

February 11, 2025

Statement for the Record
Submitted to the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee by the
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Hearing Title: “Modernizing American Health Care: Creating Healthy
Options and Better Incentives”

Chairman Buchanan, Ranking Member Doggett, and Members of the Subcommittee,

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the Academy) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record and thanks the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing on incentivizing healthy behavior and preventative care in the workplace. We are eager to work with Congress and the new Administration to implement policies that foster healthier lifestyles, promote preventive care, and expand access to evidence-based nutrition services. By prioritizing comprehensive nutrition strategies, we can help individuals make informed dietary choices, manage chronic conditions, and improve overall health outcomes. The Academy looks forward to collaborating on initiatives that integrate nutrition into broader public health efforts, ensuring that all Americans have the tools and resources they need to thrive and achieve their best health.

Founded in 1917, the Academy has remained steadfast in its mission to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities through nutrition. For over a century, we have worked to advance evidence-based nutrition policies and practices that help people make informed food and lifestyle choices to manage chronic diseases and promote overall well-being.

The Academy represents more than 112,000 credentialed practitioners in the fields of food, nutrition, and dietetics. Our members include registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), nutrition and dietetic technicians, and other nutrition professionals dedicated to improving the nation’s health through food and nutrition. In addition to its role in advancing clinical care, the Academy provides a range of services including continuing education, professional development, advocacy for public policy changes, and initiatives to improve food security and nutrition literacy. Furthermore, the Academy is deeply engaged in cutting-edge research that informs best practices and policy recommendations, ensuring that the latest advancements in nutrition science are translated into effective, real-world applications for patients, employers, and the broader public.

The Role of Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs)

At the heart of our work are Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs)—credentialed professionals who undergo rigorous education, training, and certification to provide personalized, evidence-based nutrition care. RDNs complete a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, an accredited dietetic internship, and pass a national board examination before becoming credentialed. Many also hold master’s degrees or advanced specialty certifications. Their expertise ensures that patients, employers, and policymakers have access to credible and science-backed nutrition information.

RDNs serve in a variety of care settings, including:

- Hospitals and Clinics – Providing medical nutrition therapy (MNT) to patients with acute and chronic diseases.
- Workplace Wellness Programs – Partnering with employers to develop and implement health promotion initiatives.
- Community and Public Health Organizations – Teaching, monitoring, and advising the public, and helping to improve their quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- Telehealth and Virtual Counseling – Expanding access to Medical Nutrition Therapy and nutrition counseling for employees, especially those in remote or underserved areas.

- Private Practice – Working under contract with health care or other companies, or in their own businesses. RDNs may provide services to foodservice or restaurant managers, food vendors and distributors, athletes, nursing home residents, or company employees.
- Sports Nutrition – Educating clients about the connection between food, fitness, and health.
- Universities and Medical Centers – Teaching physicians, nurses, dietetics students, and others the sophisticated science of foods and nutrition.
- Research – Working in food and pharmaceutical companies, universities, and hospitals, directing or conducting experiments to answer critical nutrition questions and developing alternative foods or nutrition recommendations for the public.

The Value of Nutrition in Employer-Based Health Incentives

The Academy commends the Committee for exploring ways that employers can encourage healthier behaviors among their employees. As six in ten Americans live with at least one chronic disease, innovative employer-driven health incentives can play a critical role in improving health outcomes and reducing long-term healthcare costs. Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) delivered by RDNs is a proven intervention for managing and preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and hypertension. Studies have demonstrated that MNT:

- Reduces healthcare costs by decreasing hospitalizations and disease complications.
- Improves employee productivity and well-being through tailored nutrition interventions.
- Enhances workplace wellness programs

Employers have the flexibility to integrate nutrition care in several ways, including incorporating MNT as a covered benefit within their health plans, employer wellness programs and incentives, and/or through third-party point solution programs. However, with flexibility also comes variability in how nutrition care is provided. The Academy supports policies that encourage employers to adopt high-quality, evidence-based nutrition interventions while maintaining the flexibility to choose models that best fit their workforce needs. Doing so, would support alignment between employer-based nutrition offerings and the goals of reducing healthcare costs, improving productivity, and enhancing workplace wellness programs

Additionally, the expansion of Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) services is critical to increasing access to effective nutrition interventions. The Academy supports policies that expand the types of practitioners who can refer patients for MNT services, such as those outlined in the MNT Act for Medicare. Allowing a broader range of healthcare providers to refer patients for MNT would help employees access these vital services more readily, improve chronic disease management, and reduce long-term healthcare costs. The Academy encourages the Committee to consider this expansion as a policy measure to enhance employee health and well-being by integrating evidence-based nutrition strategies.

The Academy also supports efforts like The Chronic Disease Flexible Coverage Act, which expands the use of first-dollar coverage in high-deductible health plans (HDHPs) for chronic disease management. We believe nutrition services should be included among these high-value interventions covered by employer health plans and wellness incentives. Expanding access to these services would not only provide employees with more tools to manage chronic diseases but also lead to improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and lower healthcare costs for employers. Additionally, greater employer investment in nutrition services can contribute to a healthier workforce, fostering a culture of wellness and prevention. The Academy strongly encourages policymakers to continue exploring policies that integrate nutrition services into workplace health initiatives, making them more accessible and effective for all employees.

Expanding Access to Nutrition Services through HSAs

We also applaud the Subcommittee for considering the role of Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) in expanding access to preventive care. Medical Nutrition Therapy is often designated to treat a medical condition, and thus do not always align under preventive services per the Internal Revenue Service guidance. Given the clear link between nutrition and chronic disease prevention, allowing pre-tax HSA dollars to be used for nutrition services provides employees with greater flexibility and choice in managing their health. The Academy strongly supports efforts to codify the use of HSA funds for tools to prevent and manage chronic diseases such as evidence-based nutrition services, including MNT and preventative nutrition counseling as eligible medical services.

Access to MNT through HSAs also enables individuals to seek professional nutrition counseling while minimizing financial barriers, ensuring they receive the guidance needed to manage conditions like diabetes, hypertension,

and obesity effectively. Employers can further support these efforts by integrating HSA-funded nutrition counseling into their workplace wellness programs, which has been shown to enhance employee well-being, increase productivity, and reduce long-term healthcare expenses. Additionally, increasing awareness of these benefits through employer-sponsored educational initiatives can help maximize the utilization of these critical nutrition services.

The Academy's Commitment to Working with Congress and Employers

The Academy is committed to collaborating with the Committee, employers, and policymakers to advance innovative, evidence-based solutions that empower individuals to make healthier choices. We look forward to working with Congress to expand access to nutrition services through employer-sponsored health plans and to develop sustainable incentives that promote long-term employee health and well-being.

We welcome the opportunity to provide additional insights and data on the benefits of medical nutrition therapy and employer-driven health initiatives. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and we look forward to continuing our work together to improve health outcomes for all Americans.

Respectfully submitted,

Harlivleen "Livleen" Gill, MBA, RDN, LDN, FAND
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2024-25 President