

October 31, 2024

Paul Reed, MD  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Director  
Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion,  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health,  
Department of Health and Human Services,  
1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 420  
Rockville, MD 20852

**SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA**  
[HP2030Comment@hhs.gov](mailto:HP2030Comment@hhs.gov)

**Re: Proposed Healthy People 2030 Objectives**

Dear Rear Admiral Reed:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on proposed objectives to be added to Healthy People 2030. We recommend including a new core objective in Healthy People 2030 that is focused on increasing the number of geriatrics health professionals practicing in the United States. It is equally important that we increase geriatrics knowledge and expertise across the healthcare professional workforce and ensure medical specialists and other health professionals receive specific training that they will need when caring for older adults. Access to a well-trained workforce and appropriate care for medically complex older adults is crucial to maintaining the health and quality of life for this growing segment of the nation's population.

AGS is a nationwide not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older adults. Our 6000+ members include geriatricians, geriatrics nurse practitioners, social workers, family practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, internists, and others who are pioneers in advanced-illness care for older individuals, with a focus on championing interprofessional teams, eliciting personal care goals, and treating older people as whole persons. We provide leadership to healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public by implementing and advocating for programs in clinical care, research, professional and public education, and public policy.

AGS' vision is a nation where we can all have a fair and equitable opportunity to contribute to our communities and maintain our health, safety, and independence as we age. AGS believes in a just society – one where we all are supported by and able to contribute to communities where ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of bias and discrimination no longer impact healthcare access, quality, and outcomes for older adults and their caregivers. We believe discriminatory policies, especially when they are perpetuated across the healthspan and lifespan, can have a negative impact on public health for us all. AGS strongly supports the steps HHS is taking to address inequities, including establishing core objectives with the data needed to help achieve health equity and eliminate disparities.

We applaud HHS' ongoing efforts to engage with stakeholders to ensure the updated set of Healthy People 2030 objectives is informed by the American public and reflects current priorities in public health. As we work to improve the nation's health, it is critically important to address care needs for the whole of our population in an inclusive and equitable manner.

AGS has long advocated for creating a healthcare workforce with the skills and competence to meet the unique healthcare needs of our nation's growing population of older adults while also addressing the current and growing shortage of geriatricians – physicians with expertise in managing, delaying, and even preventing many of the age-related health issues we face as we age, including complex chronic conditions and addressing functional and cognitive impairments. We believe it is crucial to support a diverse workforce that is trained in geriatrics and gerontology to care for an increasingly diverse and unique population.

Our healthcare workforce receives little, if any, training in geriatrics principles that would ensure providers are trained to deliver the highly skilled and coordinated services that are the hallmark of high-quality care for older people. This leaves us ill-prepared to care for the older population as health needs evolve. AGS believes it is urgent that we increase the number of educational and training opportunities in geriatrics and gerontology. Older adults living with chronic illnesses and complex conditions often do not receive optimal care, reducing overall well-being and contributing to disproportionately high healthcare costs for these individuals.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people who are 65 and older is projected to climb from 63.4 million today to more than 94.7 million by 2060, while those 85 and older is projected to more than double from 7.3 million today to 19 million by 2060.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, there is a workforce crisis in the U.S. with a disappearing supply of primary care physicians, including geriatricians. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) forecasts that by 2025, there will only be 6,230 geriatricians, or approximately one for every 3,000 older adults that require geriatrics care, leaving thousands of older adults without access to geriatrics care.<sup>2</sup> There are similar shortages of health professionals specializing in geriatrics across other disciplines with less than one percent of registered nurses and fewer than three percent of advanced practice registered nurses who are certified in geriatrics.<sup>3</sup> In addition, rural populations have more limited access to primary care than residents of urban areas, and generally are older, have a higher incidence of poor health, and face greater socioeconomic barriers to receiving care (e.g., transportation, internet access). These barriers, in addition to systemic inequities, impact the health status of traditionally marginalized communities. Given the increasing diversity among older people and rapid growth of the older population,<sup>4</sup> the need for a diverse workforce as well as training in geriatrics and gerontology will continue to increase.

