

Testimony of Ilona Rae Garrity, MBA, RD, CNSC, LDN

House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing

April 9, 2012

Good afternoon. My name is Ilona Rae Garrity. I am the Reimbursement Chair for the Pennsylvania Dietetic Association, an affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetic Association, the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. I am here today asking that you support our effort to be credentialed as providers in ALL Pennsylvania insurance plans. I also thank you again for your support of our past initiatives including introduction of HB 2535 in 2010. Although this bill was not signed into law prior to the close of the 2010 session, it has helped us with gaining additional recognition as well as paving our way towards achieving our goal of statewide recognition and credentialing by ALL insurance companies.

Medical nutrition therapy (MNT) is essential for maintaining and improving the health of PA residents and reducing costs due to nutrition-related diseases. Registered Licensed Dietitians are the most qualified health professional to provide MNT services.¹

Obesity continues to be a major epidemic nationwide. The PA Department of Health estimates that in 2010 66% of adults were overweight and 29% obese.² Based on CDC data, almost 17% of youths ages 2 through 19 were obese in 2009-2010. Since 1980, obesity among children and adolescents has almost tripled! The CDC reports that national medical costs for treating obesity-related illnesses has almost doubled, from \$78.5 billion to \$147 billion, in just 10 years. CDC estimates PA medical expenses attributed to obesity exceed \$4 billion per year. Obesity increases the risk of many diseases or health conditions, including Type II Diabetes, Hypertension, Dyslipidemia or abnormal lipid levels, Stroke, Cancers, Respiratory disorders including sleep apnea, Osteoarthritis, and Coronary Artery disease. If obesity continues at the present rate, our current generation could be the first in history where adults live shorter lives than their parents.

Diabetes is the 7th leading cause of death in the United States and is the leading cause of kidney failure, non-traumatic lower limb amputations, and new cases of blindness among adults. Diabetes is also a major cause of both heart disease and stroke. Based on data from CDC, medical expenses for people with Diabetes are more than double those without it. People with pre-diabetes, a condition in which individuals have higher than normal blood glucose levels but not sufficiently high to be classified as Diabetes, have an increased risk for developing Type II Diabetes, Heart Disease, and Stroke.

Nutrition, which is pivotal for both the prevention and treatment of Obesity, Diabetes and their associated complications, extends far beyond these conditions. The World Health Organization views nutrition as the foundation for health. Nutrition services, from pre-conception throughout life, are essential components of comprehensive health care. To ensure that our residents receive this comprehensive level of care, Medical Nutrition Therapy needs to be made available to residents when nutrition intervention can improve their health status. As Licensed Registered Dietitians, we are the MOST qualified health professional to provide Medical Nutrition Therapy. We are skilled at translating the science of nutrition into practical solutions for healthy living, providing unparalleled value to the patient.

I thank you again for your past support and ask that you continue to work on the legislation necessary to ensure that Licensed Registered Dietitians are recognized as providers in ALL HEALTH INSURANCE PLANS in our state. All Pennsylvanians deserve consistent access to the most qualified and reliable source of credible nutrition information.

"Those who think they have no time for healthy eating will sooner or later have to find time for illness."

- modified from : Edward Stanley (1826-1893) from The Conduct of Life

¹ <http://www.eatright.org/healthprofessionals/content.aspx?id=6877>

² "These data were provided by the Bureau of Health Statistics and Research, Pennsylvania Department of Health. The Department specifically disclaims responsibility for any analyses, interpretations or conclusions."