expecting my second nephew, so I took time off. I went to Perth and stayed with her until after the little one was born. I love being Auntie Lisa. I art-ed, I crafted, I played, and I planned my next move. I mapped out what I wanted from what would be the fourth stage of my career.

I realised I'd like to work for myself full-time but not alone. I had kept up my part-time private practice in Frenchs Forest in Sydney's north – so I already had an office. Over the years I did other industry consulting work in the horticulture space and for 10 years I was a regular columnist for Medical Observer, a GP magazine. Working out how to expand the business, I made a list of all the skills I had and the clients I would like to work for, and I let my network know I was back and ready to work. Every year since graduation (22 years now) I've volunteered in some capacity with Dietitians Australia, and while I had some time I stepped that up and worked on a few committees to keep busy and keep growing my network. And then one day it all just happened. Colleagues offered me projects, sometimes directly, other times as part of a team. Collaborating with others really gets my creative juices flowing.

I'm still working in horticulture – a space I adore – either directly or through PR and marketing agencies. Over the years I've loved working for associations and companies that produce avocados, apples, dried fruit, nuts, onions, papayas, prunes and strawberries, among others. Who knew I would love food regulations, substantiating claims, writing for any audience, presenting, organising food tours and so much more? What I'm doing now combines the best of skills and allows me to have work-life balance. I'm juggling a variety of clients, which is fun,

but I don't feel the PR agency pressure to bill every 15 minutes. We have an office guided meditation, which helps keep the stress under control. Working not far from home gave me back the 2 hours of travel time I lost each day, and I don't take work home with me anymore nor have late nights in the office.

In 2019 I won the Golden Handful Australian Nut Industry Award. It's for outstanding services to the industry and while its inception was only in 2017, I was the first woman to win it – such an honour!

Dietetics really is a great profession – not just because it's about food and nutrition, but because with all the transferable skills we have we can move into so many exciting avenues. We just need to take the leap!

Here are a few lessons I've learned:

- Network, network, network, never burn bridges if you can help it – you never know where your next career stage will come from and who will introduce it to you. I spend at least 15 minutes every day chatting to someone from the contacts listed in my phone.
- If you want to take the leap, have some sort of safety net – for me it was literally money in the bank.
- Taking some time off to distance yourself from one job before contemplating the next helps reset your mind and spirit. Also ensure you have work-life balance.
- Even if you're working as a sole trader you can still create a team around you to brainstorm, to learn from, to laugh with and to enjoy your vocation. From the receptionist to the manager, no one is unworthy of your time and interest.
- Learn how to say no. You may not use it all the time, as saying yes is so much more fun, but it's worth knowing when your 'no' needs to be deployed.
- Mix with colleagues young and old. I love hearing about the history of Australian dietetics and gathering lessons learned, and I also love the energy of mentoring Provisional APDs and emerging dietitians – they have so much to teach me too.
- Volunteer with Dietitians Australia – as a member you are Dietitians Australia, and if we all contribute time we can grow our profession, raise our voice and make a difference.

Chapter 8

self-assessment activity

1. What's the difference between a registered business name and a trademark?
2. What policies, terms and conditions, and contracts do you need before you start your business?
3. Speak to at least three lawyers and three insurance brokers. Tell them that you're not sure of the services you'll need, but you want to understand what they provide, and the costs involved. Don't make any decisions on the spot.
4. Assess your business and decide which kinds of insurance you will need. A good place to start is Member Advantage through your Dietitians Australia membership. Compare insurance policies to find one that meets your needs.
5. Identify the types of insurance you personally need. Each type of insurance manages a particular risk. You need to determine whether the premium is reasonable for the risk it mitigates.







Chapter 9: Finances and accounting



“Success isn’t found in the eyes of others: buying things you don’t need, with money you don’t have, to impress people you won’t know in 20 years’ time.”



– Scott Pape



Money basics

Finances and accounting are often the areas that dietitians like least about starting their own business. But if you can't pay your bills, you can't help others, so we do need to understand a little about finances, money and accounting.

The good thing about working in the private sector is that you can modify when and what type of work you do depending on how much money you need or want to live on. At certain times in your life, you may need to work more, and at other times, you may be able to work less. Understanding money and being able to save money for the future is a key to the success of a business.



Good money habits

Good money habits should start well before you start a business. With good money habits, you can save for your business's start-up expenses and understand how to budget. Some advice from the [Barefoot Investor](#) includes:

- Stay clear of loan sharks, payday lenders and buy now, pay later options
- Spend less than you earn
- Allocate 60% of your income on 'safety' (mortgage/rent = 30%; food = 15%; mobile and internet = 5%; Car = 10%)
- Allocate 20% for savings in a separate account
- Allocate 20% for splurging in a separate account
- Don't fall in the trap of trying to look rich or keep up with the Joneses
- Prioritise superannuation
- Save \$2000 as a back-up, and for emergencies
- Spend consciously – spend more on high-use items and experiences and less on indulgent and excessive items. This includes eating and drinking when you go out.
- Be wary of sales, and the tactics marketers use to get you to buy more
- Review your subscriptions. \$15/month isn't a lot, but it adds up if there are multiple lots of \$15.

If you'd like to own a business one day, practise by tracking and allocating your personal expenses. You can apply these money management skills to your business.

Reference: Pape S. (2016). *The Barefoot Investor: The only money guide you'll need*. John Wiley and Sons Australia

How much money do you need?

You can start looking at the money you need by determining your personal and business expenses. Having a table that includes essential, desirable and dream expenses is a start.

Once you know how much money you need, you can work backwards to determine how many billable hours you need to fill per week (remember there are only 40 to 48 workable weeks per year), how many products you need to sell or how many clients you need to secure.

Financial records

You must keep business records for tax purposes. These documents provide a record of business transactions and should include invoices, receipts, banking records, cheque butts, and similar items. You can be prosecuted if you don't keep adequate records of business transactions. All tax records, including receipts, must be kept for at least 5 years; however, all financial records for companies must be retained for 7 years. Think about how to store your records securely. Business records are also useful for working out income generated month-by-month, and quarter-by-quarter.

You should seek professional accounting advice to find the most appropriate system for your business. An accountant or the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) can help you with this. They can advise on the systems you need for all records, tax and auditing of accounts. To find an accountant, contact the [Institute of Public Accountants](#) (IPA), [Chartered Accountants](#), or [CPA Australia](#). The [Financial Planning Association](#) can also provide a list of financial advisers in your area.

The ATO provides detailed information on the [business records you need to keep](#). It also has a [recordkeeping evaluation tool](#) that can help you identify the records your business needs to keep and work out if you're keeping the correct records.

If you are running a company, ASIC provides detailed information on [what business records a company needs to keep](#).

Banking

It's best to have a business account with a financial institution (i.e. bank, building society or credit union). It's also good business practice to maintain a separate account for business purposes and either to use a deposit book or spreadsheet with columns for recording information about cheque, cash or credit card deposits, or to record this directly into an accounting program such as Xero, MYOB or QuickBooks. All monies received in the form of cash, cheques and credit card transactions must be recorded and banked regularly. Most accounting software will record transactions automatically through a feed from your bank.

If the business is in your own name, you can use a personal bank account for your business banking, but it's still a good idea to keep it separate from other accounts. If your business name is different to your own name, you are a company, or you wish to have merchant facilities (credit cards and electronic funds transfer (EFT)), you'll need to open a business account. These accounts generally have higher transaction fees and charges, but you may be able to find some low- or no-fee options.

Invoices and receipts

Client invoices can be professionally printed, word-processed or produced and emailed directly through your accounting software. The following details should be included:

- Invoice number and ABN (and ACN if company)
- Name of client who received the service (address may be optional)
- Name, business address and qualifications of the dietitian (this is usually in the form of a letterhead or a stamp in receipt books)
- Medicare/health fund provider number of dietitian, if applicable (this will vary depending on the health fund)
- Name and address of referring doctor or specialist, if applicable
- Date of the service
- Nature of the service
- Fee for service, including GST if applicable
- Payment options and timeframe for payment of account.



These details may vary depending on the nature of the business, such as individual client consultations versus consulting to industry.

Receipts should show the following:

- Receipt number
- HICAPS item number (Initial consultation – 500; Subsequent consultation – 600)
- Name of the person receiving the service
- Name, contact details and qualifications of the dietitian providing the service
- Provider number of the dietitian (if appropriate)
- Date payment was received
- Signature of person rendering the account
- Referral source if applicable
- ABN
- GST details if applicable.

For clients seen under Medicare, you also need to include the item number for their consultation (10954), the name of the referring doctor, and the date of referral on their invoice to enable them to claim rebates.

A combined invoice and receipt system can be used when payment is made on the day of the consultation. If you're registered for GST, invoices and receipts should conform to the [ATO guidelines](#) and include your ABN and the amount of GST charged.

Records of income and expenses

These are used to monitor all transactions, both incoming and outgoing, with all cash, cheque, credit card and EFT transactions entered into the record. The ATO states that you must keep these records and corresponding paperwork (i.e. cheque butts, petty cash receipts and credit card statements) for a minimum of 7 years. Tax records must be kept for 5 years.

Income – record the date, invoice/receipt number, description of service and amount received, including GST.

Expenses – record the date of purchase, description, method of payment and amount paid listed in the appropriate columns (e.g. utilities, rent, wages, and stationery). If registered for GST, you should include a separate column for the amount of GST you've paid on expenses, as you can claim this back from the ATO.

You must have receipts for all expenses you claim for business purposes and, if registered for GST, you need an official tax invoice/receipt to claim any GST on purchases.

Computer accounting systems

Computer accounting packages are available that can assist with accurate account keeping, financial reporting and preparation of your [Business Activity Statement](#) (BAS – if you're registered for GST), as well as payroll and superannuation payments if you employ staff. Computer accounting systems have made bookkeeping easy, and they often integrate directly with your practice management software. The most commonly used and widely available packages are Xero, MYOB and Quicken (including Quick Books and Reckon). Alternatively, you can

set up spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel if your accounting is simple. The ATO provides information on [managing invoices, payments and records](#) and BAS on their website. Talk to your accountant before choosing a program to see which programs they are happy to work with.

For further information:

- MYOB: www.myob.com.au
- Quicken: www.quicken.com
- Xero: www.xero.com.au

FAQ: How do I decide what to charge for my services?

Every professional business needs a pricing strategy. It is against the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 for Dietitians Australia to set or recommend a fee schedule, so dietitians working in the private sector need to set their own fees. However, Dietitians Australia does conduct a regular survey of fees charged by private practice dietitians and makes the results available on the [Dietitians Australia member portal](#). These can be used as a guideline when determining individual pricing strategies, but you must also consider the cost involved in providing a service and what the market will bear. Your own pricing policy will be determined by your overall business objectives. Fees less than the average could downgrade the value of a private consultation and could be used by the health funds to limit rebates.

Note that agreements between competing businesses to fix prices are illegal under the Competition and Consumer Act 2010. Price-fixing agreements do not have to be in writing; they can be as simple as a discussion at an association meeting or at a social occasion. The important point is not how the price fixing agreement was made, but that competitors are working out their prices collectively and not individually. It is illegal for a business to enter or give effect to such agreements.

To calculate your fees for service, you must understand your business costs. You need to consider any fixed expenditure (regular ongoing payments such as loans, rates, rent etc.) and incidental expenses such as office expenses (stationery, phone accounts etc.) as these must be covered before you can make a profit. See [Chapter 4](#).



Collection of fees

You should try to minimise costs associated with collection of fees and bad debts. Encourage clients to pay fees at the time of consultation and offer them a range of payment options, such as credit card facilities, PayPal, Square, and EFTPOS. If you work from several different locations, mobile EFTPOS machines are available, and products like Square, PayPal and Stripe offer facilities to allow you to turn your mobile phone into an EFTPOS machine. There are other options that enable secure payments using your mobile device or online, which can be cheaper than an EFTPOS facility, for example [Paymate OnTheGo](#). Some banks also offer similar options, e.g. [NAB Transact](#), [Commonwealth Bank eVolve](#) and [Westpac Mobile PayWay](#) or [St George Mobile PayWay](#).

If your policy is clear, you can levy an additional service charge for accounts not paid on the day. You should send the client a duplicate account every month until it's paid. If the client doesn't respond, follow up personally through a phone call, letter or email. Debt collectors may handle small debts for a fee. You can use a solicitor to recover large debts, but they may be expensive. Some dietitians may wish to apply through the Small Claims Court for judgement against a persistent debtor. This process is often time-consuming and incurs fees.

The [Health Industry Claims and Payments Service \(HICAPS\)](#) and [ACSS Health's eClaims®](#) are electronic claims and payments systems that allow clients to claim their rebate from visiting dietitians at the dietitian's office when paying their invoice. This means clients in participating health funds entitled to dietetic rebates, as well as those being seen through CDM plans through Medicare, only have to pay the out-of-pocket fees to the dietitian. Having this is convenient for your clients as they don't then have to go to their health fund to claim their rebate, and they won't have to pay the full fee for your consultation up-front. It may also encourage fee payment at the time of consultation.

Cancellation fees

There are two schools of thought regarding a cancellation policy. Those in favour have found that having a cancellation fee reduces missed or cancelled appointments. Those against it believe it creates 'bad feeling' between themselves and clients. This is particularly important when developing long-term relationships with clients with frequent review visits.

You'll need to decide if you'll charge a fee for those who cancel appointments, keeping in mind that your time is not recoverable when you have no-shows or late cancellations.

You may wish to inform your clients of your cancellation policy on your website and/or when they book or confirm their appointment. Many practice software programs can send email or SMS confirmations, which can significantly reduce the time required to confirm all your appointments. Cancellation fees attract GST and can't be claimed through Medicare, DVA or private health insurers.

Changing fees and billing practices

If you make a business decision to change how you practice, or to increase your fees, you should give your clients (and referrers) plenty of notice. You may decide after a time that bulk billing doesn't work for you, or that you need to increase your fees to counteract the expense of running a practice. Don't be afraid to increase your fees if you need to. For many clients, a small increase will not significantly impact their ability to pay for your services. However, a small fee increase adds up and can be significant for you.

Discounting

A policy you should prepare early in your business journey is a discounting and pro bono policy. Regardless of your business type, you'll sometimes be asked to discount or provide a free service. Often, you'll be told that a discount will help you attract more people, the person you're discounting for will promote your services, or providing a free service will get you more clients.

Discounting or pro bono work can make sense if it suits your interests and policy. An example of a policy includes providing 12 free presentations per year to non-profit or community groups where hosts are volunteers. You may decide to have a few pre-prepared topics for the talks, and if they want a personalised talk, you can offer them a reduced fee, such as a community rate (e.g. 50% off full rate). Have a policy around who you'll consider for a discount and why. Instead of providing free services, consider a sponsorship program that people can apply for (perhaps with some promotional work in exchange). If you provide a discount, ensure the client understands that they are getting a discount (include the full price on the invoice) and give a reason, or make it clear it's for an introductory instance only. Once you have a policy, it's easier to refuse requests that don't serve your interests.

GST

If you are registered for the GST (Goods and Services Tax) you must charge the GST on taxable goods and services. If you're not registered for the GST, you can't charge it.

GST attaches to the supply of goods and services, so you must collect the GST on any taxable services and pay it to the ATO. For business purchases, your supplier collects and pays the GST, but you can then claim this back from the ATO.

Most medical and health services, including dietetics, are GST-free. The current requirements for the service to be GST-free are that the supplier (dietitian) is a recognised professional and that the supply (the service you provide) would generally be accepted by the relevant profession as being necessary for the appropriate treatment of the recipient.

Dietetic services that are GST-free

The following dietetic services are GST-free.

