Hunger in America Food and Nutrition Insecurity Affects all RDs and DTRs

HOD Executive Summary

House of Delegates
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Of the 315 million people living in America (1), 50 million Americans, including 8.6 million children were food insecure in 2011 (2). These rates have substantially increased over the last two decades; in 1998, 10.2 percent Americans lived in food-insecure households and 14.9 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2011.

The Academy’s Strategic Plan supports the discussion of this mega issue as noted below:
- Goal #1: The public trusts and chooses Registered Dietitians as food, nutrition and health experts.
- Goal #2: Academy members optimize the health of Americans.
- Goal #3: Members and prospective members view the Academy as vital to professional success.

In order for the Academy to achieve its vision “to optimize the nation’s health through food and nutrition” all RDs and DTRs must be aware and support the goals.

“Food security is the linchpin of healthful living and must be achieved in the United States to improve the health of its citizens and residents.”

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Food Insecurity in the United States Position Paper (3)

Mega Issue Question:
How can we as Academy members increase our awareness of food and nutrition insecurity and demonstrate our commitment to take action?

Expected Outcomes:
Delegates will:
1. Raise Academy members’ awareness of the prevalence and consequences of food and nutrition insecurity for the nation, including current Academy initiatives.
2. Demonstrate commitment and inspire members to take action to improve food and nutrition security at local and state levels.
3. Act to support and promote the Academy’s policy and advocacy programs that improve food and nutrition security at the national level.

To obtain the full backgrounder www.eatright.org/hod > Spring HOD Meeting Materials.
Defining Food and Nutrition Insecurity

Food insecurity and hunger are caused by lack of resources/poverty. Poverty is caused by low-wages, wages that do not keep up with inflation and fail to sustain a family.

It is a major public health initiative to reduce and/or eliminate U.S. food insecurity by 2015. In 2009, President Obama voiced his goal to eliminate food insecurity in children by 2015 (4). In 2010, United States Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) Healthy People 2020 initiative re-established the target from Healthy People 2010 (5) to reduce household food insecurity and in doing so reduce hunger by decreasing the percentage of food insecure from 14% of the U.S. population to 6% and to eliminate very low food security among children—which was at 1.2% of the U.S. population in 2008 (6).

To understand how the current food assistance and anti-poverty programs currently exist in the U.S., a review of the history and development of programs is discussed in the backgrounder.

The Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies panel recommended that USDA make a clear and explicit distinction between food insecurity and hunger and consider alternative labels to convey the severity of food insecurity without using the word "hunger." USDA concurred with this recommendation and, accordingly, introduced the new labels "low food security" and "very low food security" to replace "food insecurity without hunger" and "food insecurity with hunger," respectively.

The following terms on food security currently do not have a universally accepted definition. There are several definitions for each term. This may be an opportunity for the Academy to develop definitions and lead that initiative.

- Nutrition Security
- Individual Food Security
- Household Food Security
- Community Food Security
- National Food Security
- Food Deserts
- Low Access

Examples of Involved Members

RDs and DTRs are currently involved in food and water insecurity programs at local, state and federal levels. Dietetics practitioners:

- administer or refer to many food and nutrition assistance programs and emergency food system programs,
- serve on anti-hunger task forces, food bank boards and food security coalitions,
- participate in local and state policy councils,
- serve on soil and water conservation districts,
- consult with community planners to address food deserts in urban and rural areas,
- serve as farmers market managers or offer support to farmers market association,
- submit and receive USDA Community food project and specialty crop block grants,
- propose state legislation that promotes prison-to-pantry food gardens,
- encourage food banks to support purchase of locally grown fruits and vegetables,
- perform research to inform best practices and contribute to evidence-base, and
- volunteer at a food pantry or soup kitchen, or local farmers market (7).

