



MEDIA STATEMENT

Food for Health and Health for All

9–15 October 2025

South Africa continues to face a triple burden of malnutrition — undernutrition, such as stunting and wasting in children, micronutrient deficiencies like anemia, and rising levels of overweight and obesity, particularly among women, adolescents, and children. This combination contributes significantly to the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.

The National Department of Health (NDoH) is leading National Nutrition Week (NNW) 2025, under the theme “***Food for Health & Health for All***”, highlighting that good nutrition is the foundation of health and human development. The theme aligns directly with the Department’s goal of promoting equitable access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food for every South African.

The theme also reflects the life-course approach to nutrition, from pregnancy and early childhood through to adulthood and old age, and reinforces our efforts to prevent and manage malnutrition in all its forms. Through strategies such as the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (2022–2027), the Obesity Strategy (2023–2028), and the Food and Nutrition Security Plan, the

Department continues to champion healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainable diets to improve population health outcomes.

According to Maria van der Merwe, President of the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA), “Nearly half of adults in South Africa live with overweight or obesity, while almost one in four households (23.6%) experience food insecurity. At the same time, an estimated 10 million tons of food are wasted annually. These stark realities highlight the urgent need for collective action to promote healthier diets, reduce waste, and strengthen local food systems.”

Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA), together with the Foundation’s dietitians Ms Cari Erasmus and Ms Shonisani Nephalama, emphasises: “Every individual deserves the chance to live a long, healthy life, free from the burden of cardiovascular disease. Good nutrition plays a critical role in preventing heart disease and stroke, which is why we are proud to support National Nutrition Week 2025 and its theme, ‘Food for Health, Health for All’.”

National Nutrition Week is an annual campaign that raises awareness about the importance of healthy eating for growth, development, and lifelong wellbeing. The 2025 theme underscores the essential role of nutrition in preventing disease, supporting healthy communities, and promoting equitable access to nutritious, affordable, and safe food for all South Africans.

Dr Marieke Theron, Chairperson of the Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA), adds: “NSSA is committed to supporting the South African government and the Department of Health in finding ways to ensure that every person in South Africa has access to sufficient, healthy food. Ensuring health for all will not only lead to healthier people but also strengthen our economy.”

From 9 to 15 October, the Department of Health and its partners will raise awareness about the importance of good nutrition throughout all stages of life — from infancy to old age. The campaign promotes healthier, culturally appropriate,

and sustainable diets while encouraging reduced reliance on ultra-processed foods.

According to Liezel Engelbrecht, Nutrition Lead for the Hold My Hand Accelerator for Children and Teens: “South Africa’s nutrition challenges are structural, requiring government, business, and civil society to work together. Partnerships across sectors can align policies across health, education, agriculture, and social protection so that efforts reinforce one another. By improving coordination, sharing data, and aligning goals, we can move from fragmented programmes to an integrated national response that improves diets, safeguards children’s health, and reduces inequities over time.”

National Nutrition Week promotes collaboration across sectors — including health, education, agriculture, civil society, and the private sector — to ensure that safe, affordable, and nutritious food is accessible to all. Importantly, it aims to empower South Africans to make informed food choices by improving their understanding of food labels and highlighting the impact of marketing tactics on eating behaviours.

Ms Lenore Spies, Chairperson of the Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition at the HPCSA, notes: “Intersectoral collaboration is fundamental to addressing South Africa’s triple burden of disease, given its multidimensional causes. Our participation strengthens the shared voice needed to highlight and prioritise this challenge.”

Under the theme “Food for Health, Health for All,” the campaign will focus on five key messages:

1. Early nutrition, lifelong impact – The first 1,000 days of life (from pregnancy to age two) are critical for growth and brain development.
2. Healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainable diets – Choose a variety of minimally processed foods.
3. Strengthen local food systems and community resilience – Support smallholder farmers, eat seasonal produce, and reduce food waste.

4. Food safety across the food chain – Safe handling, storage, and preparation of food prevent illness.
5. Empower consumers and communities – Read food labels, understand marketing tactics, and participate in shaping healthier food systems.

National Nutrition Week 2025 will feature a range of activities to reach diverse audiences nationwide. These include community and school events across provinces, university engagement sessions empowering youth, and a national webinar uniting professionals, policymakers, and community leaders. A strong digital presence will also be maintained through social media campaigns using the hashtags #NNWZA2025, #NationalNutritionWeekZA2025, and #FoodForHealthAndHealthForAll to engage the public and amplify key messages.

Mr. Gilbert Tshitadzi, Nutrition Manager at UNICEF South Africa, explains: “Through these efforts, NNW 2025 partners aim to increase public understanding of balanced diets, the importance of the first 1,000 days of life, and the basics of food safety. The campaign also seeks to raise awareness of local, seasonal, and indigenous foods, while empowering communities to engage in food policy and advocate for healthier environments.”

She adds that the campaign aims to enhance the use and visibility of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials across communities, schools, and health facilities.

Finally, Elize Joubert, CEO of the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA), notes: “CANSA hopes National Nutrition Week 2025 will spark a meaningful shift in how communities understand, access, and value nutritious food.”

Megan Pentz-Kluyts, Nutrition and Dietetics Consultant to CANSA, adds: “The theme aligns with our mission to reduce cancer risk and improve survivorship through equitable, evidence-based nutrition. Nutrition is one of the most modifiable risk factors for cancer. By empowering communities to eat well and advocate for better food systems, we can help lower the incidence of obesity-related cancers,

improve treatment outcomes and recovery, and promote long-term wellbeing across generations.”

National Nutrition Week 2025 calls on all South Africans — parents, caregivers, educators, health professionals, farmers, and policymakers — to work together to build healthier food systems and promote nutrition equity.

Every meal is an opportunity to nourish, prevent disease, and strengthen the future of our nation. Together, we can make Food for Health & Health for All a reality.

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For more information and healthy eating tips, visit National Nutrition Week 2025 www.nutritionweek.co.za

National Nutrition Week 2025 partners:

Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) – www.adsa.org.za

CANSA – <https://cansa.org.za/>

DGMT and Hold My Hand – <https://dgmt.co.za/>

GrowGreat – www.growgreat.co.za

Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa – www.heartfoundation.co.za

National Department of Health – www.health.gov.za

Nutrition Society of South Africa – www.nutritionociety.co.za

Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition at the HPCSA – <https://www.hpcsa.co.za/board/dietics>

UNICEF – www.unicef.org