An individual consultation where the client is assessed and a course of treatment suited to the individual is determined, including:

- preventative nutrition advice (e.g. healthy eating advice, antenatal and sports nutrition)
- nutrition assessments, case conferencing and care planning where they are an integral part of treatment for a client
- consultations, travel reimbursements and outcome reports for DVA clients (for more information contact DVA).

Group consultations, providing the dietitian assesses each client and determines that the group's program would be an appropriate service, including:

- weight management programs including exercise/walking groups
- antenatal classes
- workplace nutrition programs involving individual assessment and advice
- cooking classes for homeless people at nutritional risk.

Goods supplied during a dietetic service may be exempt if they are supplied at the same premises and at the same time as an identified GST-free dietetic service. The goods must be either adapted for the client's exclusive treatment or be necessarily used

as an integral part of the client's treatment during the consultation. Examples may include vitamin or mineral supplements, nutrition and recipe books, special dietary foods such as gluten-free products, and a pedometer purchased by a client as part of their exercise treatment.

Dietetic services for which GST must be charged

You must charge GST for the following services:

- Dietetic services to a private hospital or nursing home where the dietitian is contracted to provide a range of services, including patient consultations, menu planning, in-service education, etc.
- General nutrition lectures and cooking classes.
- Group workplace nutrition education programs.
- Dietetic services provided to the food, pharmaceutical or other industries, including sporting clubs.

On 1 July 2012 changes were introduced that mean that some health-related services that previously attracted a GST are now GST-free. Health-related supplies are generally GST-free when they are for the treatment of an individual who is the recipient of these goods or services. In some cases, health-related goods and services are provided to an individual but are paid for by a third party, such as an insurer, a statutory compensation scheme, a compulsory third-party scheme, or an Australian government agency. As the recipient in these instances is the insurer, scheme operator, or Australian government agency, the supply of health-related goods and services was previously subject to GST. However, the enactment of the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 1) Act 2012 means that the supplies made to the insurer, scheme operator, or Australian government agency in these circumstances are now GST-free, to the extent that the underlying supply provided to the individual is GST-free. Further information on [when to charge GST and when not to](#) is available on the ATO website.

You should get specific advice from an accountant to determine which of your services attract GST. Refer to the ATO website for information on [registering for GST](#).



Taxation

Businesses (including sole traders) only need to lodge a [Business Activity Statement \(BAS\)](#) when they are registered for GST. (Remember, you must register for GST when your business' gross income (excluding GST) is \$75,000 or more per annum.) Most BAS statements are lodged online via the [ATO Business Portal](#). The ATO currently sends paper activity statements if you do not have access to the Business Portal, but this is likely to be phased out in the future.

The BAS is the single form you complete and return to the ATO to report your obligations and entitlements relating to:

- GST (collected and paid)
- Pay As You Go (PAYG) instalments (calculated based on your income for the quarter and your expected income based on your previous year's tax return)
- PAYG withholding (any amounts withheld from wages paid to employees). Note that you need to report salary, PAYG and superannuation amounts to the ATO after every pay is processed.
- Wine equalisation tax, luxury car tax and fringe benefits tax instalments, if applicable.

You also need to lodge an annual income tax return, and an annual fringe benefits tax return, if applicable.

Your taxable income is your assessable income less allowable deductions. Assessable income includes all money received in the form of wages or salary as well as other income, including rent, interest and dividends.

Allowable deductions are any costs incurred in earning money or running your business, but not any costs that are private or domestic. These may include: rent, telephone, internet, electricity, loan repayments, travel expenses, advertising costs, stationery and equipment, home office expenses, professional body fees (e.g. Dietitians Australia membership), continuing education events, insurance, journal subscriptions, food samples, bank account fees and charges, and accountants' fees. Keeping detailed records is essential. You'll need a tax invoice receipt to substantiate any claims you make.

Case study: Running a flexible business

Susan Williams: Zest Nutrition



I'm a Health at Every Size® dietitian in private practice. I graduated from the University of Sydney with a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics in 2000 and I started my Zest Nutrition consulting business in 2007. You could call my business process organic, which is just a nice way of saying I haven't had a plan!

I took 12 months' maternity leave from my full-time job with my first child and intended to return part-time. During my leave there was a restructure and I had to return full-time. I managed for 18 months before it became abundantly clear it was time for a new adventure.

I like to do things my way, and I've never done well with bureaucracy. Working for myself was really the best fit for me. Initially I took any referral I got and saw anyone who walked through the door. I worked in multiple locations. I bulk billed. These are all things I don't do now.

It didn't take long for me to work out that I wasn't comfortable in a traditional 'expert' role, and that clients were the experts in their own lives. I hadn't heard of Health at Every Size® and I certainly wouldn't have dreamed that one day I'd consider eating disorder treatment and prevention my passion, but these first inklings of discomfort were the start of my change.

My practice has grown and shrunk over time. When I had my second child, I subcontracted to first one and then a second dietitian to cover the workload. I picked up some great contracts to provide services to private hospitals and childcare services, and another 2 dietitians joined the ranks.

My subcontracting dietitians have moved on to lovely things and I've operated Zest myself for the last 5 years. Flexibility was what I was after and it's certainly what I got.

Having three daughters, feeding and nurturing them has sharpened my awareness of body image concerns and diet culture. I was already becoming interested in intuitive eating very early in my private practice as I saw client after client with similar stories of diet roller-coasters, and on-again off-again weight loss and gain. Feeding babies, toddlers and preschoolers heightened my curiosity and led me to Ellyn Satter, Rick Kausman, Linda Bacon, Elyse Resch and Evelyn Tribole. Their writing gave me the courage to work in a way that aligned completely with my values and integrity.

I never planned to work in eating disorders but HAES® and a non-diet approach align perfectly with recovery, so it's been almost by default that the majority of my clients are seeking recovery from eating disorders and disordered eating.

In the last 4 years I've had regular supervision and it has been a game-changer. It's critical if you intend to have longevity in private practice. It keeps you sane and safe. Balancing a family and a business takes some discipline if you don't want to spend life feeling like you're doing everything wrong. I've become quite strict about my work hours and when I take work phone calls. Supervision has helped me put strong boundaries in place and I find my work more rewarding for this.

My advice, if you want it, is if you go into private practice be in it for the long haul. It takes time to build your networks and it takes time to find your passion. Have the courage to do the work you love and become known for your skill in an area of dietetics. There will be another dietitian that loves what you don't, so build your network of local dietitians and boost the reputation of the profession.

Chapter 9

self-assessment activity

1. Decide how you're going to keep financial records. Refer to the 'Technologies to help your business' table in [Chapter 5](#) for apps and software that may help keep your financial records and receipts secure.
2. Determine the cost of doing business. This includes all the expenses you have to remain a dietitian in small business – those obvious expenses like rent, and less obvious expenses like professional development, and sick or maternity leave.







Chapter 10: Information technology



“The advance of technology is based on making it fit in so that you don’t really even notice it, so it’s part of everyday life.”



– Bill Gates



IT basics

Computers

You may decide that your accounting, filing, word-processing and dietary analysis can all be computerised. The choice of a computer system will depend on many factors:

- The economic viability of using a computerised system (see your accountant for guidance and how the cost relates to tax).
- Initial and ongoing costs to set up a system. This includes a good-quality laptop for portability, an all-in-one printer, fax, copier and scanner, an external monitor, a separate mouse and keyboard, and a backup hard drive and/or cloud storage subscription. Consult an IT expert for the optimal setup.
- Software packages can be expensive, so investigate the available options to ensure they do what you need. Ensure your hardware can run them before you buy them.
- Consider who will be using the computer (i.e. the dietitian, receptionist or secretary) and their skills. Training for a receptionist or secretary will be an additional expense.
- Will you need to network computers via a server if there's more than one accessing the system? High-security cloud-based servers can be more cost-effective than physical ones.
- How will the system be connected? Cable or wireless?
- What type of internet plan will you need in terms of speed and download limits? Is it appropriate/feasible to share lines with a fax and HICAPS or will separate lines be required?
- How will you back up your files?

Computer and internet security

When using computers, email and the internet it is essential to ensure the security of your data and systems, particularly when handling clients' confidential information. Factors to consider include:

- who has access to client information (for example having different levels of access for reception versus practitioners)
- database storage and backup
- the use of email for sharing confidential information
- data encryption
- disaster recovery
- if using Cloud storage, where is the data (server) physically located? i.e. In Australia or overseas?

[improveIT](#) has some useful resources that discuss these factors in more detail. The [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners \(RACGP\)](#) also produces the [Computer and Information Security Standards](#) with an accompanying workbook, which can be downloaded free from their website.

Computer software packages

The following computer software packages may be useful for your business:

- Financial software packages, for example MYOB and Quicken/Quick Books/Reckon
- [ARGUS](#) for secure transmission/receipt of referrals and client reports from other health professionals
- Nutritional analysis programs, for example [Food Works](#).
- Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Access, Publisher)
- [Practice Software Programs](#)
- Voice recognition software (for example [Nuance](#)) for dictating letters and reports.
- Bibliographic software programs (for example [Endnote](#)), particularly if you do a lot of writing or research
- Business planning software (e.g. [Maus](#), [Heart Harmony](#)), which provide templates for producing business plans, policies and procedures manuals, HR manuals, job descriptions and more.

Case study: Selling dietetic products

Amanda Clark: Great Ideas in Nutrition



I graduated from Sydney University in 1987 and took my first job at Condobolin, in the central west of NSW, also covering the larger town of Parkes and several smaller towns. It involved a lot of driving, and it was an opportunity to represent a department and liaise with heads of other departments. Some graduates from my year also took up sole positions in rural areas and we were good support for each other. The sole position fostered my independence and self-management skills. I worked in a few similar positions before reducing my public-system hours and starting some private practice. My main reasons for working privately were for flexibility for my young family and to enable me to have final say over what I did and how it was carried out.

I admit to a childhood love for playing 'shop'. As an adult, for many years I created a mail order catalogue that was inserted into the Dietitians Australia newsletter and sold all things dietetic. As the internet developed, this enabled greater reach to consumers interested in nutrition books and resources created by my colleagues. Over time, I recognised gaps in the market where I felt the need for a resource in my own practice and none existed.

By the time I developed the Portion Perfection Plate in 2004, the Great Ideas in Nutrition online bookshop had a significant clientele of dietitians and the public, creating a ready outlet for my own products.

It has been a long process of learning to innovate, develop concepts, write, publish, source manufacturers, package, price and market products. In 2014 I expanded the range to the US and continue to enjoy managing a small footprint in the US market from afar. It's a learning curve broaching the subtle cultural differences, but I've made some firm friends in the US and have enjoyed my time there immensely.

I still consult with clients to maintain my expertise and relevance, though it's a smaller component of our overall business. I choose to maintain my own business premises, which houses our distribution centre as well as our client consulting practice. This enables me to control the entire client process from first contact to final consultation.

I think my model of consulting practice is sadly becoming outdated and being replaced by a financially safer, more minimalist approach of paying a percentage of income as rent and having no employees. I do think that it is a shame to lose the model where junior dietitians are employed by senior dietitians, they share resources and provide in-house mentoring. There's the opportunity to specialise and the receptionist knows what you do and can manage your bookings closely.

While I'm one of the youngest of the Baby Boomers, I work towards the Millennial dream of working from my laptop anywhere in the world. I like the new model of shopkeeping online and I admire anyone who successfully sells their business. I work towards maximising the value in my own business, in readiness for that day. I like that I can use my skills in other ways and in fact reach many more people than I could sitting in my office in Tweed Heads.

My advice to dietitians embarking on a new business is:

- Start with the end in mind and create value that you can sell. This will enable your ideas and processes to contribute something to the future.
- Don't call your business by your own name.
- Start with the basics and hone your skills.
- Don't be afraid to do things differently.
- Spell 'practising' (as in Accredited Practising Dietitian) correctly on your website and printing.

Chapter 10

self-assessment activity

1. Review the RACGP Computer and Information Security Standards to help inform decisions about your technology systems and how they're protected.
2. Make a list of the functions you wish to achieve through technology (i.e. collated client notes, food analysis, finances) and refer to the list of computer software packages in this chapter or the 'Technologies to help your business' table in Chapter 5 to see what you may need to purchase.
3. What measures do you need to put in place to protect the privacy of your clients, employees and other stakeholders?
4. If you are doing virtual health, or telehealth, what additional technology is important?







Chapter 11: Marketing and advertising



“You can spend your time on stage pleasing the heckler in the back, or you can devote it to the audience that came to hear you perform.”



– Seth Godin



Why and how to market your business

When setting up your business, you must consider how you'll market it. Most practices will mainly be selling dietetic consultations.

This means that the item for sale is a service rather than a product and thus largely intangible. Marketing of tangible products involves decisions to be made about the 7 Ps: product, price, place, promotion, process, people and physical evidence. (For further information on the 7 Ps and basic marketing strategy, see [Business Queensland's overview](#).)

The nature of services makes them difficult to evaluate. The 'product' in the case of services isn't physical, which means you need to focus particularly on people, physical evidence and process. Understanding these basic marketing concepts can help guide some of your business decisions and create satisfied clients. If you meet clients' expectations, they'll be more likely to return and refer others to you, helping you create a successful business.

People

Consumers of the service (clients and referrers) will directly assess the quality of the service through the people that they deal with, such as the receptionist. It's therefore very important to manage your employees effectively to deliver a high-quality service. A client-oriented approach is paramount.

Physical evidence

In the absence of tangible goods for purchase, your clients will rely more heavily on other factors to judge the quality of their service experience. Impressions and client satisfaction will be partly formed by the physical surroundings and other visible cues. Your marketing strategy must therefore consider what messages you want to send from cues such as staff appearance, branding and quality of materials such as promotional brochures, business cards, invoices and receipts, and resources and written correspondence (including formatting, language and spelling).





Process

Your clients will expect to establish good relationships with your service's representatives, and they'll also expect them to be competent in the technical aspects of their job. Clients expect to be seen within reasonable timeframes, not to be delayed at the time of consultation, to be able to book appointments easily, and to receive correct bills/invoices and accurate advice. Failures with processes cause frustration and agitation and can lead to poorer evaluation outcomes.

Promotion, advertising and word-of-mouth referral

While promotion and advertising are important aspects of marketing your business (as consumers need to know that you exist and where to find you,) they aren't necessarily the most important. The real value lies in word-of-mouth referrals, particularly from trusted sources such as GPs, other health professionals, coaches, past clients and other local businesses. Consider your unique selling proposition in the current market. Is it your level of experience in clinical nutrition or in presenting to diverse groups? Do you work with support services such as exercise physiologists to help engage clients within a comprehensive care plan?

Services are high in 'experience' quality: people can't judge how good they are until they've used them. For this reason, people will often search for information about the service from trusted sources to reduce their sense of uncertainty before they commit. For a dietitian with a new business, this

means you should try to expand your networks and create a positive profile within your community. Some ways to encourage word-of-mouth referrals are outlined below.

Public relations activities

Local media outlets are often looking for local experts to write one-off articles or regular columns, or to be available for interviews on different issues. Local 'free' papers are often willing to publish articles, especially when accompanied by paid advertising. Other public relations activities may include organising lectures or seminars. These can add to your credibility, which is important for service marketing.

Local organisations

Local organisations such as Apex, Rotary, support groups, school P&C associations, and local sporting groups and clubs often look for experts to speak on topics of interest. Speaking to organisations like these brings your name to the public. If people have met you, they hopefully have a positive impression of your service.

Personal introductions

Personal introductions give potential referrers an opportunity to put a face to a name. Try to introduce yourself in person to general practitioners, practice nurses, specialists or marketing and public relations personnel in the food and health industries. This is key to word-of-mouth referral. All these are trusted sources for your clients, so they're also valuable to you. One way to approach new referees might be by offering a regular

update on a topical dietary issue, for example through a physical or email newsletter.