How Food and Nutrition Insecurity Affect the Dietetics Practitioner’s Role

Why Hunger (APPENDIX C) summarizes the results of food and nutrition insecurity on our nation’s health and beyond. Persistent food [and nutrition] insecurity and hunger are connected to poor access to fresh and healthy foods in low-income communities, the spread of highly processed food, and a fast-food culture (64). Rising rates of childhood obesity and diabetes are signs that a population can be well-fed yet poorly nourished. These
problems, in turn, are linked to the worst family farm crisis since the 1980s, loss of farmland and an industrial food system that is driving farmers off the land. Anti-hunger organizations are increasingly collaborating with community food security advocates and other allies to promote healthy food, farms and communities through new federal policy (8).

**Academy’s Food Security Efforts**

Some of the Academy’s food security efforts are delineated below in the areas of policy initiatives and advocacy, partnerships, evidence-based research, position papers, and professional development.

**Policy Initiatives and Advocacy**

In the realm of public policy and advocacy, the Academy is committed to improving the health of Americans and we know that food and nutrition security is key to achieving this goal. Our focus areas include consumer and community issues such as:

1. Prevention and treatment of chronic disease, including health care equity
2. Meeting nutrition needs through the life cycle: Maternal and child nutrition to healthy aging
3. Provision of quality nutrition through nutrition education, food production, food access
4. Support of nutrition monitoring and research

Academy members work to assure that all Americans have access to a healthy, safe food supply by leading efforts to reduce food deserts, increasing participation in nutrition programs and working with industry to help develop nutritious food products. The Academy has identified sustainable food systems as a priority in our commitment to helping individuals enjoy healthy lives. Our members are positioned to provide nutrition education and food/water safety education in community, clinical settings, foodservice operations and food industries. We recognize that many of the populations served are vulnerable to food insecurity and to food and waterborne illness. We also have the capacity to shape food offerings in food service and community settings. Nutrition counseling and other nutrition care services require inclusion of these topics.

**Partnerships**

The Academy has partnerships with such groups as the Food and Research Action Center (FRAC), Bread for the World, Congressional Hunger Center, National Association of Aging and Nutrition Programs, Meals on Wheels Association, and Share Our Strength (9).

**Member Activities**

The Hunger and Environmental Nutrition and Weight Management Dietetic Practice Groups have collaborated with Feeding America to develop an informational sheet called Hungry and Overweight: How is this Possible? It outlines the factors contributing to being hungry and overweight, particularly among children, and resources that address this issue.

Academy members are active in efforts to reduce food insecurity in their communities. Some of those initiatives follow.

- Increasing the number of green carts in, which offers fresh fruit and vegetables in low-income areas
- Developing corner store initiatives that work with local vendors to increase healthy foods
- Facilitating seniors’ access to WIC farmers’ markets
- Leading healthy food financing efforts to bring grocers to low-income areas
- Providing nutrition education through SNAP-Ed, Cooking Matters, and other non-profit programs
- Editing and writing articles in anti-hunger journals, including *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*
- Forming state and local food policy councils
- Improving nutritional quality of foods available through food banks and food pantries
Academy Strategic Plan and Code of Ethics
The Strategic Plan of the Academy (APPENDIX A) includes a vision to optimize the nation’s health through food and nutrition and a mission to be the nation’s food and nutrition leaders. It is a specific goal of the Academy that members optimize the health of Americans with strategies to:

- Engage members to impact food and nutrition policies through participation in the legislative and regulatory processes at local, state and federal levels
- Enhance the relevance of public health nutrition within the Academy and increase its visibility in the broader public health community
- Advance relationships with key stakeholders and external organizations to further the Academy’s initiatives
- Increase health equity by promoting improved access to Registered Dietitian services and nutrition interventions

Summary
As stated in the Food Insecurity Position Paper, “clearly, RDs and DTRs are uniquely positioned to play key leadership roles and to collaborate with policymakers, government and community leaders, health departments, county extension programs, anti-hunger organizations, and other community-based organizations to eliminate food insecurity in the United States and to establish food secure communities (3).”

References: