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I am pleased to be able to present this testimony on the health benefits of multivitamins for older Americans before this **Public Listening Session of the 2004 White House Conference on Aging** in conjunction with the 2004 Governor's Conference on Aging sponsored by the State of Illinois Department on Aging on December 8, 2004 at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Chicago, IL.

Nutrition status surveys and national nutrition monitoring efforts consistently reveal a significant portion of older Americans fail to meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for several key vitamins and minerals. For example, recent surveys, including the NHANES III and CSFII show that 78% of women over 70 years fail to achieve even 75% of the RDA for vitamin E, with a similar relationship reported at a prevalence of 49% for vitamin A, 40% for vitamin C, 62% for vitamin B6, and 35% for vitamin B12. Men over 70 have a similarly high prevalence of failing to consume even 75% of the RDA with values at 53% for vitamin E, 35% for vitamin A, 25% for vitamin C, and 35% for vitamin B6.

Addressing this problem presents a challenge, but the daily use of a multivitamin/multi-mineral supplement offers a practical approach to help bring micronutrient intakes in line with current recommendations. While our top nutrition priority should continue to be getting older Americans to follow the DHHS/USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a daily multivitamin can be an effective "safety net" to ensure its users are meeting the recommended levels of micronutrients associated with the promotion of health.

A growing body of research reveals an inverse association between inadequate micronutrient intake and the risk of several chronic diseases common among older adults. In some cases, the evidence is definitive and the role of food fortification and dietary supplementation is clear, for example, the benefits of calcium and vitamin D on osteoporosis. In other cases, the data are still emerging, but the promise is clear, as illustrated by randomized clinical trials and/or large-scale observational studies showing multivitamins can reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration, colon cancer,

peripheral arterial disease, myocardial infarct, and multiple sclerosis, as well as enhance immunity and decrease the incidence of infectious disease episodes in older adults.

The totality of available evidence has led some leading medical journals to recommend a daily multivitamin, especially for older Americans. With this as a backdrop, the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of California, Los Angeles, organized *Multivitamins and Public Health: Exploring the Evidence*, a conference held in Washington, D.C. last October. We reviewed the state of the science examining the potential effects of multivitamin use and determined the prospective value of such supplementation. With the proceedings of the meeting now being prepared for publication (a summary report is attached to this testimony), I can tell you that the panel concurred that the available scientific evidence is sufficiently robust to recommend multivitamin supplementation as a prudent and convenient way to help Americans meet their micronutrient requirements and to help promote public health. Importantly, the panel emphasized that several nutrient requirements increase in older adults, owing to age-related changes in physiology, health status, body composition, and level of physical activity (see page 8). And this situation is further magnified among those elderly who are chronically ill, dependent or institutionalized. As a consequence, nutrition demands particular attention in older adults to ensure the best possible quality of life.

In summary:

- A large number of older Americans do not meet, through their diets, the Recommended Dietary Allowance of many of the key vitamins and minerals essential to health promotion and disease prevention.

- Inadequate intake of select vitamins and minerals is a risk factor for chronic diseases, especially in vulnerable groups like the elderly.

- Vitamin supplementation has been demonstrated to improve immune function in older adults and a significant body of research suggests that appropriate intake of vitamins and minerals may contribute to a reduced risk of several chronic conditions, including some forms of cancer and heart disease.

- Multivitamin/mineral supplementation to increase micronutrient intake to recommended levels is a prudent and convenient way to improve the health status of older Americans.

- The available evidence is sufficiently robust for physicians and other healthcare providers to confidently recommend a daily multivitamin to their patients for general health promotion and disease prevention.

Now is the time for government health agencies, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, and all healthcare providers to recommend a daily multivitamin for older Americans. Importantly, a recommendation to our seniors to take a daily multivitamin

should prove simple to communicate and easy to comply with, as it is an inexpensive and effective method for ensuring they meet all of their micronutrient requirements.

Thank you.

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