Because 'you are the service' you need to ensure you make a good impression with how you dress and speak, and the physical materials you leave with them (professionally designed and printed pamphlets or business cards as opposed to something knocked up on your computer at home). Consider what the evidence says about your service and your unique selling proposition.

Visiting other local businesses

Business cards, flyers and pamphlets can be left in gyms, pharmacies, personal training studios, and GPs and other health professionals' surgeries. Make sure you get permission from the business owner or manager first.

Advertising in local papers or on television, social media and radio

Make sure any advertising complies with Dietitians Australia's [Professional Standards and Code of Conduct](#).

For more information on advertising and testimonials, see the 'Can dietitians use testimonials?' section of [Dietitians Australia's Code of Conduct webpage](#). This provides information from the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and examples of advertising breaches, the complaints process and recommended promotion strategies.

Signage

Display signs outside the practice. You may need council permits for this. Consider what message you are sending to passers-by through the design and format of the sign. A hand-written blackboard says something different to a professionally printed sign.

Further information and resources

Dietitians Australia has a range of marketing resources available for members:

Media

9 Media Fact Sheets – these provide a wealth of information and tips for working with the media. Download one or all of the fact sheets for free from Dietitians Australia's [online resource library](#).

Marketing

For tips and resources to market yourself as an Accredited Practising Dietitian, visit the '[Promote your APD status](#)' page on the Dietitians Australia member portal.

Social Media

Most social media platforms provide free training and advice on how to use their platforms for business purposes. Some of the common ones include [Facebook blueprint](#), [Twitter for business](#) and [Instagram for business](#).



Case study: Nutrition health promotion

Kate Wengier: Foost



As an excited newbie dietitian, I knew clinical practice wasn't quite right for me. I studied both dietetics and health promotion at university. Nutrition health promotion was always my passion, but it took a while before I discovered that and before I could logistically work in it full time. I was pregnant when I graduated from my dietetics course, so I had a range of competing priorities when starting my career.

While not ideal, it was quite practical for me to start a small private practice while I was home with my young family. My partner was experienced at running a small business, which helped facilitate this decision. I worked with a few gyms in a program alongside a personal trainer, working with mostly clients who were non-athletes but looking to increase performance, lose weight or tone their bodies. I did this for several years, until my priorities and path changed.

Opportunities are everywhere, and the ones you choose to take and the ones you choose to ignore shape your path. You need to have your eyes open and be brave enough to give things a go and learn on your journey. My opportunity came when a family member told me that a Tasmanian festival was looking for family activities, especially children's cooking classes. I was in Melbourne but had family in Tasmania. I had children, liked to cook and was a dietitian but had never run kids' cooking classes before. People around me encouraged me to submit an expression of interest. I did this mostly because I thought I had no chance of being selected, but also knowing deep down that if I was, I would work it out. I was selected and on my first day of running children's cooking classes, I cooked with 100 children – 700 that week. My brother-in-law was my helper (the next year it was my mum). I learned more that week than I could have in months of preparation.

It was about another year later when I could afford to stop one-on-one consulting to focus entirely on group sessions (my passion) and product development.

Running your own business is always a juggling act. There's always more to do, things to improve and decisions to make. But there's also flexibility, endless possibilities and imagination.

My learnings:

- Give things a try (even if you're not fully prepared). Research, learn and grow on your journey.
- Surround yourself with people who'll support you.
- Find mentors. Listen to them as guides but make your own educated decisions.
- 'No' just means 'not yet'. Keep trying.
- Learn from your mistakes. Not everything goes to plan and that's okay.
- You often need to change your plan. But stick with it long enough to work out how to change it.
- Be consistent yet flexible.

Chapter 11

self-assessment activity

1. Develop a brief marketing plan, explaining how you'll approach each of the 7 Ps in your business.
2. Describe marketing efforts by other companies or people that appealed to you. Why did they appeal, and how can you implement similar components in your business?
3. Often the business owner is a major piece of the marketing strategy. Are there things you can do to enhance your marketability (e.g. media training, writing training, professional photos)?
4. Identify local journalists and radio announcers in the traditional media. Send them a quick note to introduce yourself, including your contact details and topics you'd be willing to talk about.
5. Identify your key target markets for end-users (clients) and referrers. Develop a contact sheet in Microsoft Excel or a CRM system if you've chosen to use one.







Chapter 12: Using social media



“When I hear people debate the ROI of social media? It makes me remember why so many businesses fail. Most businesses are not playing the marathon. They’re playing the sprint. They’re not worried about lifetime value and retention. They’re worried about short-term goals.”



– Gary Vaynerchuk



Getting started with social media

Australians are increasingly using social media to communicate – and dietitians are no exception. This provides exciting opportunities but also challenges, and many of us will need to learn new skills to keep up.

Digital media includes:

- Social networking sites (such as [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Snapchat](#))
- Blogs
- Podcasts
- Discussion forums
- Wikis (such as [Wikipedia](#))
- Content sharing sites (such as [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#), [Pinterest](#))
- Micro-blogging (for example [Twitter](#))
- Business networking sites (such as [LinkedIn](#))
- Online communities of health professionals, where you can share your expertise as a health professional with members of the public.

Dietitians Australia's [approach to social media](#) is also a useful reference. It supports Dietitians Australia's Code of Conduct.

New to social media?

You may like to follow Dietitians Australia's social media channels to see how the Association engages with Dietitians Australia members, health professionals, the media and the public. Connect with Dietitians Australia on:

- **Facebook:** [@dietitiansaus](#)
- **Twitter:** [@dietitiansaus](#) and [@dietitians_CEO](#)
- **LinkedIn:** [@Dietitians Australia](#)
- **Instagram:** [@dietitiansaus](#)



Case study: Building a business on social media

Alex Parker and Anna Debenham: The Biting Truth



We started The Biting Truth as an Instagram account in 2013, during the first year of our Master of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Sydney. At this stage there weren't many dietitians using the platform and we saw an opportunity to create healthy recipes and share nutrition tips with family and friends. Our Instagram really took off in the early days and we ran with this momentum.

Once we graduated, we followed our dream, incorporated The Biting Truth as a company and started working full time. We tried various avenues to build a consulting business – talks at gyms, working with medical centres, writing for the media and a few bits and pieces with various brands. We realised quickly that we both lacked some essential business skills to build a successful consulting business. Even though we'd established an ongoing partnership with a large childcare organisation, we found it really tough jumping straight into running our own business in our first year out of university.

We made the tough decision to start applying for jobs separately, with the idea that we'd keep The Biting Truth running on the side and continue to build it (removing the financial pressure). From there, Anna landed a job with a start-up called Hit 100. This provided Anna with some great business exposure as she worked across marketing, sales, and customer experience and gained an insight into business development, accounting and finances. At the same time, Alex got a job at a hospital and worked at a couple of medical centres running dietitian consultations and seminars. Through these varied experiences, Alex was able to build on her clinical skills and land some exciting media opportunities. Alex also continued to work on The Biting Truth one day a week.

We both worked for two years before deciding it was time to quit our jobs and go full-time with The Biting Truth. A pivotal moment in our career was when we landed a large consulting project with Woolworths, who were looking to run a pilot in-store dietitian program. This was a massive project to win – we were managing a team of dietitians, working with one of Australia's largest brands and creating a program from the ground up. The best part was we had full creative license! This opportunity opened several doors for us, and things were really starting to take off.

Our business is now 5 years old and we divide our time between corporate wellbeing, consulting with schools and childcares and social media/brand work. One thing we've always been conscious of is scalability and recurring revenue. These are two fundamental factors to consider when running your own business. In 2018 we invested the time and money into creating an 8-week online Nutrition Reboot Program. We sell this primarily to our corporate clients and it's a great product that largely ticks along on its own.

One of our biggest challenges today is ensuring we spend enough time on business development (i.e. long-term goals and strategy). Sometimes it can be easy to get lost in all the day-to-day tasks and you forget to build your sales pipelines and think about the future of the business. This can mean you go through slow or quiet periods, which can be quite stressful as business owners. To try and avoid this, we have regular strategy days and schedule time in our calendars for business development.

Our number one piece of advice is 'if you don't ask, you don't get'. We've been very fortunate to land some amazing opportunities over the years, and in many circumstances, this was purely because we asked for them. If you want to work with a brand or company, reach out to them. Never underestimate the power of jumping on the phone and calling (it proves you're a real person)!

Chapter 12

self-assessment activity

1. Become familiar with the Dietitians Australia members' approach to social media before planning your social media use.
2. What kind of social media will be most suited to your business? Which network(s) does your audience use?
3. Follow some social media accounts that inspire you, and actively identify posts that resonate with you. Reflect on why you like them, what aligns for you, and what doesn't.
4. How much time will you dedicate to your social media each week?







Chapter 13: Working with doctors and practice nurses



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”



- Helen Keller



Doctors, allied health and practice nurses

Research conducted by Dietitians Australia in 2009 and [2015](#) found several barriers to doctors referring to an APD, including the perceptions that:

- dietitians cost too much
- dietitians only see patients for a small range of conditions such as obesity and diabetes,
- dietitians won't provide any better nutrition advice than a doctor could.

APDs need to educate doctors about the diverse services we provide, how we can work with them to help them achieve better patient outcomes (and save them time and money) and the rebates that are available for dietetic consultations.

Building relationships

When you refer to someone as a professional, your reputation is on the line. Therefore, it can take some time for doctors to refer to you. They need to know that you'll provide a good service and not damage their reputation. Our research indicated that building relationships with doctors is one of the best ways to build or grow your business. Visiting doctors to introduce yourself and explain your services, maintaining regular contact and reporting back on the clients referred to you are valuable ways to foster these.





Introduce yourself

Visiting a GP or medical specialist for the first time can be daunting. Dietitians Australia has put together a suite of resources to help you prepare to visit local doctors. These are available via [Dietitians Australia's online Resource Library](#) (formerly DINER/PIP). They include:

- letters of introduction templates
- case studies to show to doctors outlining how APDs can improve patient outcomes
- checklists for planning visits and what to discuss at your visit
- tips on scheduling appointments with doctors
- brochures (for example, 'How your practice can benefit from an APD' and 'Improving patient outcomes through Medical Nutrition Therapy') and posters to display in a GP surgery.

Provide feedback

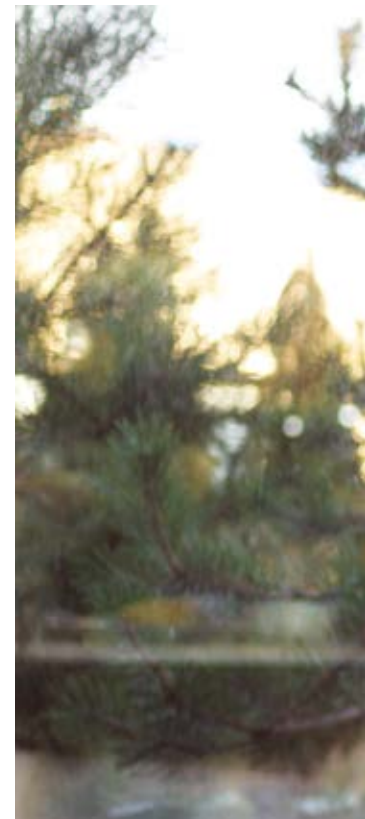
Dietitians Australia's research with GPs highlighted that GPs want more feedback from APDs on patient progress and outcomes. Providing feedback is integral to maintaining ongoing relationships and gaining future referrals. A [paper](#) published in the June 2011 edition of Dietitians Australia's journal, *Nutrition & Dietetics*, provides valuable insights on feedback letters to doctors. The paper is titled 'Facilitating patients' dietary change: a review of dietitians' correspondence practices with general practitioners'.

Becoming a trusted adviser

When a doctor, coach or other stakeholder views you as a trusted adviser, they're more likely to refer clients to you. A trusted adviser is more than someone they can refer to – it's someone who helps them to do their job better. In some instances, this may be through referring clients; in others, it's being on the end of the phone to answer a quick question, presenting to interested groups, or sending through a new research paper or fact sheet that may help them get better outcomes for their clients.

Further information and resources

Under [Promote your APD status](#), the Dietitians Australia member portal has further information regarding increasing your referrals.



Primary Health Networks

Primary Health Networks are primary health care organisations that coordinate primary health care delivery, address local health care needs and service gaps. Established on 1 July 2015, many Primary Health Networks transitioned from existing primary health care organisations such as Medicare Local, formerly known as Divisions of General Practice. The Primary Health Networks' key objectives are "increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes; and improving coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time".

See the Australian Government Department of Health [Primary Health Networks website](#) for further updates.

Leveraging Primary Health Networks

Primary Health Networks provide an opportunity for you to connect with, contribute to and benefit from a comprehensive network of primary health care providers such as GPs, nurses and other allied health professionals in your local area.

Some Primary Health Networks have member organisations that you can join. There are often opportunities to attend networking events, participate in program committees or planning forums, and be part of delivering key health initiatives. Connecting with your local Primary Health Network is an excellent way to introduce yourself and build relationships with local doctors and practice nurses to increase referrals and grow your business.



Case study: Using transferable skills to build your dietetic career

Louise Elvin-Walsh: Adept Nutrition Care



My career-path turning point was in my mid-30s. It all started one night in 2004 walking out of an inner city arts cinema after watching the documentary [The Corporation](#). I stood there in the cool autumn breeze questioning what I wanted in life and whether I was making a difference to anyone or anything at all. That weighed heavily on me. I'd been working in IT with Telstra for 13 years and certainly enjoyed my career. I worked very hard and this was rewarded financially, with respect from colleagues and management, and with exciting promotions and great study opportunities, including a Diploma of Project Management. Having broken through the glass ceiling, I could see myself working there for a very long time. I'd developed my resilience and capacity to hold my own and be highly productive in the male-dominated space of IT and telecommunications. The biggest achievement was completing a large-scale IT program of work consisting of over 60 projects across the company. But it was tough, and it wasn't really...me. Was I doing this to prove something to myself (and others)? So, back to that turning point. After that night, I assuaged my rising discomfort by donating to various charities i.e. using my 'corporate gig' money for good. I wrestled with the offer of undertaking a company-funded business degree, which made me think: 'What could I enjoy studying?' and 'What do I want to be when I grow up?'

I spoke to dietitians and nutritionists to gain insight into the profession and what it takes to succeed. In preparation for these meetings I devised a series of questions about the profession, such as the best and worst aspects of the job; the most important attributes required; the biggest challenges; where and what they studied, and whether they would recommend I follow this path. I also saw a dietitian as a client on 3 occasions.

The academic preparation for university was tougher than I imagined, juggling full-time work and attending bridging courses at night for maths and chemistry. Working with tutors on the weekends. Even taking calculus homework on my UK holiday! To evaluate my suitability for studying nutrition and dietetics, I completed a Certificate in Nutrition and Diet by correspondence. Let's face it, it had been over 25 years since I'd been at school and I hadn't ever been to university. It was an exciting time, though, because I knew that all these things were leading

towards the career I wanted. The qualities that I'd acquired in the corporate world gave me resilience and conditioned me for university life. It's important to recognise your transferable skills.

My graduation day was one of the best days of my life. I was simultaneously excited and uncertain about what the future would hold. Despite having always maintained that I wanted to go into private practice for myself, I was a little afraid of it, but I started working on my business case while volunteering at the Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH).

What I've learned during this career transition is that it's important to promote the skills you have. It can feel very awkward to be at such a junior level at this stage of your life, but it takes a good attitude, teamwork and enthusiasm to keep on learning. Don't be shy about proving your worth and promoting what you can bring to the profession. Network, network, network.

This new career has been incredibly varied and interesting. In less than 4 years, this degree has led to me owning and operating my own private practice while also working as a research assistant, community dietitian, clinical dietitian, speaker and nutrition blog presenter. I've also chaired two Dietitians Australia volunteer committees, mentored Provisional APDs, and been the student placement supervisor at Bond University and the University of Queensland. I delight in being able to practice dietetics across a broad spectrum of clinical areas and attending local, national and overseas dietetic conferences (thus combining my joint loves of travel and food).

