

## Media Release

# National Allergy Strategy launches first free national food allergy e-training program designed for cooks and chefs

- *Food allergy rates in Australia are rising, with around one in 20 children (aged 10-14 years)<sup>i</sup> and 2-4 per cent of adults<sup>ii</sup> affected*
- *Food-induced anaphylaxis has doubled in the last 10 years, and fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis increase by 7 per cent<sup>iii</sup> each year*

**Tues 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019:** A free, potentially life-saving online food allergy training program for cooks and chefs, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, has today been launched by the National Allergy Strategy, a partnership between the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA).

Developed in conjunction with chefs and cooks with experience in commercial kitchens, *“All About Allergens: The next step for cooks and chefs”* focuses on food preparation, handling and storage, and highlights the importance of effective communication between the kitchen and other staff and consumers with food allergy.

“Food allergy rates are continuing to rise in Australia, and we know that the majority of fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis occur when people are eating out,” says Associate Professor Richard Loh, co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy and past President of ASCIA. “So that is our area of focus with the All About Allergens online training program. We had great uptake of the first stage of the free All About Allergens program for people in the food service industry, so we’ve developed this next stage specifically for cooks and chefs to maximise their understanding of food allergies and hopefully reduce the number of food-induced allergic reactions we see.”

The first All About Allergens online food allergy training program has seen almost 11,000 food service industry workers from all over Australia enrol in the course since its launch in July 2017. This next stage of the training program provides information specific to cooks and chefs and aims to educate them on the safest way to handle, prepare, cook and store food to prevent food-related allergic reactions.

There are two versions of the new training program; one for general food services such as restaurants and cafes, and one for camp food services, such as school camps or sports camps. Free to access for all users and delivered in a convenient online format that can be completed at the user’s convenience, *All About Allergens: The next step for cooks and chefs* has been developed for anyone providing a food service.

Martin Latter, Group Director of Kitchens for AEG Ogden, who has managed some of Australia’s largest commercial kitchens and has even cooked for royalty, welcomed the new training program, saying, “It can be very difficult to manage all of the different dietary requests that come through a large kitchen, and often customers don’t have any concept of the type of pressure cooks and chefs are under and make requests at the last minute.

“Over my many years of working in large kitchens I’ve often seen little things happen that can put people with food allergies at serious risk, like not using the same utensils across different foods, or wearing gloves for hygiene purposes but not understanding the cross-contamination risk.”

“This training program will go a long way towards minimising the risk of food allergen cross-contamination by spelling out, in simple terms, the best way to reduce risk and help to keep our customers safe. It also provides some great resources and templates that can be used in commercial kitchens to help reduce the risk.”

Maria Said, CEO of A&AA, says “Hospital admissions for food-induced allergic reactions have increased fivefold over the past 20 years<sup>ii</sup>, and fatalities from food-induced anaphylaxis are increasing by about 7 per cent<sup>iii</sup> every year. While we know that food allergen management in kitchens needs to improve, we’re certainly not wanting to point the finger at cooks and chefs. What we do want to do is encourage a sense of shared responsibility when it comes to preventing episodes of anaphylaxis and food-related allergic reactions. Customers with allergies are primarily responsible for their health needs and need to advise food service staff about their allergies, preferably in advance, and kitchen staff need to take their food allergy seriously and understand how to manage those requests.”

Jaclyn Jauhianan, a 24-year-old university student who is allergic to honey and at risk of anaphylaxis to tree nuts, is pleased to see more being done to educate those working in food service about food allergies, saying “I dream about the day when I can eat out with my family and friends without having to be on high alert about my allergies even after I disclose them. When I can trust that the kitchen staff have taken my dietary requirements seriously and haven’t just brushed me off as being ‘fussy’. I know it is my responsibility to clearly communicate, but there definitely needs to be more awareness and education about managing food allergies in the food services industry.”

“It really needs to come from both sides,” continues Ms Said. “We urge customers with food allergies to contact the establishment about their food allergy requirements in advance when making the booking, and then to double check with staff when they arrive that their food allergy requirements have been understood and can be managed. We encourage all cooks and chefs to complete the new All About Allergens training course to ensure they understand their role in preventing food-related allergic reactions, including preventable deaths.”

*Common causes of food-related allergic reactions in commercial settings*

- Wait staff not communicating the customer’s food allergy to cooks and chefs
- Food service staff presuming a menu choice is fine without checking ingredients
- A chef or cook not checking ingredients in a garnish
- Using utensils across multiple food types, including knives, tongs, spoons, etc
- Not checking the ingredients label on pre-prepared products, e.g. mayonnaise, tomato sauce
- Suppliers changing ingredients without informing the kitchen staff
- Mistakes in communications: e.g. delivering special dietary requests to the wrong customer
- Customers not informing kitchen staff about their allergy
- Customers not clarifying whether their request is due to an allergy, an intolerance or that they simply dislike something i.e asking, “Does this have egg in it?”

For further information go to [www.foodallergytraining.org.au](http://www.foodallergytraining.org.au)

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*Distributed by Lanham PR on behalf of the National Allergy Strategy*

## BACKGROUND

Led by the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA), as the leading medical and patient organisations for allergy in Australia, the **National Allergy Strategy** aims to address public health issues relating to the rapid and continuing rise of allergy in Australia and improve the health and quality of life of people with allergic diseases, their families and carers, and the community

Further information is available at: [www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au](http://www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au)

### ***Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA)***

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA) was established in 1993 as a charitable, not for profit organisation, to improve awareness of allergy and anaphylaxis in the Australian community, by sharing current information, education, advocacy, research, guidance and support.

A&AA is a national peak health advisory body that is supported by Department of Health and Ageing funding, sale of resources, sponsorship and donations. Their outreach extends to individuals, families, school, workplaces, health professionals, government, food industry and all Australians.

A&AA has been working with the food industry to increase safety for consumers and the people that prepare their food for over 25 years. The relationships they have formed with key stakeholder organisations has helped progress the National Allergy Strategy Food Service Project. A&AA is part of an international alliance of similar organisations and works closely with peak medical bodies, including ASCIA. Their medical advisory board comprises ASCIA members who are specialist immunology and allergy physicians from across Australia.

The charity has developed many resources to assist consumers and food service staff with food allergy management.

For further information go to: [www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

### ***Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)***

The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) was established in 1990 as a not for profit, peak professional medical organisation for allergy and clinical immunology in Australia and New Zealand. ASCIA members include clinical immunology/allergy specialists, other medical practitioners, scientists and allied health professionals who work in the areas of allergy and immunology.

The mission of ASCIA is to advance the science and practice of allergy and clinical immunology, by promoting the highest standard of medical practice, education and research, to improve the health and quality of life of people with allergic diseases, immunodeficiencies and other immune diseases.

For further information go to: [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

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<sup>i</sup> Sasaki M, Koplin JJ, Dharmage SC, Field MJ, Sawyer SM, McWilliam V, Peters RL, Gurrin LC, Vuillermin PJ, Douglass J, Pezic A, Brewerton M, Tang MLK, Patton GC, Allen KJ. Prevalence of clinic-defined food allergy in

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early adolescence: the School Nuts study. *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2017;DOI:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaci.2017.05.041>

<sup>ii</sup> Tang MLK, Mullins RJ. Food allergy: is prevalence increasing? *IMJ*. 2017. doi:10.1111/imj.13362

<sup>iii</sup> Mullins et al. Anaphylaxis Fatalities in Australia 1997 to 2013. *JACI*. 2016. 137 (2): Suppl AB57. DOI:  
10.1016/j.jaci.2015.12.189