



## Healthy Aging Older Americans Act Reauthorization

Registered dietitians work to improve the health of older Americans through access to healthy foods and nutrition services. The American Dietetic Association represents more than 70,000 members, the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals.

### **We ask for support of the passage of the Older Americans Act.**

The Older Americans Act (OAA) was passed in 1965 to address inadequate community social services for older persons. One of the major emphases was on nutrition. Two programs were created in 1972: congregate dining and home delivered meals. Both provide important access to healthy food options for older adults. The OAA is considered to be the major vehicle for social and nutrition services to this group.

### **Why Nutrition is Important**

87% of older adults have one or more of the most common chronic diseases-hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease, all of which are preventable or treatable in part with appropriate nutrition services.<sup>i</sup>

- Proper nutrition makes it possible to maintain health and functionality and positively impacts the quality of life in older adults.
- As primary prevention and health promotion, nutrition counseling lessens chronic disease risk and addresses problems that can lead to more serious conditions. As a component of chronic disease management, medical nutrition therapy (MNT) slows disease progression and reduces symptoms.
- Older adults who routinely eat nutritious food and drink adequate amounts of fluids are less likely to have complications from chronic disease and to require care in a hospital or other facility.

***Cost-Benefit Support: The cost of one day in a hospital roughly equals the cost of one year of OAA Nutrition program meals. One month in a nursing home equals that of providing mid-day meals five days a week for about seven years.***<sup>ii</sup>

### **What We Would Like Included in the Reauthorization**

1. Ensure language that qualified nutrition staff, including registered dietitians, are at the local, regional, state and federal levels of the aging network that will result in cost-effective nutrition services and evidence-based interventions.
2. Include language that supports a strong evidence-based nutrition and health component through programs that include targeted nutrition screening, assessment, nutrition counseling and education.

<sup>i</sup> Position of the American Dietetic Association, American Society for Nutrition and Society for Nutrition Education: Food and Nutrition Programs for Community-Residing Older Adults. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2010;110:463-472.

<sup>ii</sup> 2007 State program report. US Administration on Aging Web site. [http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Program\\_Results/SPR/2007/Index.aspx#national](http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Program_Results/SPR/2007/Index.aspx#national). Last modified July 16, 2009. Accessed September 15, 2009.