So now, standing in a cool winter breeze, I'm no longer questioning whether I am making a difference. I know in my heart that I am, and this warms me to the core. It's so good for the soul and the most fulfilling job I've ever had.

Take the plunge and be mentally stimulated, feel empowered and pleasantly surprised by what you can achieve in this wonderfully rewarding profession!

Chapter 13

self-assessment activity

1. Using a spreadsheet or CRM, collect names, addresses, practice names, nurse names and phone numbers of potential GPs, allied health professionals, specialists and other professionals you would like to work with.
2. Create a detailed plan for how you'll build relationships with local referring practitioners.
 - a. What resources can you use to help build these relationships?
 - b. Which practitioners will you target?
 - c. Besides health professionals, who else could be potential referrers?
3. Explore the marketing and referral templates available on Dietitians Australia's online Resource Library and customise them to suit your business.







Chapter 14: Employing staff



“A team is not a group of people that works together. A team is a group of people that trusts each other. The great leaders are not the strongest; they are the ones who are honest about their weaknesses. The great leaders are not the smartest; they are the ones who admit how much they don’t know.”



– Simon Sinek



Employing staff

If you're marketing your business and providing a great service, your business may grow to a point that you need more help – this could be in the form of administrative assistance, another dietitian, or both.

While there are several benefits to having other staff to assist you, being an employer comes with obligations and responsibilities that you need to understand.

Benefits	Drawbacks
Not having to handle all the responsibility of running a practice and seeing clients.	Greater financial commitment (including wages, superannuation, workers compensation, insurance).
Assistance with administrative tasks, leaving you more time to see clients and grow the business.	Greater legal responsibilities.
Having someone else to bounce ideas off.	Need to pay wages regardless of business income (unless staff are casual or independent contractors).
Being able to take time off while someone else in the practice looks after clients.	Risk of losing clients if a dietitian leaves and clients follow.
Having a dietitian with complementary interests or specialities to increase the type and number of clients the practice sees.	
Opportunities for professional development with other dietetic staff.	

Choosing the right person

Receptionist and/or secretary

Careful choice of a receptionist and/or secretary is important because the receptionist is the staff member the client meets or contacts. First impressions can be lasting impressions! a good receptionist can improve office efficiency, client satisfaction and business productivity.

Characteristics important to this position include:

- a pleasant, friendly personality
- basic secretarial or reception training in office procedures, including word processing skills
- a good telephone manner
- good personal presentation, as they're the first impression clients get of your business
- money-handling and invoicing/receipting skills.

Dietitian

When looking for another dietitian to work with you, look for someone who:

- is suited to the position you have available
- is motivated and hard-working
- believes in your business goals
- is flexible and open-minded, with a willingness to learn
- has similar professional ideas and opinions to you
- is an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

Options for employment – employee or contractor?

Once you've decided to hire staff, you need to consider whether you will take them on as an employee of the business or as a contractor. Contractors operate as a separate business entity but work within your business, invoicing you for their services. They are generally responsible for organising their own tax, superannuation and insurance. If you're hiring staff as employees of the business you need to consider the financial and legal obligations of the business to the employees including wages, tax, superannuation and insurance. Reception staff would usually be hired as employees, on a full-time, part-time or casual basis. Dietitians could be hired as either an employee or contractor – your accountant can give you advice as to which is the best option for your business. Your decision to employ staff as employees or contractors has implications for making PAYG tax deductions, superannuation payments, and satisfying certain award obligations, so it's important you understand the differences.

FAQ: How do I decide if someone is classified as an employee or contractor?

While this will depend on the individual circumstances, in general an employee is someone who works regular or defined hours at the business's workplace using the business's tools and resources, with work direction from the employer, and who is paid a wage or salary. A contractor, on the other hand, is someone who can choose the time and place that they work, is employed for a certain task, uses their own tools and resources, and has the right to sub-contract their work. The ATO provides detailed information to help you in determining whether someone would be considered an employee or contractor, including an [employee or contractor decision tool](#) available on their website.

Awards

From 1 January 2010, employers and employees in the national workplace system are covered by the [National Employment Standards \(NES\)](#). The NES provide employees with minimum conditions, including minimum entitlements to leave, public holidays, notice of termination and redundancy pay. They apply along with modern awards that outline an employee's terms and conditions of employment.

Professional and support staff employed in the private health industry, which includes private dietetic businesses, are covered by the [Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2020](#) (MA000027). The award includes details on minimum wages, hours of work, leave entitlements and other factors relating to employees, including termination, redundancy, shift work, breaks and overtime. You need to read this document carefully before employing staff so that you understand your obligations as an employer. Awards are regularly reviewed and updated, which may include minimum wage increases, so ensure you regularly review this document. You can subscribe to award updates so that you're emailed about any changes. This is important to do as award wages are reviewed every year.

As an employer you must ensure that copies of this award and the NES are available to all employees to whom they apply, either on a workplace noticeboard or through electronic means, whichever makes them more accessible.

You also need to provide employees with a [Fair Work Information Statement](#) before, or as soon as possible after, the employee starts work. The right for new employees to receive the Statement is one of 10 minimum standards in the NES that apply to hiring of employees.

Contractors

If you hire another dietitian as a contractor to your business, the award doesn't apply, but you should develop a contract agreement that outlines the conditions of employment. The contract should include details on superannuation, provision of an ABN, holiday/sick leave, wages/remuneration, hours to be worked etc. It is highly recommended to have a solicitor write up any contract. (If you are the one signing a contract, invest the money to have a solicitor explain it and make sure it works for you.) You will also need to work out a payment structure that could be a set wage, a percentage of each consultation/session or a set amount per session.

Further information and resources

[Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

[Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#)

The employment process

Advertising and interviewing

If you decide to hire staff for your business, start by writing a detailed job specification and description. You can then call for applications through advertising, contacting employment agencies or training colleges, and personal contacts. Dietitians Australia members can also post jobs on the [Positions Vacant section](#) of the Dietitians Australia member portal.

Dietitians Australia also maintains a [Locum List](#), which lists dietitians who are currently looking for work, including details such as their location, years since graduation and areas of interest.

Applications should be in writing with details of background, education, training and previous experience, and responses to selection criteria where applicable. From these applications, you should select 6 for an interview. You may conduct the interview yourself or have an agency do this for you for a fee.

Before the interview, prepare a job description, selection criteria you want to assess, and the terms and conditions of the job. The latter may include hours, pay, holidays, sick leave, dress code and career prospects.

During the interview you should aim to find out:

- job expectations and ambitions
- strengths and weaknesses
- skills and proficiencies
- personality and values

It can be valuable, with advance notice given, to have your candidates perform example work that they may need to do. For example, develop some nutrition education resources, or complete an example consultation. Some people are very good interviewees, yet they can't perform the tasks you need them to, and vice versa.

Written references have limited value, but a telephone call to a previous employer, with the candidate's agreement, can be valuable. After the interview, record your overall impression of the candidate and check their performance against your list. After you've made a final selection, contact the successful applicant and provide an offer of employment in writing. Once they've accepted you should notify the unsuccessful applicants in writing.



Employment offer/contract

You'll need to provide your new employee with an offer of employment that outlines their position, the terms and conditions of employment, hours of work, remuneration, leave entitlements and any probation periods if applicable.

Fair Work Australia provides [templates](#) for letters of engagement for full-time, part-time and casual employees, which can be found on their website

Confidentiality

The dietitian is legally responsible for the actions of their staff and must ensure client confidentiality at all times (see the Dietitians Australia [Code of Conduct](#).)

Staff should never:

- provide information to a client without the dietitian's permission
- discuss clients or their problems within hearing of other clients
- divulge the financial or personal problems of clients or employers.

Training

Staff should be clear on what you expect from them and should be provided with a job description outlining their duties and responsibilities. A business manual outlining policies and procedures is also helpful in ensuring that staff follow them.

Staff should be involved in the operation of the business and you should regularly set aside time to discuss concerns and problems. Training and supervision of staff is an ongoing commitment, and you should also conduct regular performance reviews.

Further information and resources

[Heart Harmony Communications](#) provides free performance appraisal questions and forms and have a Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual available for purchase that can be easily adapted to your own business

The [Australian Institute of Management](#) offers management training courses that can help equip you with essential management skills.



Employer obligations and responsibilities

Workers' compensation insurance (WorkCover)

Workers' compensation insurance protects employers from having to pay large sums if employees injure themselves travelling to and from work or while at work. Each state and territory has its own workers' compensation scheme, so it's important to check the laws relating to workers' compensation insurance in the state or territory where you work. You'll need to pay an annual premium for workers' compensation insurance, which is calculated according to the total value of wages you pay your employees.

Links to state and territory workers' compensation authorities can be found on the [Business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au) website.

Employee tax

If you employ staff in your business, they must complete a Tax file number declaration (NAT 3092), available from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). It can be ordered online or by phone, or you can usually ask for copies at newsagents and post offices. The form has two parts: one that must be completed by the employee, and the other that you must complete as the employer. You need to send this form to the ATO within 14 days of a staff member commencing employment. You then have obligations to deduct amounts from payments to them and remit these amounts to the ATO. This is referred to as pay-as-you-go (PAYG) withholding.

You should withhold amounts from payments to employees in accordance with the [tax tables](#) published by the ATO. These tables take into account the employee's personal income tax rates plus the Medicare levy, any offsets or rebates, their HECS-HELP debt if applicable, residency status and other relevant matters. You need to ensure that you use the correct tax table for each of your employees, considering any information they may have provided to you on their declaration. The tables are updated annually, so it's important that you always use the current tables. Accounting software programs that include payroll have these tables built into them, but you must have an ongoing subscription for updates to ensure you always have the current tables installed.

If your employee doesn't give you a fully completed tax file number declaration you must withhold tax at the highest marginal rate plus the Medicare levy.

Each payday, you must provide a report to the ATO about payments from which you have withheld amounts, including:

- salaries, wages, allowances, bonuses or commissions paid to an employee
- payments for unused leave
- workers' compensation, sickness or accident payments
- PAYG amounts withheld
- superannuation amounts.

After the last pay for the financial year has been processed, you must submit a confirmation report to the ATO to confirm the amounts paid to each staff member for the financial year.





Employee superannuation

Under the superannuation guarantee law, you must pay super contributions for your eligible employees at a minimum rate of 9.5% of their ordinary-time earnings. This applies to eligible employees aged over 18 who earn \$450 or more (before tax) in salary or wages in a month. Employees aged under 18 years whom you pay \$450 or more per month and who work more than 30 hours in a week must also be paid superannuation. If your business is a company and you're an employee of the company, you also need to make super contributions for yourself. If you're not a company, it's a good idea to put some of your income into superannuation, but it's not mandatory.

Depending on your overall company wages, you'll have to make payments at least 4 times a year. The cut-off dates are 28 days after the end of each quarter. Superannuation contributions are generally tax deductible for you as a business.

Further information and resources

[Hiring employees checklist](#) on the Business.gov.au website

The [ATO Guide to Superannuation for Employers](#)

The ATO provides useful [checklists](#) outlining your taxation and superannuation obligations as an employer:

- When employing a new worker
- While the worker is working for you
- When the worker ceases working for you.

If you don't pay the minimum amount into the correct fund by the due date, you'll have to lodge a Superannuation guarantee charge statement – quarterly (NAT9599) and pay the superannuation guarantee charge (SGC) to the ATO. This charge is the amount of shortfall super that needs to be paid for the employee, plus interest and an administration fee. The interest and administration fees are not tax deductible. With the implementation of the Tax Laws Amendment Act 2012, company directors are now personally liable for a company's tax obligations, including PAYG, superannuation and SGC payments that a company fails to pay, even if a company goes into voluntary administration or liquidation. Refer to the [Superannuation Guarantee \(Administration\) Amendment Act 2012](#) for more information.

Privacy laws regarding employee records

The Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 includes an exemption for the collection, use, or disclosure of information contained in employee records in the context of employment relationships. All employers must keep employee records private and confidential. For legislative purposes, the following items would be considered part of an employee's records:

- information on the engagement, training, disciplining or resignation of an employee
- terms and conditions of employment
- performance and conduct.

The new Act is designed to ensure employers do not take commercial advantage, for example by selling personal information to direct marketers. The exemption only applies to employee records held by the employer and does not continue if the records are disclosed by the employer to another organisation (for example insurers for workers' compensation). See the [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner](#) for further information.

Checklist for employing staff

- ✔ Decide on the type of help you need (i.e. administrative/reception or dietitian).
- ✔ Write a job description outlining the key attributes and experience required.
- ✔ Write policies and procedures to ensure your employee understands what's expected of them.
- ✔ Register as an employer with the ATO.
- ✔ Consult the award under which staff will be employed or determine a fair pay rate.
- ✔ Determine your responsibilities for superannuation, annual leave, sick leave, workers' compensation and work health and safety.
- ✔ Advertise the position and conduct interviews. Ensure interviews replicate tasks required.
- ✔ Choose the best applicant and provide offer of employment.
- ✔ Provide contract to peruse, negotiate and agree upon.
- ✔ Have the person fill out an employee details form outlining their personal details, bank account details, superannuation fund and emergency contact.
- ✔ Have your employee complete a TFN declaration and send to the ATO.
- ✔ Arrange workers compensation insurance (unless they're a contractor).
- ✔ Arrange professional indemnity insurance (for professional staff, unless they're a contractor or required to organise their own).
- ✔ Induct new staff member. Include processes, policies, procedures and other helpful information.
- ✔ Provide suitable initial training and outline expectations.
- ✔ Plan ongoing training, professional development and performance reviews.
- ✔ Pay wages and withhold payments (according to the tax tables available from the ATO) and pay this amount to the ATO (as part of your quarterly BAS).
- ✔ Pay quarterly superannuation contributions by the due date.
- ✔ Set up reporting of wages, PAYG and superannuation to the ATO for each payday.
- ✔ Provide ongoing supervision, performance discussions and team meetings to ensure expectations are managed and met, and the business, employer and employee thrive.



Case study: Creating a team in private practice

Shane Jeffrey: River Oak Health



My career as a dietitian didn't really get off to the start I'd hoped for. Having failed my final clinical placement, I had to forgo the opportunity to do an elective placement in sports nutrition – which was the area where I wanted to practice as a dietitian. In order to demonstrate my competence, I completed another 2 weeks of clinical placement and, lo and behold, was not only assessed as being competent to graduate as a dietitian, I was also offered a job on the spot. This was my claim to fame – last to graduate, first to get a job!

It was in this job at the Gold Coast Hospital (circa 1993) where I met my first patient with an eating disorder, and that patient changed the direction of my career. There was just something different about eating disorders that really grabbed my interest. From this point on, eating disorders would be where I would spend most of my time practising as a dietitian.

Now I feel fortunate enough to have practised in the eating disorder field across a number of domains: private and public, adolescent and adults, inpatients and outpatients, independent dietitian and multidisciplinary service. I've had the pleasure of working alongside some truly remarkable people – both health professionals and the clients themselves.

I've been largely dabbling in private practice since 1995 when I set up my first clinic in Macgregor on the southside of Brisbane, working alongside a psychiatrist. In fact, this was the time when I got my first business card and my first mobile phone (aka brick – no lie, it was about the size of a shoebox!). I continued to run my private practice part-time, usually two nights a week, while working full-time in either private or public eating disorder services. That was until 2017, when I decided to go into private practice full-time – and what a jump it was. I soon found out that while I didn't need too many systems in place while working two nights a week as an independent dietitian, this wasn't going to cut it while working in full-time private practice and employing other dietitians. My practice went from paper diaries, paper records, and taking payments by cash or cheque to PMSs (electronic patient management systems), HICAPS (electronic payment systems), and a whole range of other electronic processes. As someone born in 1972, I felt like I was sinking under my laptop and the pressure to build a social

media profile on Facebook, Instagram (the camera one) and Twitter (the bird one) – in fact, I still haven't worked out the social media thing.

