



## **Administration Update: Biden Administration Releases National Strategy and Holds White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health**

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On September 28, the Biden Administration convened a [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#), the first of its kind in more than 50 years since the 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, which led to the development of landmark initiatives including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Ahead of the Conference, the Administration released a [National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#), which calls for a whole-of-government approach involving more than a dozen federal agencies to address the challenges of widespread malnutrition, diet-related diseases, and access to healthy foods with the twin goals of ending hunger in America by 2030 and reducing the prevalence of chronic disease by increasing healthy eating and physical activity. Some actions mentioned in the strategy are new, while others have already been announced or publicly noticed. Many are likely to be included in the President’s budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2024 and beyond.

### **I. National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health**

The National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health describes concrete actions that federal agencies will take and suggests contributions that broader society can make to achieve the Administration’s 2030 goal, categorized by the five Conference pillars: (1) improve food access and affordability; (2) integrate nutrition and health; (3) empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices; (4) support physical activity for all; and (5) enhance nutrition and food security research. Highlights of the National Strategy relevant to research, education, and medical institutions are described below.

#### **Pillar 1: Improve Food Access and Affordability**

*Federal Actions* - Recognizing that promoting economic security is a crucial element to uptake of healthy foods, the Biden Administration expresses support for permanently extending the Child Tax Credit (CTC) originally increased under the *American Rescue Plan*; offering universal free healthy school meals; expanding eligibility and access to SNAP and WIC; improving access to traditional foods; and increasing funding for the *Older Americans Act* nutrition programs. The Strategy also indicated that USDA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are currently developing a whole-of-government strategy to address food loss and waste.

*Community Interactions* – To increase the reach of these services to all who are eligible, the Strategy outlines several partnerships. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will partner with the Department of Education (ED) plan to institute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to inform Pell Grant recipients of their potential eligibility to enroll in SNAP. The Strategy also suggests that



philanthropic organizations support collaborations between food service programs at schools, colleges, and universities for workforce training and food procurement.

*Pillar 2: Integrate Nutrition and Health*

*Federal Actions* – The second Pillar strongly emphasizes the need to incorporate nutrition into healthcare settings and treatment and prevention models. A large part of this would come from expanded access to “food is medicine” interventions and to nutrition and obesity counseling for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries. Further, the Strategy expresses the Administration’s support for legislation to implement a pilot program to test covering medically tailored meals under Medicare to treat diet-related diseases. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will also promote access to diabetes prevention and treatment services for individuals with coverage through Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the Health Insurance Marketplace. The Administration affirms its commitment to implement universal screening for food insecurity in federal health care systems to build upon existing efforts from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As part of this initiative, the Administration will incentivize payers and providers to screen for food insecurity and other factors of the social determinants of health (SDOH) and will also incentivize hospitals to provide dedicated services to address food insecurity and SDOH.

*Community Interactions* – The National Strategy describes plans to strengthen and diversify the nutrition workforce, stating that the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will train over 4,500 individuals to be nutrition professionals and support more than 30,000 practicing professionals over five years to obtain competencies in pediatric obesity prevention, household food security, and nutrition during pregnancy. The program will work with Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to recruit and train individuals from underrepresented groups to serve as nutrition professionals. Additionally, USDA will collaborate with Land-Grant Universities to create a national workforce strategy specific to WIC.

*Pillar 3: Empower All Consumers to Make and Have Access to Healthy Choices*

*Federal Actions* – The Nutrition and Aging Resource Center within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Community Living (ACL) is planning to expand both virtual and in-person nutrition education for older adults. Additionally, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) will incorporate nutrition counseling into direct service grant programs for victims of human trafficking.

*Community Interactions* – The National Strategy outlines ED’s intention to send a Dear Colleague Letter encouraging institutions of higher education to acquire and serve healthier foods and to work with local organizations to provide services to students to promote nutrition security. USDA will promote SNAP-Ed programs like MyPlate’s Shop Simple tool and update SNAP-Ed’s database of resources. In addition, the National Strategy also acknowledges the recent announcement of the USDA Regional Food Business Centers and their role in supporting the growth of local food business, particularly in underserved communities.



*Pillar 4: Support Physical Activity for All*

*Federal Actions* – Most of the plans under Pillar 4 concern initiatives for K-12 schools and physical infrastructure, but the National Strategy adds that the Biden Administration is “working to create more parks, open spaces, and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities.” This goal is part of President Biden’s America the Beautiful Initiative, which aims to conserve 30 percent of federal lands and waters by 2030, and which led to the announcement of available funding through the America the Beautiful Challenge earlier this year.

*Pillar 5: Enhance Nutrition and Food Security Research*

*Federal Actions* – Within Pillar 5, the National Strategy calls for increased funding for food and nutrition science, inclusive of the research and bolstering, and diversifying, the nutrition science workforce performing much of this research, a noted priority. To ensure federal research is comprehensive, the Strategy calls on the Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to evaluate scientific gaps and priorities in nutrition research. To address workforce issues, NIH has posted a [funding opportunity](#) originally forecasted earlier this year to develop training programs in artificial intelligence and precision nutrition, and the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) will evaluate its research, education, and Cooperative Extension programs to identify those that can incorporate workforce development opportunities for agricultural and nutrition sciences.

