

Issue At A Glance:

White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

The prevalence of diet-related diseases continues to rise. These diseases have significant impact and disproportionately affect the underserved and marginalized populations. This brief will provide an overview of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health and outline forthcoming national strategies.

Introduction

Diet-related diseases or, perhaps more profoundly stated, diet-preventable diseases continue to rise, presenting an alarming health crisis. More than 50 years since the first and only White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, the federal government and key partners reconvened on September 28, 2022, to provide a national strategy to end hunger, reduce diet-related diseases, and reduce health disparities by 2030.

The national strategy put forth is organized across five pillars: 1) improve food access and affordability, 2) integrate nutrition and health, 3) empower consumers to make and have access to healthy choices, 4) support physical activity for all, and 5) enhance nutrition and food security research. As a part of this initiative, \$8 billion has been pledged from both private and public sectors to advance these goals set forth by the Biden-Harris Administration.¹

This brief will provide an overview of the five pillars outlined during the conference and highlight some of the forthcoming national strategies.

Notable Statistics

- 10%** of households in the United States face food insecurity²
- 23%** of the U.S. population meet physical activity guidelines³
- 33%** of the U.S. population will have cancer in their lifetime⁴
- 40%** of the U.S. population have hypertension⁵
- 10%** of the U.S. population have diabetes⁹

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Improve Food Access and Affordability

Economic security is undoubtedly critical for ensuring food security. Prior expansion of the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 helped reduce child poverty and food insecurity to record lows.⁶ However, the enhanced Child Tax Credit ended in December of 2021, putting families at risk once again. Consequently, the Biden-Harris Administration is pushing for permanent expansion of the tax credits to continue these efforts in ensuring economic security and food security for the vulnerable members of our country.

Furthermore, increasing access to healthy, free school meals is being leveraged to improve child hunger and nutrition through remodeling of the school meal programs. The percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price meals has steadily risen in recent decades to 76.9% as of 2020.⁷ The Biden-Harris Administration is pushing to expand the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer, which provides benefits to students to address food insecurity during the summer months when school is not in session.

Efforts to improve access to other federal assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), are targeting outdated restrictions to expand eligibility for additional underserved populations. Steps are being implemented to ensure this expansion includes populations such as previously incarcerated individuals, tribal communities, and youth in foster care.

Integrate Nutrition and Health

Prioritizing nutrition within the health care system is necessary to optimize prevention and treatment of diet-related diseases. Given differences in access and coverage, a proposal to pilot interventions such as “food is medicine” for individuals with Medicare coverage is supported by the Biden-Harris Administration. This proposal would include medically tailored meals, groceries, and produce prescriptions.

Under the Affordable Care Act, obesity counseling became a required covered service for certain patients; however, nutrition and obesity counseling are not currently guaranteed services for all Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries. To close this gap in coverage, there is support to expand coverage for these services, notably in areas with large rural populations. Adoption of universal screening for food insecurity in the federal health care systems will further incorporate social determinants of health into everyday health care.

Moreover, to bridge the gap between nutrition and health services, there are proposed efforts to reinforce the health care workforce with nutritional professionals, such as registered dietitian nutritionists, in addition to increasing nutrition education among healthcare professionals.

Empower All Consumers to Make and Have Access to Healthy Choices

In an effort to empower consumers to make better informed, healthy choices, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) will continue to reformulate food labels and have proposed developing a front-of-package system to help consumers readily identify more healthful options. The FDA will also update criteria for use of the term “healthy” on food packaging. There are also plans to increase incentives for fruits and vegetables in SNAP which will improve access to healthier options for the SNAP recipients.

Additionally, the FDA will continue ongoing efforts to reduce sodium consumption through voluntary sodium reduction targets for packaged foods and propose regulations on the use of salt substitutes. Through collaborative efforts with other Health and Human Services agencies and the United States Department of Agriculture, there are additional strategies being developed to reduce consumption of added sugars.

Support Physical Activity for All

Increasing awareness of the health benefits of physical activity and supporting access to recreational spaces will promote an environment for people to live more active

lifestyles. Expansion of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s State Physical Activity and Nutrition Programs will work to improve pedestrian and bicycle-safe options at the community level. The Biden-Harris Administration is also working to create more parks, trails, and outdoor opportunities, particularly in nature-deprived communities.

To further support increased physical activity, funding regular updates to and increasing promotion of the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* will help to provide improved recommendations for types and amounts of physical activity to stay healthy.

Enhance Nutrition and Food Security Research

Although there is already \$2 billion in federal funding for nutrition research through the National Institutes of Health, gaps in nutrition research continue to persist. The national strategy aims to increase funding to improve metrics, data collection, and research to better inform nutrition and food security policy. Embedded in this vision to advance nutrition science are approaches to ensure equity in research. The updated 2025-2030 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* will be examined through a health equity lens to account for ethnic and cultural norms, preferences, and the need of the individual. Further efforts to diversify the nutrition workforce through expansion of training programs will strengthen research efforts.

Conclusion

The undeniable increase in diet-related diseases along with the pressing issues surrounding hunger and nutrition have been brought to the forefront by the Biden-Harris Administration. The White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health has outlined important objectives and goals to refresh the efforts to address healthy eating and healthcare disparities in a multifaceted strategy.

By understanding and incorporating social determinants of health into these efforts, the intersection of food insecurity and equity can be more comprehensively addressed. This strategy calls for involvement from all levels of government, food corporations, healthcare systems, public and private sectors, and the community given the complexity of the issue at hand and the comprehensive strategies being proposed. It is critical for all parties to be engaged in a collective effort to create long-lasting and impactful changes to the current landscape of hunger, nutrition, and health.

References

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Did you know?

The USDA and HHS work collaboratively to update the dietary guidelines every five years in a multi-step, multi-year process.

The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025* is the 9th edition.⁸



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