Protocols

Nutrition and Healthy Ageing Trajectories in Retirement Living in the Australian Capital Territory: Study Protocol

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Objectives: There are a growing number of people aged over 55 years living in retirement communities in Australia. These communities typically consist of accommodation, services and community facilities which cater to older people and the desire to maintain independence. The Nutrition and Healthy Ageing Trajectories in Retirement Living (NutriHAT-RL) study aims to investigate the nutrition and lifestyle-based behaviours which contribute to healthy ageing and the maintenance of social and physical functioning among older people living in retirement communities.

Methods: This study will recruit a total of 2,770 people aged 55 years or over living in retirement communities in the Australian Capital Territory and southern New South Wales regions of Australia for a four-year prospective longitudinal study commencing in March 2021. A range of measures, including nutritional intake, health and lifestyle behaviours, cognitive and psychological function, and physical health, will be completed on three occasions over a total of four years. Participants will complete a face-to-face comprehensive, validated food frequency questionnaire at each time point. Risk of malnutrition and nutritional behaviour (emotional appetite and intuitive eating) will also be evaluated. Multiple mental, social, and physical health domains will be assessed at each time point. This will include cognitive and mental health (depression, anxiety, and loneliness) screening, social and occupational functioning questionnaires, self-reported and observed physical function assessments, and sleep quality. Bitter taste endophenotype, salivary C-reactive protein, telomere length, and blood biomarkers associated with healthy ageing will also be evaluated.

Results: Ethics approval has been obtained through the University of Canberra Human Ethics Research Committee (UCHREC-2306). To reduce risk of COVID-19 transmissions, a risk mitigation plan has been developed.

Conclusions: The NutriHAT-RL study will be the first Australian longitudinal study with a focus on nutrition and healthy ageing in people living in retirement communities. Findings from this study will contribute to understanding of nutrition and healthy ageing in this growing population and will inform policy and practice related to nutrition and ageing in place.

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