While I was sinking, I had what I thought was a revolutionary idea – I don't have to do it all myself. Yes, I was a good dietitian, but I was ordinary when it came to systems and social media – so as I began to recruit other dietitians to my practice, I started building a team of dietitians whose strengths complemented each other. The key learning here for me was that I didn't have to do it all by myself – after all, private practice can feel like a lonely place sometimes. The other thing that really stood out for me during this time is that being a good dietitian doesn't make one a good businessperson – hold me up as an example of this one! Finances, referral databases, monthly statistics, performance indicators, and marketing were all foreign to me – and to my colleagues. So what did I do? Despite being a dietitian for nearly 25 years, I reached out for some mentoring and supervision. I'd always done this in my dietitian work, and had been getting professional supervision for many years before it dawned on me that mentoring and supervision in the private practice/business space would be worthwhile. So once again I took a leap of faith, and this time, although I felt I was sinking, I had someone helping give me directions on the process of 'how to swim' – and the experience was invaluable. I probably wasn't the best student (just like the old uni days), but one of my greatest learnings in the land of private practice is to seek out support, mentoring, and supervision – both from a dietetic perspective and a business perspective. After all, good dietitians are not necessarily good businesspeople, and private practice, for all it offers us as dietitians, is really a business at the end of the day.

So as you consider or dive deeper into the world of private practice, remember as you go by the hat stand to grab the ones that say 'dietitian' and 'business owner' (and any other hats you choose to wear in private practice land) as you step into a career pathway that can be much more rewarding than it is challenging.

Chapter 14

self-assessment activity

1. What human resource documents will you need before employing staff?
2. What is the difference between a contractor and an employee? Which positions in your business are suitable for contractors and which will be employees?
3. What are some roles and responsibilities you can outsource?
4. Write policies and procedures for different tasks within your business, so they're ready for when you need to get help.
5. If you were to employ staff, where would you advertise?
6. Develop an 'about us' to share with potential employees.
7. Develop job description(s) and list of interview questions for potential employees.







Chapter 15: Work health and safety



“If you put good people in bad systems, you get bad results. You have to water the flowers you want to grow.”



– Stephen Covey



About work health and safety

As an employer, you must provide a safe and healthy workplace for your workers (paid and unpaid). You also need to ensure the safety of your clients and visitors to your business.

On 1 January 2012, the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) (Cwth) and the Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (Cwth) took effect and replaced the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991 (Cwth) and the Occupational Health and Safety (Safety Standards) Regulations 1994 & 1991 (Cwth).

The Act includes the term, 'person conducting a business or undertaking' (PCBU) that extends the duty of care for work health and safety to all persons who conduct a business, including sole traders and those who are self-employed. There is also a definition of 'workers' that includes not only employees but also volunteers, trainees, work experience students, contractors, sub-contractors, employees of contractors and sub-contractors, and employees of labour-hire companies assigned to work for you.

Even if you're a sole trader working alone with no employees, you still have to meet health and safety requirements in your workplace.

Your obligations include:

- providing and maintaining a safe workplace, including safe access to and exit from the workplace
- providing workers with adequate facilities for their welfare at work (such as clean bathrooms, lockers and hygienic dining areas)
- ensuring workers have adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to work in a safe and healthy manner
- keeping information and records relevant to your workers' health and safety (such as first aid records and relevant medical information)
- consulting with employees on health and safety matters in your workplace (this [short video from NSW WorkCover](#) on consultation requirements provides a good overview of the type of consultation you need to do and how and when to consult.
- obtaining expert advice on health and safety issues affecting your workers
- nominating a senior management representative (or yourself) to deal with workers and resolve health and safety issues at the workplace
- providing your workers with information about your workplace health and safety arrangements, including the names of those to whom they can make an inquiry or complaint.
- immediately notifying your State or Territory safe work regulator of certain dangerous incidents. Information about incident reporting can be found on the [SafeWork Australia website](#).

Each State and Territory has workplace health and safety legislation that you must abide by. More information about your responsibilities as a business owner can be found on the [Business.gov.au](#) website.



Work safety authorities

Jurisdiction	Authority	Website
Commonwealth	Comcare	www.comcare.gov.au
Australian Capital Territory	WorkSafe ACT	www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/home/workhealthandsafety
New South Wales	WorkCover NSW	www.workcover.nsw.gov.au
Queensland	Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland	www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
Western Australia	WorkSafe WA	www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/
Northern Territory	NT WorkSafe	www.worksafe.nt.gov.au
South Australia	SafeWork SA	www.safework.sa.gov.au
Victoria	WorkSafe Victoria	www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
Tasmania	WorkSafe TAS	www.worksafe.tas.gov.au



Case study: From public sector to small business

Julie Dundon: Nutrition Professionals Australia



Even in 1981, it seemed difficult to find employment in a major public hospital. Everything I'd learned at university was about being part of a team in an acute care hospital. After 3 weeks of unemployment I was desperate for a job. I wrote 12 letters of introduction to smaller hospitals, mainly in country South Australia, and one hospital, the Lyell McEwin Health Service, in northern metropolitan Adelaide. They had never had an allied health practitioner before. I was appointed full-time and as a new grad I established a whole department with no other allied health colleagues.

I had many concerns and questions about my ability. Could I really do this? Where could I get some support? I never learnt the skills at uni that I needed to do this! I was fortunate to have the complete support of my manager. I set up support systems. I set up policies and procedures. I established a good working relationship with the catering staff – they had no idea I was an employee! I was passionate about my profession and it showed in everything I did. I worked long hours, shed many tears, was ignored and bypassed. But I kept going and, in just 3 years, the staffing level had increased to 3 full-time equivalents and we'd established a very successful diabetes education centre.

During this time, I'd made some very valuable networks (I didn't realise this at the time) with local GPs, medical consultants and other allied health professionals. After 4 or 5 years, I went on to other public hospital positions and was eventually Unit Manager of Allied Health at Modbury Hospital, leading the team through the privatisation process.

After 15 years working in the public sector, with the same issues and no changes, I decided that I needed to move into the next big area of growth – aged care. This was in 1995. I was employed as a food service coordinator across 5 nursing homes and implemented major structural change. It was an immensely challenging and satisfying position. But, as luck would have it, the work was restructured, and I was offered a position I really wasn't interested in.

From early in my career, volunteering my time with Dietitians Australia was important. It provided me with the professional support that I'd been searching for in my position at the Lyell McEwin Hospital. Over the years, it progressed until I became the President of Dietitians Australia. I gave my time freely, as the friendship and personal and professional benefits have proven to be invaluable.

Not long after the birth of our fourth child, I decided I wanted to work in a challenging role that I could control. I purchased a small private practice in the north of Adelaide. When looking for suitable consulting rooms, the medical consultants I had worked with at the Lyell McEwin gave me a boost. I found a small consulting suite, within my budget, among potential referrers and in a perfect position, across the road from the Lyell McEwin. It didn't take long to re-establish my links and my private practice continued to grow – without Medicare! My previous hard work, dedication and passion provided a great start to my business.

In addition, with my aged care experience, I was able to approach aged care homes (in 1997) to improve their menus, identify malnutrition, provide training and develop policies and procedures. Very quickly, this part of my business really grew, as there were very few dietitians working in this sector.

In 2001, I decided to form a partnership with Anne Schneyder to create Nutrition Professionals Australia (NPA). We'd previously discovered that we had the same commitment to our profession, worked in a similar way and wanted the same outcomes for ourselves. On the other hand, we had complementary skills and experiences and have made a formidable team since that time. We decided in 2001 that we need to offer a national service and so Australia was in our name – not just South Australia.

Our plan had always been to provide a range of services – aged care, individual consulting, private hospital consulting, food industry and media. We decided that as South Australia was our base, we needed to have a generalist approach to survive as a business. Over time, each of these areas grew, and at one time NPA employed more than 12 full-time equivalent APDs and 2 to 3 support staff.

NPA embraced change even when it was out of our control. We've always needed to be one step ahead. One example was the introduction of Medicare. While maintaining our specialist services, we introduced bulk-billing clinics into many GP practices across Australia. Our aged care work extended across the country too.

In recent years, I was fortunate to be employed for a couple of years managing a large aged-care home. The knowledge, skills and networks continue to be invaluable. Now that I'm back working for NPA, those networks are adding value to NPA, but more importantly are being used for the benefit of our aged care residents.

Since 2016, NPA has focused on aged care, with all our clinics sold to another APD. Aged care continues to be our focus. NPA has developed resources for aged care staff and dietitians, and conducts two-day seminars across the country in every state of Australia every year.

NPA is now a more focused, specialist business for all aged care homes. Over the years, I've developed specialist skills that are now offered to all homes that are either non-compliant or have sanctions. With the changes to the aged care sector, we still need to be one step ahead, developing new services that the sector will be seeking in the future.

My dedication and commitment to good food and nutrition for older people throughout our community continues. There are new opportunities opening in the sector, but keeping one step ahead remains the challenge!

So, wherever you work:

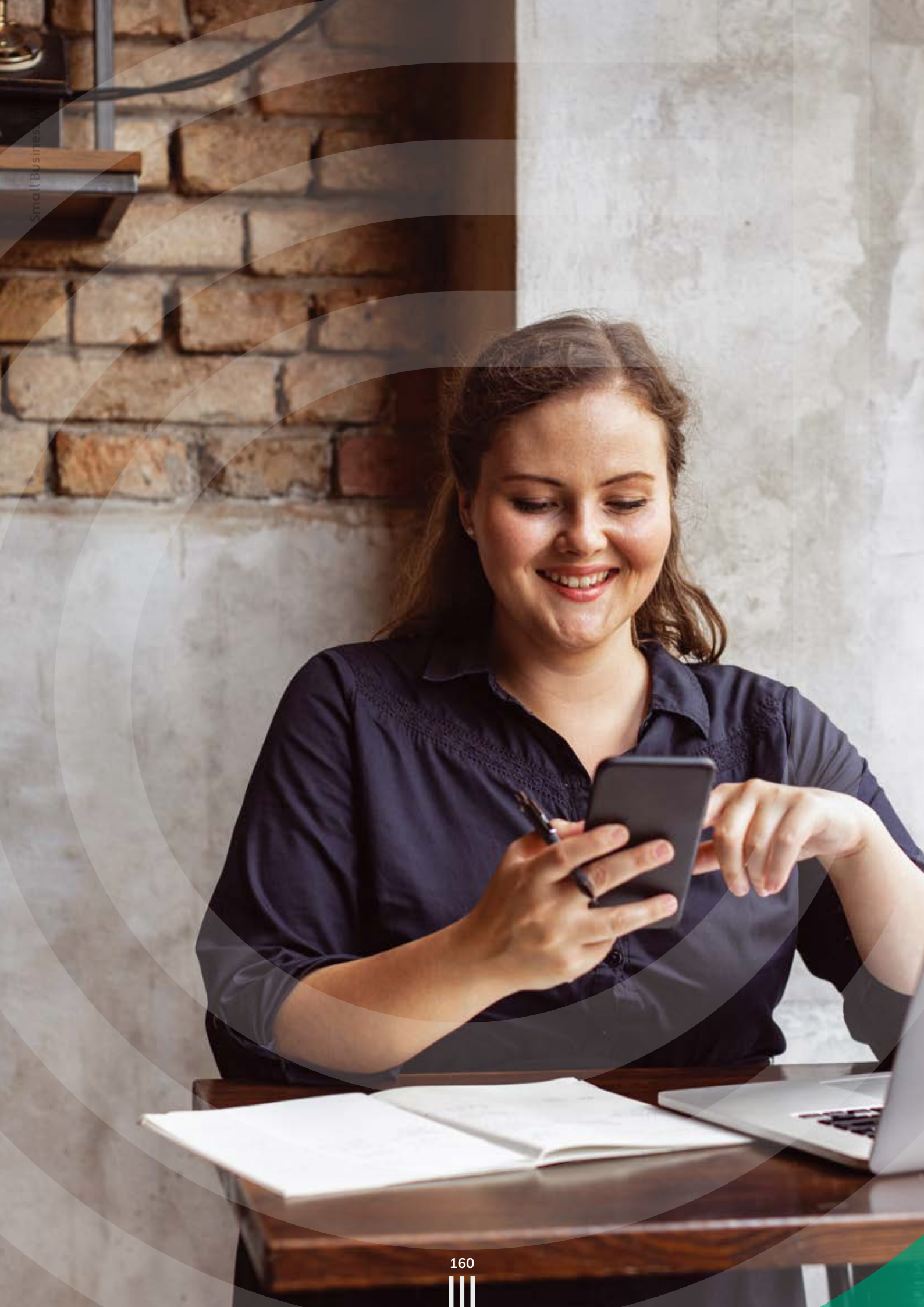
- your work experience will always be valuable, even if it's not where you thought you'd be
- establish and maintain your networks – you just don't know what the future holds
- be focused, identify your strengths and work with them
- also identify your weaknesses and work out how or where you can improve them
- regularly take some time, even if it's brief, to review your business focus
- where possible, predict future demands for your services and be prepared as best you can
- embrace change, make the best of it
- be brave, take some calculated risks
- accept and learn from your mistakes, then move on
- don't ever be afraid of showing your passion for nutrition
- ensure everyone you have contact with has a positive experience, no matter who they are
- above all, enjoy the journey!

Chapter 15

self-assessment activity

1. What are the safety risks in your business?
2. Which workplace health and safety authority does your business operate under?
3. What level of workers' compensation insurance do you need, and how is it calculated?
4. What workplace health and safety training will your employees have to take to be able to work in your environment safely?
5. Develop a protocol for workplace health and safety in your practice for when you employ people.







Chapter 16: Quality improvement



**“Continuous
improvement is better
than delayed perfection.”**



– Mark Twain



Models of continuous improvement

Quality improvement (QI) is a method of continuously examining processes within your business and systematically improving them.

There are several models of continuous improvement, including:

- FADE – Focus, Analyse, Develop, Execute, Evaluate
- PDSA– Plan, Do, Study, Act
- Six Sigma (DMAIC) – Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)
- Total Quality Management (TQM)

A detailed discussion of QI is beyond the scope of this manual, but you can find more information here:

- The [Institute for Healthcare Improvement \(IHI\)](#) is an independent non-profit organisation focused on improving quality in health care. They provide a wide range of information, tools, audio recordings and webinars for health professionals.
- The [Australasian Association for Quality in Healthcare](#)
- [Quality Improvement Performance](#)

Examples of quality improvement activities that could be applied to private sector include:

- establishing an accreditation system for your practice
- establishing standards of care for management of clients
- developing tools for performance appraisal and self-evaluation
- auditing client records
- distributing questionnaires to clients and doctors to seek feedback
- objectively evaluating your business plan against performance outcomes.

For more ideas or assistance, speak to other colleagues or an APD mentor.

FAQ: I want to conduct a research project in my business. Where can I go to get ethics approval?

One organisation that can help you obtain ethics approval is [Bellberry Limited](#), a national, private not-for-profit organisation providing ethical review of human research projects across Australia. Other options would be to partner with local universities or hospitals. You could also consider involving students from a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics course who have to complete a research project, as this would allow for ethics approval through their university.

Case study: Pivoting a business through continuous improvement

Angelique Clark: iPerformance Nutrition



I have always had a fascination with fuelling movement. The day I finished school I walked into my small-town gym with a Bill Phillips *Body for Life* transformation book in my hands and big aspirations to get strong. My thirst for muscle-building knowledge drove me towards how I could use food to transform the physical body, and this has underpinned my life's work.

