

Dietary Guidelines 2020-2025: Update on Academy Efforts

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THE DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR Americans (DGA) form the crucial basis for federal nutrition policy and are used in developing standards for federal nutrition programs, in nutrition education, and in identifying research needs. As the leaders in the field, it is critical for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to proactively help shape the recommendations and related government regulatory initiatives. The Academy and its members must be prepared to lead with the development of the 2020-2025 DGA by both nominating individual members to serve on the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) and its various associated subcommittees, and providing evidence-based input that helps form the basis of the national quinquennial nutrition guidelines. The Academy enthusiastically welcomes the opportunity to accelerate improvements in global health and wellbeing through food and nutrition through the development of the 2020-2025 DGA.

The 2020-2025 DGA will be different in both process and substance from previous iterations. For the first time, the DGA will address the needs of Americans of all ages, as the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Health and Human Services (jointly, the “agencies”) undertake a new congressionally mandated effort to develop dietary guidance for the youngest Americans, aged birth to 24 months. It is widely accepted that eating patterns formed during childhood carry into adulthood and can help prevent obesity and other chronic diseases. Recognizing that families need credible, evidence-based recommendations and concrete guidelines to develop their

children’s good eating patterns at a young age, the Academy and the American Academy of Pediatrics urged the agencies’ leadership to convene a joint expert task force charged with developing dietary guidelines for birth to 24 months in advance of the 2015 DGA in a letter to Howard K. Koh (Assistant Secretary for Health, US Department of Health and Human Services), Catherine Woteki (Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, US Department of Agriculture), and Kevin Concannon (Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, US Department of Agriculture) (written communication by S. Escott-Stump and P.M. Babjak, November 15, 2011). The Academy’s commitment to infant and early childhood dietary guidance was underscored when Chief Science Officer Alison Steiber and her team worked with the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to initiate the Pre-B Project in 2014, the “first step in the development of evidence-informed practice guidelines that will address [the full range of nutritional issues beyond nutrient exposure caregivers face]” in caring for preterm infants.¹

In addition, as a result of some groups’ criticism of the 2015 DGAC Scientific Report’s conclusions, recommendations, and scope,² the process of developing the 2020-2025 DGA has already changed. Additional process changes and heightened oversight and attention to the process are expected.

In late February 2018, the agencies promulgated a brand new step in the DGA process when they proposed a set of topics and scientific questions for public comment that the DGAC (once appointed) would review and analyze. The new process differs from that used in the past. Previously, the first step in the process was the call for nominations and subsequent appointment of the DGACs, which were tasked with

proposing the topics and scientific questions themselves. For the 2020-2025 DGA, by proposing topics and questions at the outset and seeking public comment before they were finalized, the agencies could ensure tighter connection between the topics to be addressed and the specified expertise needed for nominees of the DGAC. The Academy developed and implemented a transparent process for nominating and facilitating appointment of highly qualified Academy member experts to the DGAC with backgrounds in the topic areas finalized by the agencies.

ENGAGEMENT AND INITIAL OUTPUT ON TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

The Academy submitted a 19-page set of comments responsive to the agencies’ proposed topics and comments on March 30, 2018 incorporating significant, robust input from Academy member experts, committees, and Dietetic Practice Groups (DPGs) in accordance with the Academy’s Legislative and Public Policy Committee—approved process for developing and submitting regulatory comments.³ To obtain input from DPGs during the abbreviated 30-day comment period, the Academy reached out via e-mail, *Eat Right Weekly*, and *Public Policy Weekly News*; hosted two teleconferences at set times; and engaged interested DPGs’ Policy and Advocacy Leaders in one-on-one phone calls. Academy staff also presented at three committee meetings to solicit input and encourage engagement in the DGA process with those committee members.

The Academy is committed to enhancing transparency and increasing the level of engagement with DPGs, committees, and other Academy entities, such as the Board of Directors and House Leadership Team

throughout the DGA process. As a result, the Academy makes a concerted effort to ensure that DPGs and other Academy entities with a direct interest in specific issues addressed by the Academy's draft comments are provided an opportunity to review and offer suggestions on those issues. In advance of the 2020-2025 DGA topics being finalized, the Academy directed energies to particular DPGs and member experts to solicit input reflective of their expertise. For example, given the new addition of congressionally mandated guidelines for infants and toddlers, robust engagement with our Women's Health and Pediatric Nutrition DPGs becomes even more essential.

In addition to suggestions for refining scientific questions around several of the proposed topics for more accurate, relevant, and updated recommendations, input from our DPGs led the Academy to suggest the additional inclusion of the following four topics that the agencies had not proposed for this iteration: sodium, implementation of

the recommendations of the DGA, oral health, and sustainability (Figure).

Appropriations

The 2020-2025 DGA process has already included activity on Capitol Hill and at the White House not previously seen, notably around congressional funding determinations:

- Fiscal year 2019 President's Budget for US Department of Agriculture, the lead agency for the guidelines, included \$12 million to develop the 2020-2025 DGA.
- The proposed funding for fiscal year 2019 would support the US Department of Agriculture in successfully meeting the increased demands and responsibilities related to the development and launch of the 2020-2025 DGA, including increased scope, transparency, and opportunities for public engagement in the development process.

