

Thank you to the USDA for inviting me to speak at today's listening session. My name is Tamar Magarik Haro and I am the Senior Director of Federal and State Advocacy for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of 66,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical sub-specialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) play a crucial role in the lives of millions of children. Pediatricians routinely look to the dietary guidelines to provide advice to our patients, and we do so with confidence that the best scientific evidence available was used to inform the recommendations.

The dietary guidelines underpin key federal nutrition programs like WIC and the school meals program. At a time when 21 percent of our children live in poverty and 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, the dietary guidelines empower families to tackle the double burden of food insecurity and obesity by influencing healthier eating in school and at home.

We applaud the outstanding work of USDA and HHS on the scientific, evidence-based assessment of nutrition for our youngest children through the Pregnancy/ Birth to 24 Months (P/B to 24) Project. The results of that project will be incredibly important for the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC).

The time period from pregnancy through early childhood, often referred to as the first 1,000 days, is one of rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social development and because of this, early nutrition sets the course for preventing many diseases, even those that would occur in adulthood such as obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Provision of adequate amounts of critical nutrients, such as iron and zinc, is needed for normal neurodevelopment. Failure to provide such key nutrients during the critical period of brain development may result in lifelong deficits in brain function despite subsequent nutrient repletion.

The AAP looks forward to the inclusion of evidence-based dietary guidelines for children birth to 24 months in the 2020 DGAs as required by the 2014 Farm Bill. They will be a crucial resource for pediatricians, parents, and caregivers. There is no substitute for national dietary guidelines for this uniquely vulnerable population. While AAP publishes the Pediatric Nutrition Handbook and other policy statements related to nutrition, these are not national guidelines that are developed using evidence-based reviews like the DGA process; instead, they are resources intended to guide clinical decision making by pediatricians.

As USDA and other agencies consider the makeup of the next DGAC, it will be critical that several pediatricians with expertise in this unique age group as well as the needs of older children are included in the committee that is chosen. Members of the various work groups of the P/B-24 Project and other leaders in the AAP nutrition community would make outstanding candidates to fulfill the expertise needed for the 2020 DGAs. While the DGA recommendations for other topic areas are based on over 20 years of critical research and analysis, guidelines for the B-24 population are novel and will require new resources. It is our hope that the development and dissemination of the 2020 DGAs will be adequately resourced.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.