As the daughter of immigrant parents, my French/Mauritian upbringing was culturally rich, with enormous respect for food, eating as a family and the Tour de France. Nutrition is an integral part of my life, and the values that have strengthened my career can be attributed to my love of movement and the application of all the lessons I have learned through sport.

I left small-town Cairns to study exercise science in the Brisbane big smoke and worked/lived in gyms. I loved exercise prescription and I started competing in natural figure sculpting where I discovered how food could literally transform the physical body. I spent a ridiculous amount of money on supplements and bodybuilding paraphernalia following nutrition advice from industry 'experts' that scientifically just didn't add up. And for the first time in my life, my relationship with food took a different turn. No longer was food enhancing performance; it was being removed to support physique changes at the compromise of health. An important lesson I learnt first-hand was that food, which I had always viewed as empowering, could also become a source of suffering. Frustrated with the lack of evidence governing these practices, I went back to university to complete a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics and immersed myself in every avenue to becoming a sports dietitian.

I would then spend a decade in private practice seeing a breadth of clients from weekend warriors right through to elites across a multitude of sports. It didn't matter to me as long as they were active, and I loved every second. During this time, I watched the fitness industry explode with unregulated, misleading nutrition advice, the rise of the 'all-in-one' trainer with minimal qualifications, and the bodybuilding industry develop at an enormous rate. Social media became a primary source of knowledge and the way to choose your coach for anyone wanting to compete. I could see the results

of this in my clinic, with broken athletes and disordered relationships with food. The industry was moving fast, and I was limited in private practice. I could only effect change in one person at a time. I was burning out, but the demand and the damage kept rising. In the quest to find a solution, iPerformance Nutrition was born as an online avenue for expert nutrition knowledge to be readily available at minimal cost – but it didn't work! All the benefit of seeing a sports dietitian (the human part of the equation) was removed and a downloadable meal plan became simply a piece of electronic paper with no reflection or support in execution or evaluation. It was far from what I wanted to achieve.

I needed to create a systemised way to deliver qualified nutrition advice that allowed for personalisation but was scalable worldwide. So, I gave up seeing *everyone* to focus on what I have always known best. I pulled together all my experience from owning gyms, to designing gym challenges, and learning from my competing days as well as my elite physique clients, to create the Love Living Lean Program. For a very long time I've had this vision of holding a space in the fitness industry diet culture where you don't need to suffer to succeed. I wanted to create a different path to body composition change that encompassed the entire lifestyle transformation with sustainable results, without compromising health or performance.

It's not a new concept to use technology in a membership-based format to increase scope and efficiency in dietetics, but when you have a passion so deep that it becomes your life's purpose, the only way to do it is to be your own boss. I suppose you could say I fell into business accidentally by creating something that just didn't exist in a market that was in desperate need of change. I envisage Love Living Lean becoming the largest, most reputable online nutrition platform exclusively for women. The way I see it, having the freedom to do nutrition in the fitness space *my way*, underpinned by evidence and a decade of connecting with people, is the biggest freedom I could ever wish for in this amazing journey I get to call my career, and I'm just getting started!

Chapter 16

self-assessment activity

1. What does quality improvement mean to you?
2. How and why does quality change over time?
3. What are some strategies you can use to measure quality in your small business?
4. What are some strategies you can use to maintain quality in your small business?
5. Who is responsible for maintaining or improving quality in your business?
6. Develop a quality improvement plan for your business.







Chapter 17: Continuing professional development and mentoring



“Learn from the mistakes of others. You can’t live long enough to make them all yourself.”



– Eleanor Roosevelt



Ways to keep your skills current

Continuing professional development

Working as a dietitian in small business can be very isolating compared to being a hospital-based dietitian, particularly if you're a sole practitioner. You need to find ways to keep up to date with changes in dietetic practice. These could include:

- finding an accountability buddy or group
- attending professional lectures, seminars and conferences
- reading dietetic journals
- finding mentors, either through the APD Program or through other work-related networks
- following nutrition academics and institutions on Twitter and LinkedIn
- referring to current evidence-based practice guidelines and [Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition \(PEN\)](#)
- attending Dietitians Australia Interest Group (IG) meetings and participating in IG online discussions
- updating product information regularly
- talking to medical and nutrition representatives to get updates on products
- regularly updating client literature and education material and having an independent dietitian review your work
- networking with other dietitians, health professionals and other professionals



As a private-sector dietitian, you should also do the following things:

- Join the Dietitians Australia Dietitians in the Private Sector Interest Group and Corporate Interest Group, and any other groups in which you have an interest. To join an IG, log in to the [member portal](#) of the Dietitians Australia website. Go to your profile (click on your name at the top of the page) and select 'Share Plate Communities', then select the IGs you wish to join.
- Liaise (if possible) with local hospital or university-based dietitians to get access to library facilities and continuing professional development (CPD) sessions.
- Interact with health professionals such as physiotherapists, speech pathologists, psychologists, exercise physiologists, personal trainers and social workers, as this can lead to new ideas for running a practice, as well as more referrals.
- Network with other professionals outside the health industry. It can be beneficial to expand your network and connections beyond health.
- Provide feedback on treatment and progress of clients to the referral source by letter, email or telephone call.

Your Dietitians Australia membership provides you with several CPD resources, available on the website:

- The online [Resource Library](#) (formerly known as DINER/PIP) is a searchable database that contains a variety of nutrition education resources
- [Nutrition Care Process and Terminology resources](#) developed in the US and implemented by the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics are available for free
- Free full copies of the [Nutrition & Dietetics journal](#) can be downloaded
- Free access to peer-reviewed literature is available through [ProQuest](#)
- [PEN \(Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition\)](#) is available through discounted subscription with most Dietitians Australia membership categories.

The Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) Program

The Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) Program is a credentialing program for dietitians managed by Dietitians Australia. APD is the only credential for dietitians recognised by the Australian government (for Medicare and DVA rebate purposes), many state governments and most private health insurers. The APD program is a way for consumers and other stakeholders to recognise professionals with the qualifications and skills to provide expert nutritional and dietary advice. APDs demonstrate their commitment to ongoing education and are committed to the Dietitians Australia Code of Conduct.

You are encouraged to plan your yearly CPD program using the CPD cycle. This begins with setting learning goals at the start of each year and determining learning outcomes at the end of each year. Your learning goals, CPD activities and learning outcomes should be recorded in the online CPD log on the Dietitians Australia [member portal](#). A commitment to CPD is mandatory for all APDs, regardless of employment status. More information about the APD Program and CPD requirements can be found in the [APD Program Handbook](#).



Mentoring

Mentoring is a mutual and reciprocal relationship where both parties use reflective practice and experiential learning to develop new skills, knowledge and attitudes. Mentoring is characterised by the equal nature of the relationship, in contrast to traditional student and apprentice relationships. You develop your problem-solving techniques and reflective thinking through discussions with your mentor, where you both share experiences and knowledge.

Mentoring is a compulsory part of the APD program for dietitians with Provisional APD status. However, the benefits available from mentoring are not confined to first-time entrants or re-entrants to professional practice. Mentoring relationships enhance the reflective practice skills of mentors and mentees, and all APDs are encouraged to engage in mentoring throughout their career to enhance their professional development.

Even if you've been practising dietetics for some time, if you're new to private practice it can be a good idea to find a mentor who can help you with professional development in this area.

You can find further details on mentoring and the Dietitians Australia [mentoring program](#) on the Dietitians Australia website. You can also search for an APD mentor using [Mentor Match on Share Plate](#).

Finding mentors in other areas is also beneficial. A mentor can be specific to a field (for example, media, finance or communication) or a person who has broad or general experience as a business owner. It can be helpful to speak to other business owners in different businesses for support, friendship and ideas outside the health industry.



Case study: Niche businesses and professional development

Fiona Willer: Health Not Diets



The worst full-time job I ever had as an adult was as a paging operator for a telecommunications company. For 8 hours at a time the calls would come in continuously. I would answer each one with the script provided and then type the message to be sent to the recipient as a text message. Yes, I was the prehistoric version of the 'voice to text' app! It was repetitive, thankless work, and although I didn't hate the job (our office was spacious and clean, the bosses were okay and, boy, were my typing skills amazing), I felt like the boredom and lack of autonomy was poisoning me. So when I finished studying dietetics a good many years later, I knew in my bones that having one dietetics job, unless it was a super-diverse job with lots of autonomy and projects, wasn't going to suit my needs well. So, in typical style, by the time I'd been an APD for a year, I'd started tutoring at university, working full-time as a clinical dietitian at a hospital, and had bought a small dietetics private practice. I wouldn't have been able to buy that practice without a loan from Grandma but going into business for myself is one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Fast forward 10 years, and my business is still my loyal companion while my life has morphed tremendously alongside it. The hospital job fell by the wayside after a few years when my first baby came along, and I eventually sold the bricks-and-mortar part of my private practice after 6 years – all of the consulting I do now is virtual (thank you internet). I'm now putting the final touches on my PhD that was 7 years in the making and I'm still closely involved (and planning on staying involved) with academia.

My business these days supports the delivery of my professional development presentations, workshops and online courses, sales and distribution of my books and, since early last year, my subscription-based professional development podcast for health professionals. On paper it looks like a bunch of side gigs, but my low tolerance for boredom would have it no other way! Having my own business has allowed me the flexibility of being able to hang out with my three kids while they're little, do the PhD and work around university teaching commitments – my business works around my needs rather than the other way around.

I love dietetics and dietitians – we're so clever and so driven – but we can be pretty risk averse. And going into business *is* risky, there's no sugar-coating it. It can take an excruciatingly long time to feel confident that all the parts are working properly. Doing all the 'right' things is no guarantee of success. It's often lonely. There's often eye-watering amounts of admin involved. But it's creative, exciting and energising too.

My advice:

- Continue to work part-time for someone else while you're getting things going.
- Never invest more than you're able to lose.
- As soon as you can afford it, pay someone else to take over those admin tasks that you hate and that keep you from 'doing the good bits'.
- Seek feedback from your customers, and act on it.
- Consider negative feedback as a gift.
- Keep your eye on your competitors and try to make them allies instead. Get a good accountant (ask others for their recommendation – take it from someone who has paid for and been burned by bad advice!)
- Use business guides (like this manual but also from the ATO, Medicare and other sources) to learn your responsibilities as a business owner who is also a health professional, especially if you're employing others.
- And finally, if you end up feeling like I did as a paging operator, get out. One of the amazing perks of being a dietitian is that there are so many potential work avenues for us, and if we're brave our careers tend to take us to places we couldn't have predicted on the day we graduated, whether we're in business or not.

Good luck!

Chapter 17

self-assessment activity

1. Review CPD guidelines on the Dietitians Australia member portal before setting your goals.
2. What areas do you need to enhance your knowledge, skills or experience in to reach your goals?
 - a. What nutrition domain or clinical areas do you need to enhance your skills or knowledge in to be successful in your business?
 - b. What business areas do you need to enhance your knowledge and skills in to be successful in your business?
3. What local business support groups or online groups provide appropriate professional development that can help you be successful in your business?
4. Develop a professional development plan for the next 12 months to help you achieve your goals.







Chapter 18: B2B consultancy businesses



“To build a long-term, successful enterprise, when you don’t close a sale, open a relationship.”



– Patricia Fripp



Business-to-business consultancy

While most dietitians working in small business are in a traditional private practice providing dietary advice to individual clients, there are many other options for a private dietetic business. This and the following chapters introduce some emerging business types in nutrition.

As an Accredited Practising Dietitian, you can provide consultancy services to businesses, organisations and government departments if you have valuable skills that the business is looking for. We call this business-to-business, or B2B. The business pays for your services rather than the end-user (or 'consumer' in B2C or business-to-consumer).

There is a well-established precedent of dietitians providing services to businesses. Common consultancy agreements occur between APDs and residential aged care facilities, food companies, education institutions, marketing and PR agencies, and community groups.

There is no set rule about how you charge a business for consultancy services. Ultimately, you're looking for a win-win solution where your client is happy with your service (or the product or outcomes produced) and the price they pay, and you're happy with the fee.

When negotiating a fee consider:

- overheads – travel costs, tax, superannuation, GST etc.
- opportunity cost – e.g. charge a day rate if you need to have a day from other work or clients you are unable to work with if you take on this work
- promotion
- image and license fee – for benefits over and above services provided through PR, media or meeting regulatory requirements.

You could charge fees as:

- an hourly rate
- a contract fee based on a set number of hours, or a short-term contract
- a project fee (inclusive fee regardless of time taken)
- a retainer to provide services on an ongoing basis.

Additional charges may be made for expenses such as travel, incidentals, additional services from other freelancers and overheads. Be sure to keep all receipts as proof of your spending, and ensure you discuss expectations with the client prior to claiming for reimbursements.

If you choose to offer a discount or provide consultancy services pro-bono, in addition to the benefit of building your experience, you can discuss and negotiate contra benefits such as advertising, product, tickets, mentoring or other exchange of services. When providing an invoice, list the full fee, and apply a discount. Most accounting software allows you to do this on an invoice. By doing this, you can quantify the discounts provided and whether you received benefits to outweigh them. Additionally, clients then see the full fee if they refer or would like to continue to receive your services. The tax implications of this kind of arrangement are described on the [ATO website](#). Seek the advice of an accountant to ensure you meet your tax obligations.

Below is some introductory information about common businesses that may purchase your consultancy services.

Aged care facilities



Australia's ageing population, an increasing number of aged care facilities, and recognition of the issues of malnutrition in this population, mean dietitians can play an important role in the aged care industry. Residential aged care facilities must ensure the nutritional needs of their residents are being met, and having a dietitian involved can help them to meet their accreditation requirements in this area. Once the Royal Commission into Aged Care releases its final report, this may provide additional opportunities for dietitians. Dietitians can work with aged care facilities in the following areas:

- menu review and assessments
- menu development
- dietetic services to residents
- staff education, workshops and in-services
- process and system advice regarding improving clinical and foodservice nutrition
- wellbeing initiatives
- quality improvement initiatives
- assisting with meeting accreditation requirements in nutrition and hydration.

When working with an aged care facility, it's a good idea to negotiate regular hours and an agreement based on projects and/or regular services. Better clinical outcomes are associated with regular facility-wide assessments, reviews and the ability to speak with all stakeholders to maximise care to residents.

Childcare centres and schools

Our increasing awareness of the importance of nutrition and a healthy lifestyle for children and teenagers provides opportunities for dietitians with an interest in working with these groups. Possibilities include:

- developing childcare centre or school nutrition policies, including dealing with allergies and other special diets
- menu planning and assessment for childcare centres and boarding schools
- developing school canteen policies

- speaking to students about nutrition and body image issues, and providing advice to teachers on these topics
- guest lecturing and preparing teachers' notes for education on nutrition topics
- giving talks to parents and staff regarding good nutrition for children
- providing sports nutrition advice for school teams
- providing education, workshops and resources for parents, family and teachers.



When approaching schools and childcare centres, it can be helpful to have an internal advocate. This may be a parent on the P&C committee, a passionate teacher or even an influential student. Depending on the size of the school, purchasing decisions may be made by the principal, vice principal, head of department, foodservice manager, business manager, sporting coach and/or the P&C committee. Often school administration staff and the principal's executive assistant act as gatekeepers to the principal. Many principals still review paper copies of material, so dropping printed proposals or information may be more beneficial than email.

Private hospitals

Unlike public hospitals and large private hospitals, many small private hospitals don't have a dietitian on staff, and instead contract a private dietitian to provide nutrition services. This is largely providing individual consultations to patients, but could also include some staff education, procedure development and menu planning and assessment.

Doctor relationships are often the key to getting work in private hospitals. For many hospitals, doctors such as surgeons are the source of much of their income – they pay operating theatre and staff costs and their patients (or health funds) pay for the hospital stay. If you have a good relationship with a doctor providing services to the private hospital, they could recommend your services. Some small private hospitals allow multiple private dietitians to visit patients (usually subject to application), and leave the doctors and nurse unit managers to choose which provider they refer to.

