

**Written Statement of
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Listening Session
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Chairman Hardy, members of the Policy Committee, and Dr. McGee:

I am Laura Howard, Executive Director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP). On behalf of NANASP's over-900 members across the country, I thank you for this opportunity to present NANASP's thoughts on the agenda for the next White House Conference on Aging.

As a professional membership organization representing the interests of members at all levels of the aging network who are dedicated to providing quality nutrition and other direct services for older Americans, NANASP has a particular interest in the upcoming White House Conference on Aging. It will be held the year before the first baby boomers become eligible for the Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition and other service programs. This will make the OAA the first federal service program for the elderly to confront this demographic challenge.

Nutrition providers are acutely aware that the population they serve today is both changing and growing. One of the major challenges will be to attract those seniors newly eligible for OAA programs to participate. This may require a redefinition of congregate meals for a new generation. Nutrition programs will need to reassess and possibly redesign menus, service delivery methods and ancillary services offered to meet the expectations and desires of this new population, while continuing to serve those currently receiving services. Programs must balance these demands while adhering to federal nutritional standards in an ever-tighter budget environment.

The OAA nutrition programs and services have a great effect on several of the key issue areas the Policy Committee has identified. Nutrition is the most basic of human needs and therefore significantly impacts the health and long-term living of older Americans. Through the nutrition programs, seniors above the age of 60 can receive a meal at a congregate site or through a home-delivered program that provides one-third of their daily recommended nutritional intake. This provides a greater health status to seniors who otherwise might not be able to achieve proper nutrition. The nutrition programs also allow seniors to remain independent and in their homes instead of being prematurely institutionalized. As long-term care needs grow with increased life expectancy, home and community-based services will play an integral part in maintaining the dignity, independence, and health status of many seniors.

OAA nutrition programs also provide opportunities for social engagement in both congregate and home-delivered meal programs. It cannot be stressed enough that congregate programs are more than just a meal—they provide an opportunity for

education and socialization and allow seniors to maintain community ties and stay active in society. In the home delivered program, the meal delivery is at times the only chance for an isolated senior to engage in human contact. This socialization is important to reducing isolation and is a tool used to monitor the safety and well-being of seniors living alone. The nutrition programs also allow seniors to remain active by providing opportunities for volunteerism and civic involvement. In general, boomers have achieved a higher level of education than their elders, the value of which can be utilized to make a positive impact on their communities and the services for which they are eligible.

The nutrition programs can also have a positive impact on the environment and the local marketplace. Many NANASP members have experience with the USDA Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides seniors with coupons that may be redeemed at local farmer's markets and produce stands. This program has mutually beneficial effects in that it supports local farmers by providing a customer base for their agricultural products while ensuring that fresh fruits and vegetables necessary for a healthy diet are available to seniors who need them. Through the nutrition programs seniors can also learn how environmental factors affect them. Hazardous conditions such as heat stroke or hypothermia can be deadly for seniors. With education and the monitoring of a home-delivered meal recipient, these dangers can be avoided.

Nutrition providers are and will continue to be an essential part of the health care team and social network of older Americans. In many cases, they are the "first responder" to a senior in need. They are also a trusted source of information and resources and are more likely to be called upon by boomers who will take an active role in their own health care and wellness.

Therefore, NANASP encourages the next White House Conference on Aging to:

- Engage boomers in discussions about future directions of present day service programs for the elderly to ensure their participation;
- Recognize the crosscutting value of good nutrition to the physical and mental health of older persons;
- Examine the cost effectiveness of the Older Americans Act nutrition programs as well as the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and recommend ways to strengthen these programs in the future;
- Recommend a regular review of the nutritional value of these programs with a special focus on having these meals be culturally and generationally responsive;
- Ensure the strongest possible commitment to food safety in all these programs.

As you are aware, the next reauthorization of the OAA is scheduled for next year, as is the Conference. We hope this Conference will contribute not only to the next reauthorization, but the ones that will follow over the next decade.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee. We look forward to working with you to achieve a successful and productive Conference.