Included in the focus on novel approaches to advance nutrition research, the Strategy describes a plan for the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to use artificial intelligence and machine learning to better understand and predict food- and nutrition-related health outcomes. HHS will also utilize the NIH Climate Change and Health Initiative to explore the impacts of climate change on nutrition security and the quality of food on population health.

*Community Interactions* – Partnerships are embedded into the priorities of this Pillar. For example, to identify gaps in research, the Strategy notes that ACL is creating an older adult Nutrition Research Agenda that will “involve federal and external partners to identify gaps in existing research regarding food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, and behavioral health issues in order to develop a long-term framework for advancing the quality of services, establishing research priorities, and creating impactful policies.” To advance health equity, the NIH Common Fund Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (ComPASS) Program will leverage multisectoral partnerships, including through community-led interventions, and will create a health equity research model for intervention research across NIH and other agencies. Key to diversifying the workforce, the Strategy details that NIFA will leverage Land-Grant University systems, connections with non-federal partners, and community partners to conduct outreach to historically underserved communities and MSIs.

In another effort to identify needs, the Strategy describes a survey that ED will conduct in partnership with institutions of higher education to assess how federal relief programs, such as funding for food pantries, addressed food insecurity among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic and to evaluate the current extent of food insecurity among college students. ED will also convene universities



to elevate best practices for improving food and nutrition security on college campuses as part of an effort to identify innovative models that can be improved or scaled and applied to other areas.

On the day of the Conference, the Biden Administration also [announced](#) more than \$8 billion in public and private sector commitments to help reach the 2030 goal. Included in these plans was a \$250 million collaboration between the Rockefeller Foundation and the American Heart Association, among other partners, to establish a national Food is Medicine Research Initiative, which will develop and collect evidence to help design and scale “food is medicine” programs with assistance from government, academia, health care, industry, and community partners.

## **II. White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health**

The Conference featured a substantial number of high-profile speakers from Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration in addition to many well-known experts in the field. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack overviewed the National Strategy at the outset of the event, followed by President Biden reaffirming his commitment to ending hunger and reducing diet-related diseases. President Biden also stressed the importance of investing in federal nutrition programs, reducing health disparities, and educating individuals and physicians on the role of nutrition in overall health outcomes. Keynote speaker José Andrés, chef and founder of World Central Kitchen, argued that food insecurity is a national security issue. He called for a transformation of the U.S. food and healthcare systems, and he proposed establishing a new federal agency that would ensure the safety of the food supply and provide consistent access to safe and healthy foods for all Americans, including during natural disaster emergencies and other crises. The Conference then proceeded with a series of panel discussions, two for each of the Pillars in the National Strategy. Highlights from the panel sessions discussing the second Pillar, integrating nutrition and health, and the fifth Pillar, enhancing nutrition and food security research, are provided below.

### **Integrating Nutrition and Health**

In the first Nutrition and Health panel discussion, invited speakers, led by Dr. Rajiv Shah, President of the Rockefeller Foundation and former Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), discussed the benefits of utilizing a “food is medicine” approach in healthcare. This approach is predicated on a prevention strategy that is not currently easily reimbursable by federal healthcare programs. Panelists in the second Nutrition and Health session, led by Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Under Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), echoed many of the strategies and concerns first outlined in the opening session.

Panelists urged the federal government to make medically tailored meals a fully reimbursable benefit and encouraged the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) to introduce new Food as Medicine pilot programs. They suggested increased screening for food insecurity in primary care settings and improving physician training to include a stronger focus on nutrition and cultural sensitivities. Panelists expressed support for further research on which communities face food insecurities and called for dedicated efforts to reduce health disparities, including meaningfully



considering input from people with lived experiences of food insecurity. Above all, they affirmed the need for building strong partnerships across sectors.

#### *Nutrition and Food Security Research*

Senator Bill Frist, a former heart surgeon and Republican Senator from Tennessee, led the first panel discussion on nutrition and food security research. This panel stressed the dual roles of research and communication, both necessary for designing and scaling pilot programs to address food insecurity. Panelists in this session called for better communication between program leaders and researchers about ongoing efforts to help evaluate a program's effectiveness, needed resources, and opportunities to scale up or to reach new communities. They also wanted assurances that researchers would use the data acquired at the conclusion of a project for appropriate advocacy and making meaningful improvements.

Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, USDA Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics and USDA Chief Scientist, led the second panel, which focused on advancing equitable, community-involved research and building a diverse research workforce. The panel advocated for the research community to place greater value on qualitative data to account for the complexity of the human experience. Dr. Jacobs-Young also acknowledged the role of Cooperative Extension in disseminating information.

In an afternoon panel session, HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, who served as moderator, emphasized the importance of investing in prevention to reduce the incidence of diet-related diseases and promote population health. Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) expressed her commitment to making food available and accessible for everyone and touted the role of the Farm Bill, which will be reauthorized in 2023, in addressing the Administration's goals. She cited Farm Bill nutrition programs, such as SNAP and WIC, which are essential pieces of the Administration's goals, and highlighted the role of the Farm Bill in authorizing pilot programs that can turn local, community solutions, into scalable programs that can be implemented nationwide. House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) stated that she wants to make increased investments in food and nutrition and aims to promote economic security among families to allow them to afford healthy foods. She called on President Biden to include the strategies discussed at the Conference and in the National Strategy in his FY 2024 budget request to enable crucial initiatives to move through the appropriations process.