



Future Changes Driving Dietetics Workforce Supply and Demand: Future Scan 2012-2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The dietetics profession faces many workforce challenges and opportunities to ensure that registered dietitians (RDs) and dietetic technicians, registered (DTRs) are at the forefront of health and nutrition. The profession must prepare for new public priorities, changes in population, and the restructuring of how people learn and work, as well as new advances in science and technology. In September 2010, the Dietetics Workforce Demand Task Force, in consultation with a panel of thought leaders, identified 10 change drivers that affect dietetics workforce supply and demand. This future scan report provides an overview of eight of these drivers. Two change drivers—health care reform and population risk factors/nutrition initiatives—are addressed in separate technical articles. A change matrix has been included at the end of this executive summary. The matrix contains a summary of each change driver and its expected impact and is designed to present the drivers in the context of a larger, dynamic system of change in the dietetics profession. The impact of any of these change drivers individually and collectively in a dynamic system is uncertain. The outcome of any change driver is also uncertain. The dietetics profession faces many choices within each change driver to meet the workforce challenges and seize the opportunities for leadership and growth.

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THE DIETETICS WORKFORCE Demand Study Task Force commissioned this future scan, as well as a series of technical articles to inform its workforce projections. Signature i, LLC—with assistance from Trend Spot Consulting—designed and facilitated a 1-day workshop on September 27, 2010, with 14 thought leaders offering diverse perspectives on the future of the field. Through analysis and prioritization, the thought leaders (Textbox) narrowed the possible trends and issues shaping the profession to 10 change drivers. After facilitating this session, futurists Marsha Rhea from Signature i, LLC and Craig Bettles from Trend Spot Consulting researched eight of the change drivers. This futures scan is the synthesis of a wide-ranging literature scan using futurist methodologies to

identify and analyze changes and their implications.

HOW TO READ THIS FUTURES SCAN

This futures scan has been designed to serve two purposes: to help the profession explore the future, and to support the Dietetics Workforce Demand Task Force in creating scenarios to use in modeling workforce supply and demand projections. Each change driver opens with a narrative image of the future that comes from the futures scan research and meets the standards of plausibility and probability. However, it is not intended to present a view of the expected future, but rather to demonstrate implications for workforce supply and demand.

Each section presents a Figure that contains a summary statement of that change driver, lists some of the workforce challenges and opportunities, and then closes with a statement assessing the impact on the dietetics workforce. How much of an impact each change driver will have on supply and demand is indexed as low, middle, or high. This is a subjective index that is a first step toward a quantitative estimate of the relative influence each change driver should have in modeling dietetics workforce supply and demand.

A future research directions section follows for each change driver. These short summaries explain key or provocative findings from the futures scan. Selected references are included for those who want to read more about these trends, issues, and developments.

Change Drivers Matrix

The change driver matrix (Figure 1) offers an at-a-glance view of the change drivers

and makes it easier to consider how they might interact with one another in a scenario view of workforce supply and demand.

Aging Population Drives Opportunities and Challenges

Figure 2 summarizes the dietetics workforce implications of an aging population.

The US Census Bureau has projected that the elderly population, those aged 65 years and older, will grow by >36% between 2000 and 2020. Keeping this growing population healthy and involved in and contributing to society is a key challenge for the future and an opportunity for the dietetics profession.

The “Baby Boomers”—a generation whose 65th birthday celebrations started in 2011—are the leading edge of a rapidly aging America. The Boomers are not only the largest generation to enter retirement, they are also the most educated, wealthiest, and most diverse generation to enter retirement. For both personal and financial reasons, many members of this generation will remain active in the workforce and their communities after retirement.

Keeping elderly workers engaged is also a priority for many organizations. Older workers have valuable skills and experience but are looking for more flexibility in work arrangements as they get older. This desire will lead to expansions of flex-scheduling, phased retirement, mentorship programs, and company wellness programs.

Keeping the Boomers active and involved will require better health and wellness programs. Aging dramatically increases the risk of preventable chronic diseases and disability. Much of this can be prevented with better nutrition combined with physical and mental activity.

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Change Driver	Summary	Impact	Change Index
Aging population drives opportunities and challenges	Aging of the US population will usher in widespread changes in US communities and workforce and health care systems.	An aging population will create opportunities for registered dietitians and dietetic technicians, registered in institutionalized care settings as well as in private health and wellness programs. However, replacing an aging population of dietitians and finding dietitians willing and able to serve the growing geriatric population will prove challenging.	H^a
Population and workforce diversity challenges professions to change	The dietetics profession needs to develop cross-cultural skills and knowledge of other cultures to grow in a more diverse country.	Growing diversity in the United States will drive demand for community food programs and nutrition counseling. However, dietetics practitioners are not well-placed in culturally diverse communities to seize these opportunities.	M^b
Workforce education meets job market demands	A more diverse student population seeks flexibility, convenience, and affordability in education to prepare for and maintain employability.	While many more students will need postsecondary education to get a job, they will want more assurance that dietetics education leads to immediate and sustained employment.	H
Interdisciplinary teaming drives innovation	Interdisciplinary teams will drive innovation and solve problems in all kinds of arenas where nutrition matters.	The profession will have to be assertive and opportunistic to secure positions in a world where competencies and credentials are less important than teaming and problem-solving.	H
Generalists gain edge on specialists	Dietetics practitioners can thrive as adaptable generalists if they cultivate an interdisciplinary perspective and leadership qualities that employers value.	Without career adaptability, there could be too many dietetics practitioners for declining fields and too few for emerging opportunities.	M
Technology transforms nutrition counseling	Technologies will empower customers, clients, and patients to manage their own diet.	Dietetics practitioners who can develop these technologies will be in demand. Others will need to shift to higher-value services that cannot be programmed into expert systems.	M
Personalized nutrition evolves	New personal health testing and monitoring technologies will create opportunities for dietetics practitioners.	Dietetics practitioners are well-placed for a shift to a health care system that focuses on predicting and preventing disease. However, the scientific knowledge and technical skill needed could create a split between general practitioners and those with advanced training until the technology matures.	H
Food industry transforms for public priorities	The food industry responds to public priorities to transform the current food supply chain into a more healthful, safer and more sustainable system.	Without a systematic pipeline for feeding qualified candidates into these opportunities, the dietetics profession could easily lose out to others in this job market.	L^c
Health care reform boosts access to dietetics services	Dietetics practitioners are valued members of coordinated care teams and deliver consistent nutrition therapies to people with chronic diseases.	The law creates the conditions to prove the value of dietetics practitioners in promoting health; it does not ensure that dietetics practitioners will be the only ones to provide these services.	M
Population risk factors and nutrition initiatives increase demand	Widespread chronic disease, obesity, and socioeconomic challenges make nutrition initiatives and life-course interventions a public priority.	Public support and funding for population health initiatives and prevention strategies are very uncertain. While the opportunities for dietetics practitioners to intervene across the life-course are extensive and exciting, more dietetics practitioners will need to shift into these new practice roles.	H

Figure 1. Change drivers matrix. ^aH=high; ^bM=medium; ^cL=low.

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