Corporate health

Employers are increasingly recognising the value in keeping their workers healthy, as those who are fit and healthy are more productive and take less sick leave. They also like to provide employee benefits to improve their culture and image. Large companies sometimes provide food for employees, such as full meals or snacks. Corporate health creates an opportunity for dietitians to provide a variety of nutrition services in the workplace, including:

- individual nutrition consultations
- body composition analysis
- health checks
- health fairs
- group education
- talks and seminars
- cooking demonstrations
- menu development for canteens or cafeterias.
- behavioural nutrition consultancy.

There are several decision-makers when it comes to buying corporate health services. A common purchaser of corporate health services is the company's human resource department, and some organisations also have a health and safety department.

Fitness centres

Fitness centres, gyms and studios provide services that complement dietetic services. You could offer a variety of services to your local fitness centres, including:

- nutrition talks and seminars for members
- group education sessions for members
- individual consultations for members
- staff education
- providing nutrition content for newsletters
- providing advice regarding foods served at in-house cafeterias or coffee shops.



Working with a fitness centre or personal trainer can promote additional referrals and help them better understand the dietitian's role.

Disability group homes

People with disabilities are at increased nutritional risk and dietitians can play an important role in improving their health and wellbeing. Many individuals with a disability live in group homes with other clients, with carers who come in to help with their daily living activities, including meal planning, shopping and cooking. Services you could offer include:

- nutritional assessment and care for individual clients
- staff education
- assistance with menu planning and development
- advice on coordinating the varying nutritional needs of different clients.

Sporting groups



For those with an interest and expertise in sports nutrition, providing nutrition services to local sporting groups and teams is another possible area of work. Working with sports can be a rewarding experience but working with a national sporting team lead to long hours and poor pay. If you choose to work for an athlete or sporting team for experience, you need to take into account the additional benefits you get over and above experience and the ability to put the role on your CV. If the team has no budget for dietetic services, you may be able to negotiate other benefits such as products, tickets (for you or your clients/referrers), uniforms and other swag, players to come to open days at your practice or help with a presentation, contacts to other coaches and teams and/or space to work from for other paid work. Services you can provide sporting teams include:

- consultations for individual team members
- body composition analysis
- nutrition talks and seminars for teams, coaches and parents
- policy and procedure development
- cooking classes and shopping tours.

[Sports Dietitians Australia](#) sends CPD emails that frequently include business resources and job opportunities.

Case study: Nutrition consulting businesses

Nicole Senior: Professional Nutrition Services; Bug Me Entomophagy Nutrition Consulting Services



My business is a one-woman show providing nutrition consulting services to the food and communications industries (large, medium and small), plus government and non-government organisations. Services include nutrition marketing and communications and education, as well as product and recipe development. The overall mission is to help Australians enjoy a healthier diet through improving the food supply and educating and inspiring the community to choose and prepare delicious and nutritious foods and meals. I love my work.

My overall purpose, however, is advancing environmental awareness and sustainable food and lifestyles, and I contribute significant time and energy to this cause. While most of this has been on a voluntary basis for the Dietitians Australia Food & Environment Group, social media advocacy and in my local community, my goal has been to secure paid project work in this area. In 2019, I finally achieved my first sustainability client. I became project manager for a project funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) to educate health professionals about sustainable seafood. I manage a small team of dietitians to develop an online resource to help health professionals feel more confident in recommending sustainable seafood.

I've also started another small business (a 'side hustle' in contemporary lingo) to help advance entomophagy (insects as food), called Bug Me Entomophagy Nutrition Consulting Services. The emergence and growth of insects as human food in Australia is an opportunity to help new enterprises with the challenges of nutrition marketing. Along with my business partner Jane Marriott APD, I'm keen to assist them with successful product launches that are accurate, responsible and compliant with regulatory requirements while also compelling. Normalising insects as food and making them delicious can contribute to food sustainability, good nutrition and the growth of new food businesses in Australia.

I firmly believe that food and environment issues are every dietitian's business. We all need to think how we can incorporate sustainability principles into our daily practice and recommendations in all settings. The great thing is that many of the same principles of sustainable eating also apply

to healthy eating: it's a win-win. There is a growing role for dietitians as educators, researchers, practitioners, influencers and advocates for sustainable food. While there may not be a job currently called 'sustainability dietitian', I don't think we have too long to wait. But why wait? We can start to create our own opportunities.

What principles have guided me on my path?

- I've always given generously of my time and expertise. I do this in a strategic way to help me manage my time, and this has ultimately paid off because it has grown my knowledge and experience, and it has also established valuable networks. It's these networks that resulted in the FRDC project.
- I take what I call a 'portfolio approach' to my client list. In the same way you balance an investment portfolio with different levels of risk and return, I aim to work for a variety of clients both big and small, as well as undertake volunteer work to make a living but also contribute to larger causes.
- I get help when I need it. I'm a sole trader so I've brought in other APDs to help on projects when necessary (again, good networks help). An opportunity shared is an opportunity doubled.
- I play to my strengths: leadership, creativity, communication and relationship building. I use social media, but I know I'm not great with images so I stick with words!

My business doesn't generate big profits, but it gives me meaningful, rewarding and enjoyable work. The flexibility of running my own business allows me to contribute to my family and the community and achieve work-life balance. I don't consider myself especially entrepreneurial, but my business is an example of how dietitians can create their own opportunities, harness their passions and work their own way.

Chapter 18

self-assessment activity

1. This chapter outlines various areas that dietitians can work in. Consider each of these areas and where you feel you may be suited to.
2. What are some of the benefits you can provide to businesses to help them increase their revenue and look after their customers or employees? How can you promote this to the businesses?
3. Who are your competitors in your market?
4. What groups can you network with that include buyers of your services?







Chapter 19: Nutrition communication businesses



“Your job is not to write copy. Your job is to know your visitors, customers and prospects so well, you understand the situation they’re in right now, where they’d like to be, and exactly how your solution can and will get them to their ideal self.”



– Joanna Wiebe



Types of nutrition communications

Nutrition communications have been part of dietitians' work for many years. Nutrition communications include writing, professional speaking and media work.

Nutrition communications can provide indirect income through marketing your business and providing added value for your customers. Developing content is a way to showcase your nutrition communication skills and promote your message and expertise.

Writing for print media

Writing articles for print media, online platforms or blogs can be a source of income and a way of promoting your business. But writing for mass media is different to writing for university assignments or professional development. A big mistake new nutrition writers make is focusing on education and information rather than entertainment and inspiration. If you're considering a career in writing, reading a range of different types of articles and books can give you language patterns, vocabulary and engagement techniques to hook your reader. Write at every opportunity and take the time to review and re-write. Courses in creative writing, communication and journalism or public relations may help. An easy way to improve your writing is to read your writing out loud. (Or there are programs that do this for you like Microsoft Word's inbuilt text-to-speech tool.) When you read your own writing in your head, you fill in the gaps. When you read aloud, you hear it as your reader will read it.

The better you become at writing, the more writing opportunities will come your way. In the beginning, you'll probably need to volunteer, blog or put social media content out with the aim of improving your writing. In today's media landscape, nutrition writers with celebrity or a large following are often preferred so they can promote the publication to their audience.

If you are writing articles for magazines, newspapers or digital media it is a good idea to obtain a letter of intent between the author and the publisher stating the exact terms of the agreement. Always ask to see the final edited article before this goes to print,

to ensure what you have written or quoted has been kept in context. Things to consider include the format and type of publication, deadlines, length of the article, layout requirements and the intended audience. Note that you won't always have complete editorial control and you often won't see the final layout before it is published. You need to consider whether you are comfortable giving up some control. Always keep a copy of any material to be published and determine who is responsible for any illustrations or photographs, and for ensuring that copyright has not been breached.

If you're creative and skilled at developing recipes and taking good photographs, you can promote these additional services to accompany your written work.

If you want to promote your business (no pay), you can write a media release about a topic you are passionate about and distribute to relevant media. This can promote you as an expert to be interviewed or provide an opportunity for comment through a column or article. The more you work with the media, the better relationships you'll make with journalists and over time you'll be able to call them when you have ideas, issues to advocate or events to promote. You should consider doing some media training before you put yourself out there. Journalists are more likely to come back to you if you interview well.

When you're starting out, start local. You're more likely to be invited as an expert with your local paper or radio station than you are with a major outlet. It's a good way to build experience and start developing a profile. Also, if you have university connections, university media offices often keep a database of academics who are happy to be interviewed on certain topics. This can be a valuable resource.

You can also ask to be placed on Dietitians Australia's database of 'APDs interested in speaking with the media' or database of 'APDs able to speak with journalism students'. More details can be found under '[Working with the media](#)' on Dietitians Australia's member portal.

Nutrition influencer (social media profile business)

Having a large or highly engaged following on a social media platform can form the foundation of a successful business. A large organic reach (getting your posts to a wide audience without paid advertising) can take time to build unless a specific event increases your popularity. Many people with large followings online do not make money out of this; however, some do. If you want to become an influencer you need to:

- create appealing content that works with the social media platform you're using. Most platforms need visually appealing content
- be authentic
- be 'on brand' and align with the values you promote
- be active on the platform
- focus on your target audience and customer
- post on dynamic components (e.g. Instagram Stories) frequently.

Influencers can receive free products or be paid to promote specific products. Influencers may also be able to leverage off their social media profile to promote their services or sell their products. If you're given a product, or paid to promote it, you need to identify the promotion and your relationship with the company in your post. If you promote a product without a relationship, and are rewarded later, you should edit the post to identify it as a collaboration.

If you have a following and aren't sure how to monetise it, an initial step can be to register with influencer agencies such as [theright.fit](#), [Tribe](#) or [Hypetap](#). (These agencies charge for some services.) From here, you'll see the types of posts that companies are after, and you can then contact the companies that you believe align with your brand and that your audience will be interested in.

Dietitians Australia has [communications guidelines](#) and [ethical principles of social media](#) resources available on the website. The communications guidelines are targeted for media interviews but are also appropriate to social media. The Australian Health Practitioners Regulatory Agency (AHPRA) has [advertising guidelines](#) for health services (including social media) that can provide additional guidance. For further advice on social media use for your business, refer to the individual social media platforms for more information.

Authorship

Writing a book is a rewarding experience. Despite the incredible rise of digital media, both ebooks and paper books remain popular.

There are many people who want to write a book 'one day', and then years pass without them achieving it. With freelance designers and editors and cost-effective printing, there's no reason why a self-published book can't become a reality for most.

Getting a book published through a publisher is a little harder. Publishing as an industry has been disrupted over recent years. The Executive Publisher at Wiley, Matt Holt, suggests considering the following points if you'd like to have your book published.

1. "To be published, you need to be able to write. Sounds simple, but it's often overlooked by experts. Although we have editors, we look for those with expertise to share combined with a level of creativity and/or writing flair.
2. Build a platform. This may include social media following or engagement, speaking opportunities, teaching opportunities, or influential positions. Most non-fiction books in the beginning sell to those within the author's network.



3. Develop a commitment and/or marketing plan for your book. What will you do to promote the book (book tour, pay PR agency, paid social ads, speaking) with your existing networks? How many copies of the book will you buy yourself? Will you develop additional online resources and/or promotional material/videos?
4. Focus on writing a book proposal (not the full book). Publishers usually have some input into the final product. A book proposal varies in format; however, proposals usually include:
 - a. Title and short summary
 - b. Synopsis and premise
 - c. Author bio (short for promotional and extended for credibility)
 - d. Author platform
 - e. Proposed chapters (with short summary)
 - f. Proposed book details (e.g. number of photos, book size etc.)
 - g. Competitor books
 - h. Marketing plan
 - i. One to three example chapters
5. This links with the first tip, but my best advice for academic writers who aspire to become authors is to read more fiction, and short, interesting stories. This will help you develop emotion in your writing.”

If you're yet to build a profile, you can still write a book. Options include self-publishing, engaging a ghost-writer or co-authoring a book with a dietitian (or other person) with a profile, or starting your book and building your profile simultaneously.

“Don't write a book to make money. A book is merely a business card that people don't throw away.”

– Andrew Griffiths



Media resources for Dietitians Australia members

Dietitians Australia encourages members to work with the media to communicate accurate and practical nutrition information to Australians, and to raise the profile of APDs as the 'go to' nutrition experts. Dietitians Australia has a range of resources available to members who are working with or are interested in working with the media. Access these resources under '[Working with the media](#)' on the Dietitians Australia website.

Professional considerations when working with the media

Before working with the media, you should be fully conversant with Dietitians Australia's [Code of Conduct](#) and the laws covering breach of copyright. All statements published must be able to be substantiated in a court of law.

- For information on privacy, defamation and freedom of the press refer to the [Australian Press Council](#). They also have [Statements of Principles](#), including a Statement of General Principles and a Statement of Privacy Principles.
- The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) has useful information for freelance journalists, including the [MEAA Code of Ethics](#).
- The [Advertising Standards Bureau](#) can also provide information on the Australian Association of National Advertisers [Code of Ethics](#).
- The [Australian Communications and Media Authority](#) provides information on electronic media.



Professional speaking

Dietitians are often asked to give presentations, workshops or talks. This gives us unique opportunities to practice our speaking skills. When it comes to presenting, there are professional dietitians who speak, and professional speakers who are experts in nutrition. The difference is not always well understood; however, the first is based on expertise and information-sharing, while the latter focusses on combining this with presentation style, engagement and entertainment.

As a dietitian, you can be paid as a per hour or per presentation. As a professional speaker, you'll be paid either directly or through a speakers' bureau, and you are usually paid per presentation, or a half-day or full-day fee. If you're interested in building professional speaking as an income stream, it can be helpful to attend events and network with the professional speaking community with [Professional Speakers Australia \(PSA\)](#). If you're already making income from speaking, you might meet the requirements to join as a professional member or certified speaking professional (CSP) and access their member benefits to build your speaking business.

Nutrition education or services

Providing nutrition education or freelance services can allow you to teach individuals or groups. If you have a level of expertise, schools, universities and training organisations may have opportunities for guest, sessional or contract teaching in their accredited programs. For accredited program teaching, you'll usually need to submit verification of your qualifications along with your CV. Sometimes the budget is controlled by the manager in the department, or at company level; however, in other organisations, individual subject coordinators or lecturers may control their own budgets and be able to offer you work. You need to have a strong understanding of the program requirements for meeting accreditation and covering learning objectives.

Some dietitians offer nutrition education to schools. These programs can vary from direct teaching, edutainment, or developing teaching materials to providing workshops. Nutrition education in schools can be for students, teachers, school staff or parents. Contracts with schools can vary from one-off presentations or projects to ongoing contracts. Sometimes there are also contractor or employee roles at the school. Funding for your services may come from the school budget, local community grants (that your business or the school can apply for), combining resources with another school or from the P&C.

Once you've developed your expertise, you can enhance continuing education opportunities for your peers and build the profession by providing nutrition education to your peers in your area of interest, or by linking with other experts. Event promotion is now as simple as putting up a Facebook post if you have a following, and promoting it through ticketing platforms such as Eventbrite or Trybooking, or through a direct link on your website. If your audience in your location is small, you could use online courses, webinars or groups to share your expertise and create an additional income stream.



Case study: Nutrition communications

Kara Landau: Uplift Food



I've always been passionate and dedicated to making a positive impact on people's lives through good nutrition. When I graduated from university, I was driven and motivated. I knew that I could combine my new qualifications with my personality, strengths and love of travel to take advantage of the opportunities in the world.

My most recent product, Uplift Food, is what I'm most proud of. There are lots of 'rules' that people told me about how to be successful – like 'you can't get funding as a solo founder'; 'you can't have a successful dietitian career in the US without becoming a registered dietitian'; 'you can't sell your products to big companies'. I'm happy to say that with hard work, dedication and belief I've become the exception to many of these rules.

