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October 26, 2018

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to recommend that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, clearly indicate in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other federal nutrition guidelines that meat and dairy products are optional, based on an individual's dietary needs.

Food and nutrition play a crucial role in health promotion and chronic disease prevention. The AMA has long-standing policy supporting dietary and nutritional guidelines to improve health and nutrition and to combat obesity. For example, the AMA supports culturally responsive dietary and nutritional guidelines and recognizes that racial and ethnic disparities exist in the prevalence of obesity and diet-related diseases such as coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. The AMA notes that African Americans are at particularly high risk for prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, and cardiovascular mortality, and that prostate and colorectal cancer are strongly linked to dairy, processed meat, and red meat consumption. Such products also contribute to cardiovascular risk. Dairy and meat products are promoted in federal nutrition policies even though they are not nutritionally required. At the most recent meeting of the AMA House of Delegates, the AMA adopted a resolution addressing this issue. Accordingly, we urge you to recommend in the next version of the Dietary Guidelines and other federal nutrition guidelines that meat and dairy products are optional, based on an individual's dietary needs.

Thank you for considering the AMA's views. If you have any questions, please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President of Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org or 202-789-7409.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD