



American Society for Nutrition
Excellence in Nutrition Research and Practice

August 5, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President and Ambassador Rice,

On behalf of the American Society for Nutrition (ASN), we commend the Biden-Harris Administration for planning a 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health to develop a national strategy to end hunger by 2030 and increase healthy eating and physical activity in the U.S. to prevent and treat diet-related chronic diseases and conditions. Established in 1928, ASN is a non-profit organization dedicated to the creation, translation, and dissemination of nutrition science. ASN brings together the world's top researchers to advance the science, education, and practice of nutrition. ASN has more than 8,000 members around the world, working throughout government, clinical practice, academia, and industry, to conduct research to achieve the ASN vision of “A Healthier World Through Evidence-Based Nutrition”. This important conference has an opportunity to profoundly impact the future health of our nation by improving nutrition security and diet-related disease prevention. The policy outcomes from this conference have the potential to address long-standing health inequities and disparities such as these and reduce health care costs. We appreciate your recognition of this opportunity and your commitment to improving the health of America and offer ASN’s assistance.

On Thursday, June 16, 2022, ASN held a listening session “Informing ASN’s Recommendations to the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.” This live dialogue session was held as part of Nutrition 2022 Live Online, ASN’s virtual annual meeting which brings together the top scientific researchers, practitioners, and public health professionals to identify solutions to today’s greatest nutrition challenges. This dialogue session attracted more than 250 participants. ASN, as an interested organization coordinated this dialogue session in order to identify ideas and recommendations for the upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health and to bring together the voices of nutrition researchers and other stakeholders who have diverse experiences with hunger, food and nutrition insecurity, and diet-related health conditions to help ensure that any proposed policy solutions center around their research and experiences.

This dialogue session centered around the five Conference pillars and five distinguished panelists were invited to share their input on these pillars.

- *Improve food access and affordability*: Joel Berg, CEO, Hunger Free America

- *Integrate nutrition and health*: Matthew Levy, MD, MPH, Section Chief of General and Community Pediatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin and pediatrician at Children's Wisconsin
- *Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices*: Jessica Fanzo, PhD, Blomberg Distinguished Professor of Global Food Policy and Ethics at Johns Hopkins University and Director of Food & Nutrition Security at Hopkins' Alliance for a Healthier World
- *Support physical activity for all*: NiCole Keith, PhD, FACSM, Professor and Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis and member, President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition Science Board
- *Enhance nutrition and food security research*: Angela Odoms-Young, PhD, Associate Professor at Cornell University and Director of the Food and Nutrition Education in Communities Program and New York State EFNEP

Each panelist was asked to consider the following four questions, which were suggested by the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health Toolkit for Stakeholder-Led Convenings to help guide discussions, as they addressed the specific pillar that was the focus of their presentation.

- 1) What specific actions should the U.S. federal government, including the Executive Branch and Congress, take to achieve each pillar? What are the opportunities and barriers to achieving the actions you are recommending?
- 2) What specific actions should local, state, territory and Tribal governments; the private sector; civil society; and others take to achieve each pillar?
- 3) What are opportunities for public and private sector partners to work together to achieve each pillar?
- 4) What are innovative, successful activities happening at the local, state, territory and Tribal levels that could inform actions at the Federal level?

There was time at the end of the session for questions and answers between the panelists and audience, as well as the opportunity for audience members to suggest their own ideas and recommendations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. ASN also developed a website as an additional way for ASN members and others to submit specific, actionable policy recommendations and ideas to improve nutrition security, end hunger, and focus on diet-related prevention of chronic diseases at <https://www.nutrition.org/White-House-Conference-on-Nutrition>.

ASN also participated in listening sessions organized by other organizations, with some groups submitting their own robust recommendations to influence the White House national strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health such as the Strategy Group Informing the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, which ASN was a member of, convened by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Food Systems for the Future, Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and World Central Kitchen.

The specific, actionable policy recommendations that resulted from ASN's actions described above – suggested by ASN members, the five distinguished panelists at ASN's listening session, audience input, and from the organization itself - are all shared below. While recommendations are grouped by Conference pillar, many of ASN's resulting recommendations are cross-cutting across each of the five pillars. We encourage the White House to consider these recommendations for inclusion in the national strategy on hunger, nutrition, and health to bring about successful solutions that advance nutrition security, nutrition-related prevention of chronic diseases, and nutrition and nutrition research in general. We also encourage the White House to use the outcomes of this conference to highlight the research gaps and influence federal research funding to help shape the future of nutrition science and research and advance the health of our nation.

Improve food access and affordability

- Increasing access, expanding eligibility, and increasing waivers for nutrition assistance programs is important to improve food access and affordability. Nutrition assistance programs provide assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provide economic benefits to communities. Improved access can be aided by consolidating applications/ certifications across nutrition assistance programs and automatically enrolling those who qualify for other applicable nutrition assistance programs.
- Ongoing nutrition research is needed to evaluate and strengthen the fundamental evidence for nutrients and foods in health and disease prevention as well as measure the effectiveness and efficiency of nutrition assistance and education programs. Nutrition monitoring data is necessary to provide valuable information that guides science-based, data-driven nutrition assistance programs.
- Nutrition education must be a critical component of all nutrition assistance. Enhancing cultural appropriateness of nutrition assistance programs and nutrition education can allow us to reach communities and populations most in need.
- Food and nutrition programs and data collection should be aligned across all federal agencies which will lead to more efficient, coordinated outreach and an improved

participant experience across federal nutrition assistance programs. Leverage existing data and improve data collection through innovation and technology modernization to improve efficiency, access, and promotion of data sharing. Embrace new data science technologies that allow for data to be shared more readily among nutrition programs, that allow for disaggregation of data when necessary, and reduce barriers to data sharing. Clarification is needed to broaden how states may use and share data generated by federal nutrition assistance programs.

