

December 10, 2018

Christopher J. Lynch, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary of the NIH Nutrition Research Task Force

Submitted via email: nutritionresearch@niddk.nih.gov

Re: RFI: Draft Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research

Dear Dr. Lynch,

The Defeat Malnutrition Today coalition is pleased to submit brief comments on the Draft Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research.

Defeat Malnutrition Today is a diverse coalition of over 80 national, state, and local organizations who are committed to defeating older adult malnutrition across the continuum of care, including community, healthy aging, nutrition, advocacy, health care professional, faith-based, and private sector groups. We are focused on advancing this fight through federal and state policy and advocacy.

To date, diet quality and excess body weight have been the primary areas of focus in government goals and strategies for older adult nutrition. Malnutrition has generally not been accounted for in the educational opportunities and literature, and especially not in materials distributed and rules created by the federal government, or in national health surveys that include the older adult population. However, malnutrition is a significant problem for both underweight and overweight or obese individuals due to loss of lean body mass.

We are very pleased to see many mentions of malnutrition in this Strategic Plan, particularly as it relates to older adults' health. As our population ages, it is extremely important to study this issue. Today, there are 49.2 million seniors 65 and older, comprising 15.2 percent of the U.S. population; in just two years from now, the senior population is projected to be 56.4 million, or 17 percent of the overall population. Between 2020 and 2030, there will be an additional 18 million seniors in the United States.

As you noted, malnutrition is unfortunately a common issue among older adults. In the acute care hospital setting, it is estimated that approximately 20 to 50 percent of admitted patients are malnourished or at-risk of malnutrition. According to the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging, nearly 35-50 percent of older residents in long term care facilities are malnourished. Research into this condition, as well as related concerns such as sarcopenic obesity, is critical.

One entity you should strongly consider partnering with in this research is the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (USDA HNRCA) at the Friedman School of Nutrition at Tufts University. Their effort in studying healthy aging and its relationship to nutrition and

physical activity is significant, and they have made contributions to U.S. and international nutritional and physical activity recommendations, public policy, and clinical healthcare. They are on the cutting edge of older adult nutrition research and would be an ideal partner with whom to continue research efforts into these conditions.

Thank you for considering our comments, and please let us know if we can provide you with any further information. You may reach us at info@defeatmalnutrition.today.

Sincerely,

Bob Blancato
National Coordinator
Defeat Malnutrition Today