



Nutrient Reference Values – Age Range for Adults

Brief Consultation Paper

Issue

Consideration is being given to whether the adult age range for the [Nutrient Reference Values](#) (NRVs) for Australia and New Zealand should remain at 19 years and over or be changed to 18 years and over.

Input is being sought on the implications of a potential change, from those organisations that may be impacted.

Background

The 2006 *Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand* outline the intake levels of nutrients considered adequate to meet the nutritional needs of healthy people. They are intended for use by health professionals to assess the likelihood of inadequate intake in individuals or groups of people.

The 2006 NRVs set out values for the following age ranges:

- Infants - 0 to 6 months; 7 to 12 months
- Children and adolescents - 1 to 3 years; 4 to 8 years; 9 to 13 years; 14 to 18 years
- Adults - 19 to 30 years; 31 to 50 years; 51 to 70 years; >70 years
- Pregnancy - 14 to 50 years
- Lactation - 14 to 50 years.

As outlined above, the 2006 NRVs consider an adult to be 19 years and over. This age range is reflective of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) *Dietary Reference Intakes*, which form the basis of the 2006 NRVs. Consistent with the NRVs, the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the New Zealand Eating and Activity Guidelines also consider an adult to be 19 years and over.

Reviews of some of the fluoride and sodium NRVs were undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Health and the New Zealand Ministry of Health, and approved by the Council of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The reviews were undertaken to pilot the *Methodological Framework for the Review of Nutrient Reference Values* and given time and resource constraints, reviews of only some of the fluoride and sodium NRVs were completed. The 2016 fluoride review retained the adult age range at 19 years and over, while the 2017 sodium review revised the adult age range to 18 years and over for the Suggested Dietary Target and Upper Level of Intake.



The decision to change the sodium adult age range to 18 years and over was made while the systematic reviews were being undertaken for sodium. The Expert Working Group undertaking the reviews considered that this age range should be used as this was the accepted and legal definition of an adult in Australia and New Zealand.

The adult age range for all other sodium NRVs remains at 19 years and over as they were not included in the 2017 review. Likewise, as they have not been reviewed, the adult age range for the NRVs of all other nutrients remains at 19 years and over.

Current Situation

NHMRC has been engaged to undertake a priority driven review of the 2006 NRVs on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Health and the New Zealand Ministry of Health. This includes, reviewing the evidence and updating the remaining fluoride and sodium NRVs not reviewed in 2016 and 2017, the iodine NRVs and all adequate intake NRVs for infants. These reviews are being conducted using a phased approach over three years, commencing with sodium and iodine in 2018.

NHMRC has established a Steering Group Advisory Committee and nutrient specific Expert Working Groups to provide advice on the sodium and iodine reviews. The Steering Group Advisory Committee is currently considering the inconsistency in the adult age range that has resulted from the change in the 2017 sodium review.

To ensure consistency across all nutrients, the Steering Group Advisory Committee will consider whether the adult age range should remain at 19 years and over or whether it should be changed to 18 years and over as each nutrient is reviewed.

Retaining the current adult age range at 19 years and over ensures:

- consistency with the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand
- consistency with the Australian Health Survey¹
- consistency with journal search functions such as MEDLINE
- alignment with the National Academy of Medicine [formerly the IOM].

However, it is possible that the current adult age range may lead to confusion in public health messaging given that 18 years is legally and socially considered an adult in both Australia and New Zealand (although this does not appear to have been an issue to date).

Changing the adult age range to 18 years and over ensures:

- consistency with the general perception and legal age of adulthood
- consideration of changes in dietary patterns with legal access to alcohol

¹ The New Zealand Health Survey considers an adult to be 15 years and over.



- consistency with grey literature, policy and programs

However changing the adult age range to 18 years and over may:

- impact on dietary modelling underpinning the current Australian Dietary Guidelines, given these are based on the 2006 NRVs with their adult age range of 19 years and over
- impact on the use of NRVs as laboratory reference values lead to inconsistency across nutrients for an extended duration during the time taken to change all adult NRVs to 18 years and over
- lead to confusion in public health messaging with different age ranges for adults across the different nutrients until all NRVs are reviewed.

Views are being sought on what the implications of both options may be. Some of the possible implications are outlined above however, this list is not exhaustive and is intended only to offer suggestions.

Consultation Questions:

1. Has the current age range of 19 years and over raised any issues before this point in time? If so, what are these?
2. What impact (positive or negative) would changing the adult age range to 18 years and over have on the work of your organisation?
3. If changing the adult age range to 18 years and over did have an impact on the work of your organisation, briefly describe what costs, time and resources would be involved in implementing the change?
4. Is there anyone else that should be consulted on this issue?

If you would like to provide input, please send your response to the questions above to dietaryguidelines@nhmrc.gov.au by **COB Friday 23 November 2018**. All input will be considered by the Steering Group Advisory Committee.