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## Providing Access Is a Key to a Diverse Academy and Profession

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' newly refreshed Strategic Plan includes areas where we will "focus efforts to accelerate progress toward achieving the vision and mission through impact goals that help focus, set priorities and assign resources."<sup>1</sup> In addition to well-being and prevention, nutrition care, and health systems and nutrition security and food safety, the board added a new impact goal: diversity and inclusion.

For the second straight year, the COVID-19 pandemic converted virtually all meetings of Academy affiliates, dietetic practice groups, member interest groups, and other groups and organizations to virtual events. With my fellow members of the board of directors, I participated in many of these groups' spring 2021 meetings.

At session after session, during discussion after discussion, I took part in forward-looking exchanges that show our grassroots groups—and their members and leaders—are confronting our most significant issues in candid, open, and genuine ways. I came away more impressed than ever at the great things that are happening at the grassroots level.

The addition of diversity and inclusion to our Strategic Plan as an impact goal is a crucial step. "Disparities in health care have real consequences in the moral and ethical fabric of society," says Mary Lee Chin, MS, RD, chair of the Academy's Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

"In updating the Academy's Strategic Plan, we see clearly that there is broad recognition from members and leadership that we all want to be part of the solution. The committee knows we have the responsibility to create a D&I [diversity and inclusion] action plan that reflects the views of members, based on intense and intentional listening. We partner and support the creation of strategies and tactics by Academy organizational units who know their human and financial resources, the will and needs of their members, and who have the responsibility and the authority to institute direction and changes."

A concept that each of our focus areas has in common is *access*. Creating resources must be accompanied by significant strides in making our services *accessible* to all and increasing opportunities for all to enter and succeed in the nutrition and dietetics profession. A significant step we have taken is to create a central online location where news, resources, and other content related to diversity and inclusion are quickly available: the new Diversity and Inclusion Hub ([www.eatrightpro.org/practice/practice-resources/diversity-and-inclusion](http://www.eatrightpro.org/practice/practice-resources/diversity-and-inclusion)).

On the Hub, you will find updates from the D&I Committee; projects undertaken by Academy groups and

individuals; dozens of resources devoted to improving access for students and practitioners at every level, including publications and recorded professional development sessions; information on applying for Foundation scholarships; translations of National Nutrition Month® materials into multiple languages; latest news articles and informative videos. The D&I Hub is constantly being updated, so please visit often.

The Foundation's board of directors conducted a high-level review of its Strategic Plan in March, focusing on 3 strategic

### SEEKING COLLABORATIONS

The Academy continually seeks ways to collaborate with outside organizations as Academy members focus their diversity and inclusion efforts as well. In May, in a letter<sup>2</sup> from the Academy's Chief Executive Officer Patricia Babjak, the Academy reached out to Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH, the new director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We offered the Academy's congratulations and support for the CDC's Racism and Health initiative, informing her of our strategic alignment and offering the Academy's support. An excerpt from the letter follows:

*Marginalized and minoritized populations have historically faced chronic disease health disparities due to socioeconomic inequalities and reduced access to comprehensive health care and preventive services, healthful foods and safe places to be active, and the Academy is dedicated to advocating for policies and programs that promote health equity. We have been longtime supporters of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity and the Division's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health and State Physical Activity and Nutrition grant programs. We are pleased to share our recently published Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities and Chronic Disease Issue Brief and encourage its broad dissemination.*

priorities: ensuring significant efforts to support inclusion, diversity, equity, and access are reflected in language used by the Foundation, investing in the signature Kids Eat Right public education program, and reaffirming its commitment to support outcomes research.

“Our Foundation is a catalyst for the profession to come together and collaborate to address the greatest food and nutrition challenges, now and in the future,” says Foundation Chair Becky Dorner, RDN, LD, FAND. “The Foundation’s board understands the significance of this process to ensure our Strategic Plan aligns with the issues and needs of Academy members, our profession, and the health of the public. We are committed, along with the Academy, to continue to make inclusion, diversity, equity, and access a priority, along with critical programs and research that empower nutrition and dietetics professionals to help consumers live healthier lifestyles.”

I hope all members will follow the lead of the D&I Committee, affiliates, dietetic practice groups, member interest

groups, the Foundation, and individual members and join me in answering the question:

What can I do—in my workplace, in my educational institution, in my everyday life—to make nutrition and dietetics a more meaningful presence in the lives of a diverse population and encourage diverse individuals to enter our profession and thrive in it?

Our answers to this question will determine our future.

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### References

1. Eat Right Pro. The Academy’s strategic plan. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://www.eatrightpro.org/leadership/governance/board-of-directors/strategic-plan>.
2. Eat Right Pro. Academy letter to CDC director Dr. Rochelle Walensky. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://www.eatrightpro.org/news-center/member-updates/from-our-leaders/academy-letter-to-cdc-director>.