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Nutrition Services for Older Adults at Home and in Communities

The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) has partnered with the American Dietetic Association (ADA) and American Society for Nutrition (ASN) to publish a position paper focusing on access to safe and adequate food and nutrition services, including nutrition education, for the increasing number of older adults who receive health care in their homes or communities rather than in nursing homes or other residential facilities.

The position paper is published in the March/April issue of SNE's Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior and the March issue of Journal of the American Dietetic Association. It was written and issued jointly by SNE, ADA and ASN, and represents all three associations' official stance on this health issue:

Given the federal cost containment policy to rebalance long-term care away from nursing homes to home- and community-based services, it is the position of the American Dietetic Association, the American Society for Nutrition and the Society for Nutrition Education that all older adults should have access to food and nutrition programs that ensure the availability of safe, adequate food to promote optimal nutritional status. Appropriate food and nutrition programs include adequately funded food assistance and meal programs, nutrition education, screening, assessment, counseling, therapy, monitoring, evaluation and outcomes documentation to ensure more healthful aging. The growing number of older adults, the health care focus on prevention and the global economic situation accentuate the fundamental need for these programs

"We are pleased to have the opportunity to join both ADA and ASN in establishing a position on nutrition services for older adults," says Geoffrey Greene, PhD, RD, LDN of the University of Rhode Island and SNE President. "With an increase in life expectancy, it is essential that older adults have the opportunity to remain independent at home and in the community."

The joint SNE, ADA and ASN position paper focuses on access to safe and adequate food for older adults in communities and addresses issues related to food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition, and food and nutrition programs serving older adults in community settings. According to the paper, nearly 13 percent of the U.S. population is age 65 and older and is living longer and growing in absolute numbers, with those aged 85 years and older the fastest-growing segment. Projections for 2030 estimate an increase to 72 million or 20 percent of the population.

With rising costs representing a significant factor for older people in making decisions about health care, the paper addresses food assistance programs, which may help reduce these costs by helping people stay in their homes. The paper asserts that some food assistance programs can support more people living healthfully and independently at home than those older adults living in a nursing facility. Recommendations for older adults include promoting healthful aging and optimal nutritional status as well as seeking out resources in their communities to help them remain independent as they age.

Kamp BJ, Wellman NS, Russell C. 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 Nutr Educ Behav*, 2010; 42:72-82 DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2009.12.001