

Re-connecting in a diverse nutrition world

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For the first time since the Covid pandemic disruptions, nutrition and dietetic health professionals from South Africa, Africa and further afield will be gathering in person in Somerset West for the 2023 Nutrition Congress. The three-day event, held from 18 to 20 April 2023 is co-hosted by NSSA (Nutrition Society of South Africa) and ADSA (Association for Dietetics in South Africa).



The Congress provides a vital platform for nutrition researchers, both up-and-coming and well-established, to share the latest findings and recommendations across all fields of nutrition ranging from public health nutrition challenges to specialities such as therapeutic nutrition.

Maria van der Merwe, president of [ADSA](#) (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) says, "As a biennial event, we have not been able to host an in-person national Nutrition Congress since 2018. So much has changed in the past five years, making the in-person 2023 Nutrition Congress not only timely but also a critical opportunity to share experiences and new developments so that we can collectively identify priorities for action."

"Advocacy for nutrition is one area where greater collaboration and synergy can gain ground for nutrition. On the health system front, South Africa is in the process of implementing National Health Insurance, offering a critical opportunity to ensure that nutrition is incorporated in all service delivery streams, from health promotion to disease prevention, management and treatment."

"ADSA, as a professional association, is taking note of the changing landscape for nutrition professionals. New ways of communicating, creating new ventures, diverse work opportunities and a new professional category are all emerging. We, therefore, want to also utilise the opportunities offered by the 2023 Nutrition Congress to engage with the diverse range of nutrition professionals and practitioners to identify the needs of our professionals, to ensure that the professional associations remain relevant in a changing world."

Nutrition-related challenges in South Africa and Africa are complex and spiralling. Undernutrition, which includes childhood stunting, coexists with rising rates of obesity and overweight, not just in the same communities, but sometimes in the same households. The pursuit of modern healthy lifestyles is all too often thwarted in the many communities that lack access to nutritious foods as well as safe spaces conducive to daily physical activity. Simple healthy nutrition in homes is negatively

impacted by the powerful marketing of the diet, fashion and beauty, media and social media industries.

According to Professor Corinna Walsh, the NSSA President, key nutrition challenges need to be addressed by broad collaboration and greater synergy between diverse practitioners in the nutrition field.

She says, “The greatest challenges demand a multidisciplinary approach to address their deeper underlying causes. We can do much more if we move from working in silos to applying a systems-thinking approach. These challenges include the high prevalence of the triple burden of malnutrition, which includes under-nutrition, which is stunting and wasting; overweight and obesity; and hidden hunger which is micronutrient deficiency. When planning interventions, the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence our health cannot be ignored, and thus we need to engage experts in these fields to address pressing nutrition challenges.”

Van der Merwe adds, “Ultimately, we require political, policy and fiscal commitment in order to turn the tide when it comes to the nutrition situation in the country. Here we have a platform for learning and development, where we can strategise, network and forge new partnerships to address the challenges and grasp the opportunities presented. While we have become accustomed to online meetings, the opportunity to engage in person for three days provides for more in-depth discussions, not only during formal presentations but also during break time and at the workshops following the congress.”

The 2023 Nutrition Congress aims to highlight and share collaborative solutions to the significant nutrition challenges experienced in Africa. Bringing nutrition and dietetic professionals together opens up opportunities to make a sustainable difference by bringing solutions to scale across diverse communities.

Professor Walsh says, “The World Health Organisation’s double-duty actions are an illustration of a coordinated approach to the problem of malnutrition in Africa. These include interventions, programmes and policies that could concurrently lower the risk or burden of undernutrition, as well as overweight and obesity and their consequences.”

Van der Merwe concludes, “Nutrition education, from early childhood onwards, that is in line with our national healthy eating guidelines, would allow for well-informed communities able to apply knowledge when making food choices and could lead to an increase in the demand for healthy foods. This would, of course also require foods that form part of a healthy diet to be available, accessible, and affordable to all, which is possible when policy decisions impacting food are taken with the health and best interest of the population as a primary consideration.”

The 2023 Nutrition Congress theme, *Synergy and Re-connection in a Diverse Nutrition World* highlight the need for economic, social and environmental factors to be taken into account when it comes to solutions for Africa’s nutrition challenges.

2023 Nutrition Congress

18 to 20 April 2023

Lord Charles Hotel, Somerset-West, Western Cape, South Africa

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The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) is the professional organisation for Registered Dietitians. The primary aims of the Association are to serve the interests of dietitian in South Africa and promote the nutritional well being of the community.

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