

Get the Message Out on the Value of Nutrition Services or....

“Take Your Congressman to Work” Campaign!

Overview

Maybe you cannot really take your Congressman to work but the August District Work Period, (where Congressmen work in the home district) will provide a great opportunity for members to get to know their Congressman in your state. During this time it can be ideal for them to understand more about nutrition services and the effectiveness of the public funding.

There are over 100 new members of Congress that needed time to get oriented to the process of government and policy making. As a result, they have had little time to learn about the issues and the value of programs including nutrition services and interventions. Until now that is. The time is up! We need to connect ADA members and all members of Congress and share with them our value to improve the health of Americans through nutrition interventions and services. No one is better than us to tell that story and let them learn about these programs and the impact on their constituents and communities.

As you might have been tracking, budget cuts are making it through both chambers of Congress. In addition, the conversation on raising the debt ceiling is taking center stage in Washington DC. Programs that have discretionary spending will see reductions and mandatory programs as well. ADA staff is working hard to make sure the reductions are fair not only to members of the Association but also to ensure that there is not backsliding to improve the health of Americans. We support the reduction of the debt but want to make sure that reductions are done equitably and are not short sighted. We need to be proactive and use our members to educate members of Congress on what dietitians do, our value to saving health care dollars and to be a resource as the budget talks move forward.

The Plan

An ADA Public Policy awareness campaign (Take Your Congressman to Work) will be launched with members of Congress on the value of the registered dietitian during the August district work period. This is the time when members of Congress are home in their districts connecting with constituents. The dates of the recess are from August 8 - September 5. It is an ideal time for ADA members to connect with their Congressmen to have a discussion about the valuable services we provide. Here are a few ideas for visits or meetings: an invitation to visit a diabetes education class, a tour of a farm-to-school program or school visit to learn about all the innovative changes, visit to a community garden or WIC Farmers’ market, have a chance to deliver a home delivered meal to help keep a senior independent or a visit to a congregate dining site or the dining room of a long term care facility. Most Congressmen appreciate an invitation to see what is important to their constituents and how government funding is being used effectively. They want to know what is important to their constituents, the people that send them to Congress. If a visit is not possible, maybe a group visit or coffee hosted in home would be work as well.

Here are some more ideas from our Legislative Public Policy Committee Chair and Vice Chair...

1. Attend Town Hall meetings hosted by Congressmen.
2. Work with your state media representatives to have a radio interviews with RDs and elected officials on nutrition topics including obesity issue, diabetes and the pre-diabetes epidemic and the solutions we provide
3. Feature RDs at Farmer's Markets showing how to cook, prepare the fresh produce and the nutrition value of the produce and talk about the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program
4. Use personal stories that can be told be an individual who has had a successful outcome working with a RD. This speaks volumes.

"Illustrate the visits and show the faces of our members. Having quality photos from a good camera gives members an opportunity to illustrate the visits in local papers, which are, in turn, kept in the Congresspersons' offices. Add a personal client story to goes with the photos. That way, our focus is illustrated, along with our members' efforts. For example, if you are delivering meals to the homebound, have the story about the recipient and the success of keeping them at home creates that human interest story. It gives us an opportunity to give national data and local data (very personal). Shopping at a farmers' market with WIC and senior clients who are using vouchers would give a wonderful backdrop. Visiting a daycare center that uses USDA commodities, a WIC center with diverse clientele, are all great photo opportunities."

The Message...Why Registered Dietitians?

Now more than ever, we need to sell our value. We know we provide value in keeping Americans healthy, whether by changing behavior for individuals or for communities. We need to get this message out and we need to make sure we include our outcomes in our message. We know that it is no longer enough to ask for funding, we need to provide proof that services are effective and making a difference.

The PIA office will create some templates to leave behind for you to use that will cover the different practices areas. We will also create some talking points that can help set the stage.

Start gathering some statistics on number of clients/patients/students served, cost and return on investment, if known. Remember stories and photos are an impactful combination.

Your Role

As the Public Policy Coordinator (PPC) for your state dietetic association, would you lead efforts for this awareness campaign? Each state dietetic association is unique as is the state's public panel. We do not want to be prescriptive on how you make these connections but rather give you the support you need. You know your resources and time available. We also know that many Congressmen have issues that have piqued their interest more than others. Some are interested in children, others in older adults, some in farming issues and some focused on the budget. Find out their hot buttons by reading the paper or listening to their media interviews. You can tailor your message to their interests. The most important thing to remember is give them the reason why they should fund these nutrition programs, interventions and services. This will be a win/win for everyone and the continuing building of important relationships.

Issues Update

Although at this point it is unclear what legislation will move forward in this Congressional session, you will be sent materials that cover ADA issues in case you would like to meet on these issues. These issues include-

- **Older Americans Act**

The Older Americans Act (OAA) was passed in 1965 to address inadequate community social services for older persons. One of the major emphases was on nutrition. Two programs were created in 1972: congregate dining and home delivered meals. Both provide important access to healthy food options for older adults. The OAA is considered to be the major vehicle for social and nutrition services to this group.