The only federal programs dedicated to training the workforce to care for older adults—the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) and the Geriatrics Academic Career Awards (GACA) program—have been successfully leading and preparing the healthcare workforce, caregivers, and their communities as demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency. The GWEPs and GACAs worked with health systems to participate in the outreach to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations, preventing widening the

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau International Programs Center. International Database (IDB): Population by Age. Accessed October 29, 2024. [https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/#/pop?COUNTRY\\_YEAR=2023&COUNTRY\\_YR\\_ANIM=2023&FIPS\\_SINGLE=US&FIPS=US&popPages=BYAGE&POP\\_YEARS=2024,2060&menu=popViz&ageGroup=O&CCODE=US&CCODE\\_SINGLE=US](https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/#/pop?COUNTRY_YEAR=2023&COUNTRY_YR_ANIM=2023&FIPS_SINGLE=US&FIPS=US&popPages=BYAGE&POP_YEARS=2024,2060&menu=popViz&ageGroup=O&CCODE=US&CCODE_SINGLE=US)

<sup>2</sup> Health Resources & Services Administration. National and Regional Projections of Supply and Demand for Geriatricians: 2013-2025. Published April 2017. Accessed October 29, 2024. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/geriatrics-report-51817.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Rowe JW, Berkman L, Fried L, et al. Preparing for Better Health and Health Care for an Aging Population: A Vital Direction for Health and Health Care. National Academy of Medicine. September 19, 2016. Accessed October 30, 2024. <https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Preparing-for-Better-Health-and-Health-Care-for-an-Aging-Population.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Administration for Community Living. 2021 Profile of Older Americans. November 2022. Accessed October 30, 2024. [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Profile%20of%20OA/2021%20Profile%20of%20OA/2021ProfileOlderAmericans\\_508.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Profile%20of%20OA/2021%20Profile%20of%20OA/2021ProfileOlderAmericans_508.pdf)

health disparity gap exacerbated by the pandemic. These programs are critical in providing assistance for proactive public health planning with their geriatrics expertise and knowledge of long-term care and would help ensure states and local governments have improved plans for older adults in disaster preparedness for future pandemics and natural disasters.

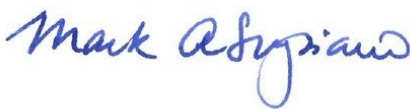
The GWEPs educate and engage primary care physicians, nurses, social workers, the caregiving workforce, and other health care professionals as well as family caregivers, and focus on opportunities to improve the quality of care delivered to older adults, particularly in underserved and rural areas. In Academic Year 2021-2022, GWEPs trained over one million health care professionals, students, patients, and caregivers.<sup>5</sup> In Academic Year 2020-2021, nearly 52 percent of the health care delivery sites that GWEP awardees partnered with were located in medically underserved communities.<sup>6</sup> Due to GWEPs' partnerships with primary care and community-based organizations, GWEPs are uniquely positioned to rapidly address the needs of older adults and their caregivers, especially around Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The GACA program is an essential complement to the GWEP. GACAs ensure we can equip early-career clinician educators to become leaders in geriatrics education and research. It is the only federal program designed to increase the number of faculty with geriatrics expertise in a variety of disciplines, providing training in opioid use treatment, health equity/social determinants of health, and more. Increasing our federal investment in these programs would support expanding understanding of geriatrics, ensuring a pathway to geriatrics health professions, and maintaining the health and quality of life for us all as we age.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our recommendations for the updated set of Healthy People 2030 objectives. Expanding the geriatrics and gerontological workforce and increasing the expertise of healthcare professionals in geriatrics is imperative to support both individual older adults' health and population health.

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Thank you for taking the time to review our feedback. For additional information or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Anna Kim at [akim@americangeriatrics.org](mailto:akim@americangeriatrics.org).

Sincerely,



Mark A. Supiano, MD, AGSF  
President



Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. Fiscal Year 2024 Health Resources and Services Administration Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees. March 2023. Accessed October 30, 2024.

<https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2024.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health and Human Services. Fiscal Year 2023 Health Resources and Services Administration Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees. March 2022. Accessed October 30, 2024.

<https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2023.pdf>