- There has never before been any specific congressional investment in terms of a dedicated line item to develop the DGA.
- The Academy has engaged in conversations with US Department of Agriculture staff and other national organizations. The organizations are tentatively planning to send a sign-on letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committees requesting \$12 million for the development of the DGA.

Ongoing Engagement and Optimizing Input Using Approved Academy Processes

The Academy actively prepares for opportunities to gather input from member experts, DPGs, and other Academy groups through a framework for responding approved by the Legislative and Public Policy Committee. Benchmarks in the process during which the Academy has an opportunity to submit input include the following: finalizing topics and scientific questions, call for nominations to DGAC; public meetings on specific topic issues, and review and comment on DGAC Scientific Report.

It is possible that additional benchmarks may be included, as the agencies are committed to changes in the DGA process to improve transparency and enhance scientific assessment. The Academy has taken advantage of additional touch points for engagement with DPGs' new Policy and Advocacy Leaders transitioning into their positions at the beginning of the new fiscal year. Through training webinars, teleconferences, and calls for nominations to the Academy's internal working groups on the final DGA topics, we will be able to ensure the breadth and depth of our members' expertise is heard and utilized.

The Academy established member-focused DGA working groups intended to provide a forum for Academy members recognized as content experts to review available evidence and recommend stances to form the substance of the Academy's comments on topics to be addressed in the 2020-2025 DGA. Each working group is composed of between five and nine Academy members representing a cross-section of practice experience, relevant DPG membership, and expertise in research methodology,

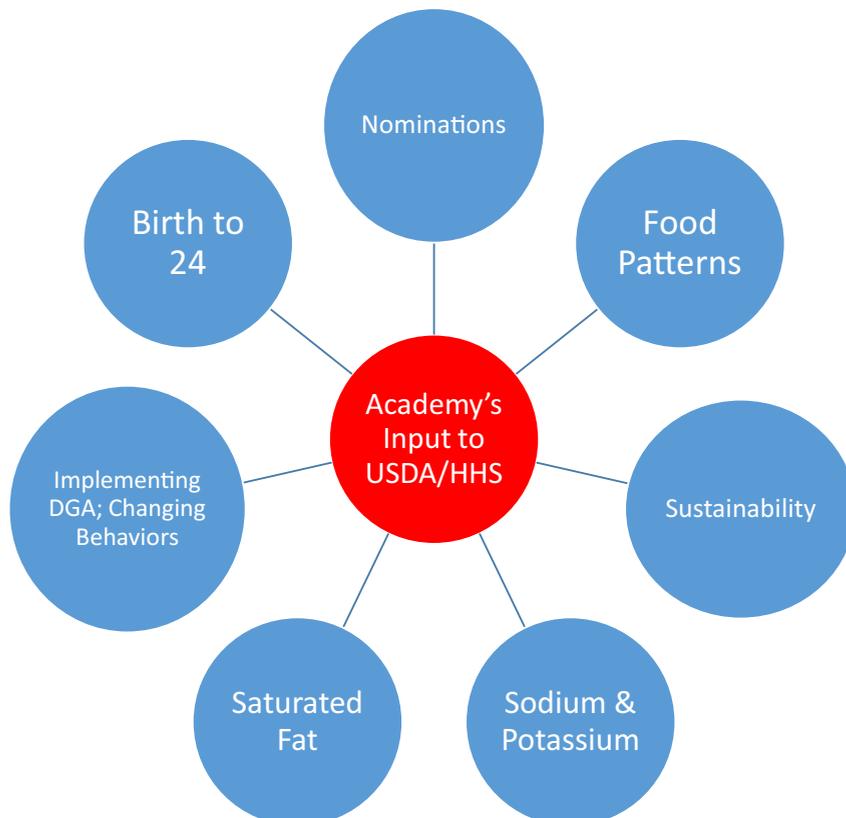


Figure. Member task forces. DGA=Dietary Guidelines for Americans; USDA/HHS=US Department of Agriculture/Department of Health and Human Services.

development, and analysis. The working groups' criteria for membership differ, reflecting the working groups' deep dives into complex issues likely to require specialized knowledge and scientific backgrounds.

The structures of the member working groups and concerted efforts by the internal staff will ensure broad representation of Academy experts and facilitate consensus on the Academy's input on the 2020-2025 DGA. As a result, the Academy is well-positioned as a trusted, unbiased, and proactive leader on these salient issues, and will be enabled to effectively collaborate with other stakeholders in an attempt to develop broader consensus.

Academy staff composes the internal DGA team, which provides structure and consistency; maintains standards

of research and analysis, including for using the Evidence Analysis Library; and facilitates engagement with, and input of, Academy member experts and relevant DPGs participating in the member-focused working groups. In addition, the internal team provides staff support for the Academy's various topic-specific DGA working groups and drafts the Academy's comments at various intervals throughout the process.

Academy members are encouraged to work with their DPGs' Policy and Advocacy Leaders to provide input relevant to the substance and process of the 2020-2025 DPGs, and all registered dietitian nutritionists and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered will be essential in translating the recommendations of the guidelines into actionable change to

accelerate improvements in global health and well-being through food and nutrition.

References

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