

Meredith Whitmire, Policy Director, Defeat Malnutrition Today
Oral Comments—Second Meeting, 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines
Advisory Committee

July 11, 2019

Hello. I am Meredith Whitmire, Policy Director for the Defeat Malnutrition Today coalition, a group of 90 national, state and local organizations and agencies fighting older adult malnutrition.

The framework and approach outlined for the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines highlight the importance of guidelines to improve the nutritional intake of Americans across the lifespan. As older adults represent a growing proportion of the U.S., including dietary guidelines relevant to an aging population is important.

In fact, older adult malnutrition is a growing crisis in America today—one in two older adults face the threat of malnourishment.

Malnutrition is pervasive, costly, and contributes to disability and slower recovery; however, it has not yet been addressed by a systematic, consistent approach throughout the continuum of care, including in our communities.

We were very excited to see the focus question on the relationship between dietary patterns consumed and sarcopenia. Malnutrition is a leading cause of sarcopenia, and many cases of severe sarcopenia could have been prevented with an adequate diet.

Relatedly, in your work researching nutrients of public health concern, we ask you to closely consider necessary intake of protein in older adults. Studies show that older adults need a substantially higher amount of protein to maintain their muscle mass and prevent

sarcopenia, and yet the reference intakes are the same for all groups aged 14 and older, male and female. This should be reevaluated.

We are also excited that you're studying the current prevalence of nutrition-related chronic health outcomes. In your evaluations, we ask you to consider the presence of malnutrition when you're examining chronic health outcomes, since poor nutrition causes some conditions and exacerbates many others.

Ultimately, older adult malnutrition is preventable – but to defeat it, we must first address it. The work of the Advisory Committee can and should lead the way on this effort. Thank you for having me and thank you for your important work.