

2026 Opening Session Remarks Transcript

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to FNCE.

I am thrilled to be here with all of you today in historic San Antonio.

Before we begin, I want to recognize our Board of Directors, all of our volunteer leaders, our Academy staff who does the really hard work for FNCE, and anyone else who gave time to support the Academy and our profession. Thank you so much for everything you do.

One of my favorite things about FNCE is seeing so many people from all areas of nutrition and dietetics together in one place.

We come from different areas of practice, and we are at different points in our careers. But for a few days we get to come together and celebrate the work we are all passionate about.

And when I look around this room I don't just see where we are today.

I see where we are going.

The future of nutrition and dietetics isn't far off. We can already see it taking shape.

And for me, one of the places I see this most clearly is in my students. They're over there.

My students and my role as an educator are a huge part of what drives me.

I would not be standing on this stage today if I weren't an educator trying to be a good example for them.

I want my students to see that leadership can take many forms.

It can mean getting involved. It can mean speaking up. It can mean asking a difficult question or taking a chance on something new.

And it means recognizing that you have a role in shaping the profession you are entering.

Serving as Academy President is another opportunity for me to model that kind of involvement and responsibility.

But the truth is, I learn from my students just as much as I teach them, and that really excites me.

They question assumptions. They think differently about what is possible. And they are looking at careers that may be very different from what many of us imagined when we first entered dietetics.

Our profession has never been one single career path, and those possibilities continue to expand.

I see students and young professionals taking their nutrition and dietetics training into public health.

I see them working in global school meals and research.

Others are moving into food industry roles or regulatory work. Some are helping drive product innovation.

Clinical dietetics remains an essential part of who we are, but it is one part of an increasingly broad profession.

The knowledge and skills we bring make an impact in so many different places.

And I want you to hear from two people who are already showing us what that can look like.

Both Erin Ogden and Trisha Sterringer are former students of mine, and I asked them to share what excites them about the future of nutrition and dietetics and where they see themselves contributing.

Looking to the future of nutrition and dietetics is so exciting and inspiring.

The importance of good nutrition is never going away, and there will be so many opportunities for nutrition professionals and students to inform and shape public policy at all levels federal, state and local. And this is exactly where I see my own impacts too.

I know we can all work together towards more sound nutrition policy wins that actually improve the health of our communities and neighbors.

Dietitians and NDTRs are well equipped for leadership roles in this field.

What excites me the most about the future of nutrition and dietetics is that it seems like nutrition is at the forefront of a lot of public conversations, and people are really interested in learning how to properly fuel and nurse their bodies.

So this creates an amazing opportunity for dietetics professionals to really be able to shine as the experts in nutrition.

Where I see myself contributing to the future of our profession is through dietetics, education and training.

Through my current roles and teaching, mentorship, and as a dietetic internship director, I have an amazing opportunity to engage with the next generation of dietetics professionals

who get to provide all of that amazing, evidence based information that the public seems to be craving.

Thanks, Trisha.

Thanks, Erin.

I love hearing those perspectives because Erin and Trisha are examples of what we mean when we talk about the future.

And this is not about just getting more students into nutrition and dietetics programs.

We also need to create a profession people want to join.

They need to see themselves building meaningful and sustainable careers in nutrition and dietetics.

That means showing students the wide range of possibilities available to them.

It also means removing barriers and creating opportunities to enter the profession.

And those of us who are established in our careers have an important role and responsibility.

We can mentor. We can teach. We can create opportunities. We can open doors.

We aren't handing the profession to the next generation.

We are building it with them.

And we are building it at a time when our profession is changing in real time.

Nutrition has never been more visible or more important than it is today.

At the same time, the world around us is moving quickly.

Technology is changing. Healthcare is changing. Food systems are changing.

The way people find nutrition information is changing as well.

Some of the careers students are preparing for today did not exist 20, 10 years ago.

We have to recognize those new opportunities and think about new ways RDNs and NDTRs can contribute.

We should help define what the future of nutrition and dietetics looks like instead of waiting for someone else to define it for us.

A, thank you.

AI is one example. It's already changing how people find nutrition information. It is also changing how professionals work.

But the question isn't, "What will AI do to our profession?"

We should be asking: "How can we shape how these tools are used responsibly and effectively?"

How can technology extend our expertise?

How can AI help us work differently or reach more people?

Our students and early-career professionals may see possibilities in these tools that some of us don't.

Innovation like this expands our reach and impact of qualified nutrition professionals.

It should not diminish the value of our expertise.

That brings me to the work of our Academy.

Our Strategic Plan is our compass for ensuring the progress we are making connects to what matters most for members and the profession.

That progress should mean more people understand the value of RDNs and NDTRs.

It should mean more opportunities to practice and lead.

It should give practitioners stronger evidence and better resources to support their work.

And it should mean RDNs and NDTRs have a voice in more of the places where decisions about food, nutrition and health are being made.

On Monday during Mission in Motion, CEO Dr. Wylecia Wiggs Harris will share more about the progress we are making and how that work is moving us into the future.

Part of this progress also means looking beyond the places and partnerships that feel most comfortable to us.

If we want our profession to grow, we need to build new relationships and work in new settings.

We need stronger connections with people and organizations where work intersects with ours.

Those relationships can create opportunities and help more people understand the expertise our profession brings.

At the same time, we need to remain clear about who we are.

Our identity is grounded in science and evidence - rooted in education and expertise.

And while we may work in very different settings or follow very different career paths, there is room for all of us in this profession.

Over the years, I have watched students go on to do things I never imagined when I first became an educator.

That makes me so excited about what comes next.

If these are the opportunities our students are creating today, imagine what the next generation will be doing 10 years from now.

Our responsibility is to make sure we are ready for those possibilities.

We need to provide the next generation with the opportunity to grow and give them the support to take chances.

And we need to give them the confidence to take this profession to places we may not be able to see today.

Each of us has a role in building that future.

Mentoring, opening a new door or welcoming a different perspective, exploring a new partnership.

Our collective voice is stronger when we work together and when we recognize the many ways our colleagues contribute.

FNCE gives us a chance to see the future of our profession all in one place.

So, over the next few days, I hope you deepen your expertise.

But I also hope you look beyond your own lane.

Engage with someone doing something very different from you.

Listen to an idea you haven't considered before.

And think about what else may be possible for this profession.

When I look at my students, I don't just see the next generation of our profession.

I see possibilities for our profession that we haven't even dreamt up yet.

Our job is to make sure the next generation has every opportunity to turn those possibilities into reality.

Thank you so much for being a part of this profession that I love. And once again, welcome to FNCE.