87% of older adults have one or more of the most common chronic diseases-hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease, all of which are preventable or treatable in part with appropriate nutrition services.ⁱ

- Proper nutrition makes it possible to maintain health and functionality and positively impacts the quality of life in older adults.
- As primary prevention and health promotion, nutrition counseling lessens chronic disease risk and addresses problems that can lead to more serious conditions. As a component of chronic disease management, medical nutrition therapy (MNT) slows disease progression and reduces symptoms.
- Older adults who routinely eat nutritious food and drink adequate amounts of fluids are less likely to have complications from chronic disease and to require care in a hospital or other facility.

Cost-Benefit Support: The cost of one day in a hospital roughly equals the cost of one year of OAA Nutrition program meals. One month in a nursing home equals that of providing mid-day meals five days a week for about seven years.ⁱⁱ

There is no bill introduced in either chamber.

- **Medical Foods Equity**

The Medical Foods Equity Act, introduced in the Senate by John Kerry (D-MA) and in the House of Representatives by Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), would require all insurance companies to cover the cost of medically necessary foods for all inborn errors of metabolism. Products covered would be any medically necessary formula or food modified to be low in protein, as well as pharmacological doses of vitamins and amino acids for the treatment of inborn errors of metabolism and conditions.

Sponsors for the bills are:

H.R.1311 - Medical Foods Equity Act of 2011

Rep. Earl Blumenauer [D, OR-3]

Rep. Leonard Boswell [D, IA-3]

Rep. Kathy Castor [D, FL-11]

Rep. Marcia Fudge [D, OH-11]

Rep. Luis Gutiérrez [D, IL-4]

Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee [D, TX-18]

Rep. Eddie Johnson [D, TX-30]

Rep. Henry Johnson [D, GA-4]

Rep. John Lewis [D, GA-5]

Rep. Nita Lowey [D, NY-18]

Rep. James Moran [D, VA-8]

Rep. Jared Polis [D, CO-2]

Rep. John Sarbanes [D, MD-3]

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz [D, FL-20]

S.311 - Medical Foods Equity Act of 2011

Sen. Charles Schumer [D, NY]

Sen. Richard Blumenthal [D, CT]

Sen. Robert Casey [D, PA]

Sen. Chris Coons [D, DE]

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand [D, NY]

Sen. Robert Menéndez [D, NJ]

- **Loan Forgiveness for Dietitian-H.R. 531 Access to Frontline Health Care Act of 2011**

This bill was introduced into House by Representative Bruce Braley of Iowa. This bill would reduce health disparities by providing loan forgiveness to health practioners including dietitians.

Current cosponsors are-

Rep. Corrine Brown [D, FL-3]

Rep. Michael Michaud [D, ME-2]

Del. Eleanor Norton [D, DC-0]

Rep. Nick Rahall [D, WV-3]

Rep. John Tierney [D, MA-6]

- **The Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medication Act of 2011**

Drug shortages including TPN solutions has been a concern since 2000 and effects many of our nutrition support practioners. The problem is increasing. The shortages are attributed to many complex factors including consolidation and mergers of drug companies leaving fewer options for a particular drug, mineral or solution, and quality issues that surface and become problematic for certain drugs.

This is a bipartisan bill, *H.R. 2245: Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medications Act of 2011*, introduced into the House of Representatives on by Congresswoman Diana DeGette (D-CO) and by Congressman Tom Rooney (F-FL). On June 21 the bill was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. There is a Senate companion bill (S 296) introduced in the Senate by Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) and has legislation has 11 cosponsors.

S. 296: Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medications Act sponsors are:

Richard Blumenthal [D-CT]

Al Franken [D-MN]

Sherrod Brown [D-OH]

Barbara Mikulski [D-MD]

Benjamin Cardin [D-MD]

John Reed [D-RI]

Robert Casey [D-PA]

Charles Schumer [D-NY]

Chris Coons [D-DE]

Jon Tester [D-MT]

Dianne Feinstein [D-CA]

- **Farm Bill**

As of now we not anticipate that ADA will have its recommendations for the Farm Bill for these meetings.

Steps for Setting up a Meeting

Call the Congressman or Senator's district office and ask for the scheduler. If she or he is unavailable, ask for their email. Send an engaging invitation that explains how many **voters** will be there and why it is important for the Congressman to see the work you do for the community. Set a date, but keep it open and flexible to the Congressman's schedule so they will feel more willing to attend. Make it a fun event and ask many people to attend, if possible. Members of Congress love to be seen in the community especially with people from their districts.

Partnerships for Success

Once these meetings have occurred, you will be asked to send us a success report. We will provide a report template so you can easily submit this information. We know that our grassroots efforts will be successful in getting our message out. Times are different here which means new and different strategies.

Thank you all for your work and volunteer time!

ⁱ 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 Am Diet Assoc.* 2010;110:463-472.

ⁱⁱ 2007 State program report. US Administration on Aging Web site. http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Program_Results/SPR/2007/Index.aspx#national. Last modified July 16, 2009. Accessed September 15, 2009.