When I founded the Travelling Dietitian in 2008, I never knew that I'd soon be living in the US, with an award-winning product and living my passion for gut-brain health. In the beginning, I refined my business skills by working as a community brand manager and media spokesperson and delivering corporate health services for one of Australia's biggest health insurers. I knew that I wanted to become a successful entrepreneur, and I had big ideas. So, in 2012 I travelled to New York City on an exchange as part of my Masters of Entrepreneurship and Innovation while I continued to research the impact of food, nutrients and nutraceuticals on wellbeing and mood.

In 2013, I wrote a book, *The Clean Separation*, to help people use good nutrition, including prebiotics and other psychobiotics, to improve their mood and bring their best selves to the table. This book served as a springboard to becoming a spokesperson for aligned brands, a media dietitian and a professional speaker. It was at this time I realised there was a gap in the food product market that I was trying to piece together for clients and followers of my media presence with my recipe creations. This is where the idea for Uplift Food was born. I'd been self-employed in nutrition communications, but I started to realise that my nutrition communication work was being impacted by not having products in the market that I could offer people.

For years I'd been promoting the benefits of certain nutrients, like prebiotics, to support gut, mental and overall health, but I'd found a gaping hole in the market for food products that combined these specialty nutrients.

Because I'd worked for several food product companies, I decided it was time to take a leap of faith and create a new category of product that was missing globally.

My years of research and advocacy for the science behind the gut-brain connection, as well as my position as a nutrition adviser for the Global Prebiotic Association gave me my new product, Uplift Food, credibility when I brought it to the Australian and US markets in 2018.

Now the CEO and founder of an international company, I'm fulfilling my mission to support individuals across the world to gain the health benefits of prebiotics.

My big break came when I applied for an accelerator program in the US when I thought I'd be working on driving sales in Australia. Despite being told I couldn't get in as a solo founder, I did, so I went back to the US and learned about the market there. In March 2019, I presented to Mondelez Snackfutures fund to bring my proprietary blend of ingredients to snack products, and the Uplift cookies were brought to market. It's early days, but I'm excited about the business and the benefit it can provide to the health-conscious consumer.

Business hasn't always been easy. There are many times where I thought that my vision wouldn't come to life. Some people presume that everything is happening quickly for Uplift, but to me it is the culmination of my whole career's work.

I think my main piece of advice to dietitians wanting to start their own venture is to know your consumer and what they're willing to pay for. If you want your business to be successful, know your expertise and your value as a dietitian and where your strengths and passion meet. Finally, align yourself with people and companies that can help you bring your vision to life.

Chapter 19

self-assessment activity

1. What are the different types of nutrition communication that can be used to bring income to your business?
2. What is the difference between direct income and indirect income from nutrition communications?
3. Who are some dietitians in nutrition communication businesses that you admire?
 - a. What type of nutrition communications do they work in?
 - b. Who are the customers that are paying for their nutrition communications work?
4. What is the benefit of nutrition communications businesses over and above income?
5. If you have a goal of making a business from nutrition communications, such as being an author or professional speaker, what are the stepping-stones towards reaching this goal?







Chapter 20: Nutrition product businesses



“Dream big! There are no limitations to how good you can become or how high you can rise except the limits you put on yourself.”



– Brian Tracy



Types of nutrition products

There are different types of products that may help people apply nutrition advice and make dietetic services more effective. Nutrition products can be aimed at consumers, organisations or other health professionals.

Food product businesses

These are businesses that develop a food product or meal product, or do food preparation for individuals, groups or organisations. To develop a food product, you need a good understanding of food preparation regulations, food regulations and distribution options. You can start a food product business yourself or provide food product nutrition consultancy services to a food product business. Dietitians are common in corporate food companies and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) as in-house employees or long-term contractors. However, smaller food companies probably won't have in-house dietitians, and working freelance for them may be a rewarding consultancy opportunity.

Nutrition assessment and education products

These can be developed for people with a range of conditions, and for different ages and cultures. Many nutrition products have been designed by dietitians who wanted resources or models to enhance their services but couldn't find something suitable. Successful businesses from overseas or different clinical or cultural groups have been adapted for different markets or for new clinical or cultural groups. Nutrition education products can include kitchenware, food models, models for conditions, games, flash cards, nutrition assessment devices and activities. Nutrition education products can also be developed for peers as training or continuing professional development.

Manuals and resources

These can allow you to share your knowledge and experience with others and reduce their time spent developing their own. If you have specialist expertise in a field, you may be able to sell resources or manuals to other dietitians. If you have products, programs or systems that work in a certain area, such as schools or aged care facilities, you may be able to on-sell the resources or manuals to other similar companies. If you're paid to develop the material as a freelancer, ensure that your contracts identify that copyright sits with you or your company and you can sell the products again.



Case study: Creating a nutrition product

Kate Save: Be Fit Food



I'm pretty lucky to have grown up in a household that appreciated a nutritious diet based on real, home-cooked food. From when I was young, my mother always insisted we eat at least three pieces of fruit per day and loads of vegetables, never allowing us to have any treat foods unless we were at a party. Fortunately for my younger sister and I, mum worked 6 days per week in her pre-loved clothing shop so Dad would take us out on Saturday mornings to do the weekly food shop and always let us stop for a treat either at Wendy's, Doughnut King or even occasionally Red Rooster or McDonalds. Dad did most of the cooking at home, except for our Tuesday night roasts where the whole neighbourhood was invited to share in the endless trays of roasted vegetables and meat. My dad is half-Chinese and half-Norwegian, so we ate Asian-style meals with rice at least 4 or 5 nights per week. On Saturdays, Dad would cook up a feast with a theme such as Indian, Italian, Thai, or Middle Eastern where we'd enjoy 3 to 5 extravagant courses.

I was destined to fall into the nutritional industry, as from the age of 18 months old, I was regularly admitted to hospital with severe stomach pains that lasted for days, if not weeks. Until I was 8, my grandfather used to take me for regular medical testing, but nothing was ever diagnosed, and my family just accepted the term 'abdominal migraine growing syndrome', which the doctors used to describe this phenomenon. The only way I could somewhat manage my symptoms was through a healthy diet.

A decade later, just as I got my license, the stomach pains seemed to return more frequently and would often leave me crippled in pain on the side of the road, so I knew I needed to continue the search to find an official diagnosis. Within days of my 20th birthday, I was diagnosed with what the doctors thought was a tumour, and I underwent emergency surgery. It turned out that I had a choledochal cyst and gall bladder disease. Over this period, I continued my study at university to become a dietitian, exercise physiologist and diabetes educator. I paid my way through by working as a personal trainer, alongside my 6 other casual jobs to pay off the investment properties I'd purchased with my younger sister.

I stayed in my first full-time position for around 2 years, teaching nutrition and exercise science to emerging personal trainers. I decided I wanted to have my own gym and dietitian practice and really take control on spreading the importance of a healthy diet and lifestyle. Four years later my business, Peninsula Physical Health and Nutrition, had over 20 staff. Around the same time, I gave birth to my first daughter, Chloe. After 6 months of sleepless nights and relentless staff-related issues at work, I decided to sell the gym to Australia's leading exercise physiologist company and just keep the dietitian consultancy, which now has contracts in over 10 medical centres and three private hospitals. One of these contracts was with a well-known bariatric surgeon, Geoffrey Draper, in his extremely busy Melbourne surgery.

We got along so well over the next few years that one day we decided to act on our idea of creating a "real food-based Very-Low-Calorie-Diet (VLCD)" to give his pre- and post-surgery bariatric patients an option to keep well-nourished while losing weight rapidly. The business was named Bariatric Essentials and expanded beyond just our bariatric patients. It became popular not only with people with diabetes and other metabolic conditions, but also among the general public for general weight loss.

For almost 2 years, Geoff and I poured tens of thousands of dollars into this new business with no sign of returns. That was when I suggested we apply for the Shark Tank TV show and change our business name to Be Fit Food. The first time around, Geoff thought that this was too risky for our professional reputations, so we withdrew after the first interview. However, we reapplied the following year as our funds had dried up and no amount of effort seemed to be turning things around. It was decided I would present to the Sharks and that Geoff would just provide moral support from backstage. After being grilled by all five Sharks for over 2 hours without any sign of a break, I went backstage to get Geoff so that we could close a deal. Both Janine Allis and Steve Baxter made us offers, but I went on the show hoping to secure investment from Janine for the mentoring she could provide as well as the investment, so we accepted her offer.

I was extremely naïve at this point, as I thought I would collect a cheque either on the way out or it would be sent in the mail. However, I later learned that only around 3 of the 100 businesses who pitched on Shark Tank actually got through the gruelling due diligence process, which lasted for almost 12 months. The show was filmed in November 2016 but didn't air until August 2017, so it was a long time to keep a secret and wait to see if we'd secured the investment. Then suddenly it happened, and it happened fast.

After Shark Tank aired, overnight we went from having orders for around 300 to 1500 meals per week to over 30,000 meals per week, and my team grew from 5 staff to 63 staff. This was the most challenging time I've ever experienced, especially as I'd had surgery for a melanoma only 2 weeks earlier. For the next 6 months, every day was turmoil as we broke every system we previously had in place and had to rebuild them all, including a new website, food production facility, expanded pick-and-pack operation, storage and distribution. We went from being available only in Victoria to offering home delivery Australia-wide within 12 months. Behind our busy retail store, we slowly built additional rooms in the warehouse for our head office, positioned next to our 40-foot freezer. The rest is history now as I work tirelessly to build up Be Fit Food to become a recognised name for rapid weight loss and health behaviour change through a portion controlled, low-carb eating approach.

Chapter 20

self-assessment activity

1. What are the nutrition products you're aware of?
2. What ideas do you have to develop nutrition products that could make your clients' or customers' lives easier?
3. Who are the customers that may pay for products you could develop?
 - a. How much would they pay?
 - b. How do you reach the customers?
 - c. What are they currently using instead of your product?
4. How will you bring your product to market?
 - a. What are the costs required to develop the product?
 - b. Where can you manufacture your product?
 - c. What type of packaging is needed?
 - d. Can you post your product, and what is the cost for shipping?
 - e. How do you protect your product from being copied and distributed?







Chapter 21: Nutrition tech start-ups and digital businesses



“The ‘recipe’ for digital medicine is trust, reliability, and quality, which brings about the promises of digital medicine (access, convenience, efficacy, personalisation, reduced stigmatisation, and evidence).”



- Greg Licholai



Introduction to digital businesses

Digital businesses have increased in popularity due to advances in technology, especially the smartphones. Technology makes businesses scalable and able to cater to specific niches, so entrepreneurs can have a global focus. All businesses need to have some digital presence, even if they are not technology businesses. For this reason, most nutrition businesses will be technology-enabled. Technological advances in recent years include being able to book appointments online, market your business yourself through social media, publish your own articles, and sell your products and services online to overseas customers while you sleep.

Technology start-ups are a different business model to a small business, in that they are built with scalability in mind, and with a focus that is not location-dependent. The rewards for successful technology start-ups can be very high, but the failure rates are above 90% (compared with 60% of traditional small businesses), which make them highly risky.

Start-ups relevant to nutrition and dietetics include:

- Digital health apps
- Digital software to improve efficiency
- Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered nutrition assessment
- Health-tech hardware, including wearables
- Robotic-driven nutrition assistance

If you're interested in technology, innovation and start-ups, there are options for you to increase your knowledge and potentially find co-founders to assist you in building your dream. In most parts of Australia, there are start-up ecosystem hubs, which generally offer co-working space, networking events, courses, and mentoring. If you're an emerging dietitian, many universities have innovation and entrepreneurship programs. If you're an alumnus, you may be eligible to join the university's incubator program to support you to grow your idea and test its feasibility. The local start-up hub may also offer programs that help with activating your business idea through networking events, start-up weekends and pre-accelerator programs.

Startup Weekend and similar events are a good introduction to the start-up world. You can locate an event near you through the [Techstars Startup Weekend](#) website. When you subscribe to your local innovation hub's events on Facebook and Eventbrite, you'll be able to keep up with development in your local area.

Case study: Building a tech start-up business

Alicia Edge: Compeat Performance



Sport is a big part of my life, and I was fortunate enough to work in my dream career as a sports dietitian at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). It was through sport that I met my husband, Dan. As we started our family, I made the difficult decision to move back to Forster to be closer to family and take advantage of the amazing people and lifestyle that go with living in a regional, coastal town.

I suppose I'd be kidding myself if I didn't admit to a little frustration that came with having a young family and being unable to work in elite sport, after refining my skills and furthering my passion for sports nutrition. As a mum, it can be hard to balance the career you want with the family life you want. I know I'm not alone in this. For those who have worked at the AIS, it is a hard place to top – the best thing is having a team of sports dietitians who become like family, and this is accompanied by top-level mentoring, professional development and of course the guaranteed weekly pay popping into your bank account.

This is how my entrepreneurship journey began. I wasn't ready to give up my identity and passion for helping athletes achieve their goals, and from my work at the AIS, I knew that some athletes found it hard to access high-level sports dietetic support. I thought I could solve my problem while also solving a big problem for athletes around the world. That's when Dan and I put our heads together and came up with the idea of Compeat Nutrition. We took on the partnership and became co-CEOs to build this business.

It took us a year to realise that what we were doing was considered a tech start-up. We were busy behind the scenes laying the groundwork and investing everything into trying to build a world-class solution. Once we recognised we were in this space, our direction and opportunity changed quickly. We were selected for a start-up accelerator (when our second baby was only 2 weeks old) – and we quickly became immersed in a culture we didn't know existed. We had to learn a new language (sometimes quite literally) in business and learn as quickly as we could.

It's been 18 months now (with another new baby too), and what we started with is very different to what we have now, in terms of our direction and our business model. We've been recognised with business awards and have built our platform and the team. This road is not an easy one and isn't without sacrifice and burden. We've had to forgo all of the usual short-term goals and comforts for the long-term focus – meaning stressors both personally and financially. The job is not just about nutrition – equal time is devoted to technology. I never envisioned this would be my career path, but I wake up each day with so much passion, focus, and energy. That's something that is hard to put a price on.

Being in tech business means that you no longer draw all your friends and supporters from the health sector, and you're surrounded by a start-up community that want to see you achieve and to solve big problems. The focus moves away from what you can do in your local community to the reach you can have globally. I'm proud that we can support athletes achieve their goals regardless of their location. We have sporting teams and individuals who access our products and services at all times of the day and night. I'm so proud of our team of sports dietitians who work in this weird new world, and of our athletes, who are quite literally kicking goals around the world.

I am sure that, if you're reading this, you have a fire burning to launch into the tech space and see what magic can happen when you combine your expertise in nutrition with the immense potential in tech. For you, my biggest advice is to simply start. There will never be a perfect time to test the waters, but by simply starting you'll already be ahead of many others. Tech development takes time and an often-incomprehensible financial investment. Tech is expensive, and much more expensive than you probably can imagine before you start. As a tech founder, you'll doubt yourself daily and continually be outside of your comfort zone. You'll take risks – but if they're based on believing in your abilities, ideas and work ethic, they are calculated risks. You're betting on yourself, and that in itself is well worth it!

Chapter 21

self-assessment activity

1. Locate the local start-up hubs that are close to you, or online incubators that may be able to support your idea.
 - a. Do they have any events or courses that may help you understand the technology business community?
2. Identify your state government agencies that cover innovation and start-ups. What programs do they fund? What other support do they provide?
3. If you're interested in technology start-ups, attend a local event and ask at least 3 start-up founders the following questions:
 - a. What's the best thing about working on a tech start-up?
 - b. What's the worst thing about working on a tech start-up?
 - c. How do you identify the customers who will purchase your product or service?
 - d. What helped you start your technology business?







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