



NSSA EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

On the 7th of June 2024, the Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA) held an Extraordinary General Meeting to obtain member approval for changes to the constitution required by regulations set by the South African Revenue Service (SARS) on all public benefit organisations (PBO) such as the NSSA. All NSSA members voted in favour of the changes to the NSSA constitution after having read and discussed the changes needed.

Ms Rebone Ntsie, Director of Nutrition at the National Department of Health and NSSA member, was invited to discuss the topic of **'How to place nutrition on the Department of Health's agenda and the role the NSSA can play'** at the meeting

This topic was inspired by research that found that dietitians working in primary health care can show significant economic benefits for the health system. Howatson et al. (2015) found that for every one dollar spent on dietetic interventions in New Zealand, the health system could save \$5.5 to \$99 per year.

From Ms Ntsie's presentation, it became clear that the challenge regarding the dwindling appointment of dietitians within the South African public sector stems from insufficient funding for the positions of Nutrition Professionals. Additionally, the Department of Health does not seem to understand the cost-saving implications of disease prevention when employing dietitians. The research paper by Howatson et al. (2015) stated "Dietetic interventions demonstrate statistically and clinically significant impacts on health outcomes in the areas of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and malnutrition in older adults, when compared to usual care."

The Director of Nutrition stated that there are a variety of ways that the NSSA could assist in furthering the nutrition profile in South Africa. The avenues that members of the NSSA could use to promote nutrition professionals are: research initiatives, engaging policymakers, building alliances, and public awareness campaigns (Figure 1). Additionally, the Director of Nutrition indicated that academics or researchers should reach out to the Directorate of Nutrition to identify forthcoming research needs. It was also emphasised that research findings/outcomes should be communicated to the Department of Health through various channels, including presentations to the Nutrition Directorate: Department of Health, policy briefs, radio interviews, and opinion pieces in newspapers.

The NSSA would like to support the work of the Director of Nutrition to promote the employment of additional dietitians and nutritionists in public health facilities across South Africa. We look forward to future engagements with the Department of Health, specifically the Director of Nutrition, to improve the health of South Africans by effectively utilising the many available nutrition professionals.

Reference

Howatson, A., Wall, C., & Turner-Benny, P. (2015). The contribution of dietitians to the primary health care workforce. *J. Prim. Health Care.* 7(4): 324–332. <https://doi.org/10.1071/HC15324>

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STRATEGIES TO ELEVATE NUTRITION	
STRATEGIC APPROACHES	ACTIONS
Building evidence through research	Research Initiatives Undertake studies on nutrition's impact on health Develop clear, actionable recommendations Share findings with policymakers and the public
Advocacy and policy influence	Engaging Policymakers Organize meetings with health officials Present evidence-based research Advocate for nutrition-related policies
Building alliances and collaborations	Building Alliances Work with other health organizations Engage with community groups and schools Foster partnerships with private sector guarding against COI
Public awareness campaigns	Raising Public Awareness Launch education campaigns Partner with media to disseminate information Use social media to reach a broader audience

The slide also features logos for the Department of Health, Republic of South Africa, the 2030 NDP, and the 30 Years of Freedom anniversary. On the right, a video call interface shows a grid of participants, with Dr. Rebone Ntsie in the top right corner and other participants listed below.

Figure 1: Strategies to elevate the nutrition profile in South Africa