



To Support All: Diversity and Inclusion

The Academy encourages diversity and inclusion by striving to recognize, respect, and include differences in ability, age, creed, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, size, and socio-economic characteristics in the nutrition and dietetics profession.

—Academy's revised Diversity Definition, adopted by the Board of Directors (February 2019)

PROVIDING THE BEST FOOD AND nutrition services and advice to a diverse American (and global) population requires a diverse profession that is broadly representative of our society and is attuned to people's cultural needs and traditions. With a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, Academy members can best work—individually and together—to achieve effective, innovative collaborations with our clients and patients to improve the public's health.

"The Academy is diverse in that it welcomes membership without discrimination," says Teresa Turner, MS, RD, LDN, a US Army Child and Youth Services nutritionist at Fort George G. Meade in Maryland, and chair of the Academy's Diversity Committee. "However, with less than 10% of membership identifying as part of a diverse group, there are not enough diverse decision makers and leaders in the Academy to give equal footing to all those represented."

Increasing diversity in the nutrition and dietetics profession has been a stated Academy priority since at least the early 1980s, when our first diversity/affirmative action plan was created. The Academy developed a 5-year Diversity Strategic Plan in 2015 that includes initiatives to increase the diversity of our membership and to foster and increase members' cultural competence.

We developed and/or support the Diversity Leaders Program, a Diversity Mentoring Toolkit, and more than 60 Diversity Liaisons within dietetic practice groups and member interest groups who create outreach events and recruit diverse individuals. The Diversity Committee sponsors awards and grants that assist in funding outreach events and other tools.

The Academy created both Diversity Awards and specific grants to encourage groups to hold outreach events; offers leadership and diversity training through certificate of training programs and educational scholarships; and publishes accessible resources to improve members' cultural competency. Read much more about our plan at www.eatrightpro.org/leadership/honors-and-awards/diversity-awards-and-grants.

REVISED DEFINITION

It has become increasingly clear, especially in recent years, that organizations such as the Academy must look beyond diversifying our membership and profession and ensure that all who enter dietetics feel they belong and can thrive. In 2018, the Diversity Committee reviewed the Academy's Diversity Definition, and recommended to the Board of Directors that the Academy revise our definition.

The committee recommended adding "Inclusion" to the Diversity Definition "to reflect the importance of encouraging diverse individuals into the profession and continued involvement (akin to recruitment and retention)." At our February meeting, the Board adopted the new definition found at the beginning of this article.

"A PART OF SOMETHING"

"It is important to know the difference between diversity and inclusion, and ideally to value and actively practice both," says Judith C. Rodriguez, PhD, RDN, LDN, FADA, FAND, professor of nutrition and dietetics at the University of North Florida, past member of the Diversity Committee, and the Academy's 2010-2011 President.

"While diversity is about a variety or range of groups, inclusion is about being, and feeling, a part of something. A group may have many different persons, but not all, or any, may feel as though they are *included*. Likewise, a group may have many persons who are included, but the group is homogeneous. Both elements are important to our profession," Rodriguez says.

"A profession with a diverse group of practitioners is richer in knowledge and resources and can serve more persons in



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culturally appropriate and competent ways. An inclusive group of practitioners ensures that all members are welcome and contribute, benefit from, and provide benefits to others."

THE PEAK OF INCLUSION

Teresa Turner adds: "It is also my hope that the Academy, its members, and other professionals realize that the peak of inclusion will not be reached until there is no longer a need to pen the terminology. When it becomes the standard that all are represented equally, the concepts of diversity and inclusion will hopefully become antiquated. Ideally, no one will need to be included because no single group will be the standard by which to be included," and all will be welcomed.

In the spirit of diversity and inclusion, the Academy will continue to actively promote role models, establish scholarships, and provide mentoring opportunities to diverse individuals at every stage of their careers. We will continue to make educational and cultural competency resources available to all members. We will actively execute our Diversity and Inclusion communications plan, focusing efforts in areas of greatest potential.

The Academy is committed to creating a diverse *and* inclusive profession that closely resembles the communities we serve and supports all people in achieving their health and nutrition goals.

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