- Better aligning Medicaid, Medicare, and other federal programs with nutrition assistance programs can lead to improved health for all participants. In addition, coordinating federal and state agencies and programs can lead to improved health for all participants. Encouraging state and local innovations in training, case management, and program design can also help to achieve long-term gains.

Integrate nutrition and health

- Obesity and food insecurity are complex problems that require system-wide approaches. Hospitals and other health systems should screen patients, particularly children, for food insecurity. Hunger Vital Sign™, a validated 2-question food insecurity screening tool based on the [U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module](#) to identify households at risk of food insecurity has been used successfully in Wisconsin hospitals. Implementation of a food insecurity screening tool within health systems is often also a gateway to learn about other social determinants of health, such as transportation and housing security, for patient populations. Many referrals to family resource centers and interventions such as immediate food assistance take place based on the data gathered by food insecurity screenings and often families are not aware of local resources until such a screening has been conducted. Many insurance plans support the use of apps such as Foodsmart, a telehealth experience that combines registered dietitian services, tailored meal planning tools, and a food delivery marketplace to improve nutrition security and health. Food insecurity and other social determinants of health should be included in health system screenings. These important screening tools should be covered by insurance companies.
- Health systems have tremendous power in a community and are anchor institutions that can help to address social determinants of health and offer community development assistance and as such should be leveraged to impact community nutrition security, healthcare, and food systems.
- Increased nutrition education should be required for physicians and other health care professionals expanding the nation's role in enhancing the integration of nutrition curricula into medical schools and nutrition counseling into routine patient care. Currently physicians in training receive little to no education on the relationships

between diet, food and health and they often lack the skills to effectively counsel patients on these topics. A bipartisan resolution passed the House of Representatives this year that calls for medical schools, residency, and fellowship programs to provide nutrition education that demonstrates the connection between diet and disease, which ASN supports. For example, training programs on motivational counseling and weight bias could be incorporated into medical school curricula. Certification bodies should also increase the number of nutrition and diet-related questions on board exams. This action will better prepare our health care systems to involve nutrition professionals as part of the patient care team and address the needs of patients suffering from type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other diet-related diseases and conditions. However, for physicians and other health care professionals to code and bill for time spent counseling on diet and related topics, there need to be expansions or changes in allowable reimbursement by insurance companies and others when there is demonstrated efficacy in supporting human health.

- Medicaid coverage should be expanded for Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) services, making nutrition counseling for all diet-related diseases a required service for state Medicaid agencies with reimbursement for health care professionals, including nutrition physician specialists and registered dietitians. Almost all Medicare beneficiaries have at least one chronic condition and over two-thirds live with multiple chronic conditions. This expansion would allow Medicare beneficiaries to access the care they need by providing coverage for MNT for a variety of chronic conditions under Medicare Part B.

Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices

- Food environments have a profound impact on the food choices we make. The US is a leader in both domestic and global supply food systems. It is important to make the healthy choice the easy choice and to make healthy choices affordable for all. Improved social protections such as nutrition assistance programs can help to empower consumers and allow for greater access to healthy food choices.
- The FDA's ongoing work to define healthy and determine front-of-pack labeling that showcase healthy food options will help empower consumers to make healthier choices. It is important to align all federal food and nutrition policies, regulations, and programs with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs)* to ensure science-based nutrition standards that will lead to improved health. However, it is important to note that presently nutrition labeling policies for foods emphasize nutrients and food components while the *DGAs* emphasize dietary patterns. New approaches are needed in nutrition labeling to illustrate how foods contribute in a meaningful way to healthful dietary patterns and practices.

- FDA should also improve and streamline the process for making health claims and qualified health claims on food packages. Health claims, including approved, qualified and structure function claims as defined and regulated by the FDA serve as a vehicle to educate consumers on the healthfulness of foods and beverages. Many existing regulations on health claims were released in 1993 and have not been updated since. As such, many health claims may not be aligned with authoritative public health recommendations, including the most recent *DGAs* and the latest scientific evidence but should be to most effectively steer consumers to the healthiest options.
- As such, continuous support is necessary for federal nutrition recommendations such as the *DGAs*. The *DGAs* are critically important in that they form the basis of federal nutrition policy and programs, guide local, state, and national health promotion and disease prevention initiatives for public health agencies, health care providers, and educational institutions, and inform products developed and marketed by the food and beverage industry. However, the *DGAs* do not have dedicated funding. It is imperative to secure funding to support the implementation and coordination of the 2020-2025 *DGAs* among federal agencies and to ensure the research gaps and opportunities from the 2020 and 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Scientific Reports are addressed. Dedicated funding is also necessary to allow the responsible agencies to improve preparation and development for the 2025-2030 *DGA* process. In addition, ASN strongly supports dedicated support to ensure needed updates of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) take place given that the DRIs provide current, accurate data with which to identify nutrients of public health concern and other nutrient needs to be used in the development of the *DGAs*.
- Agricultural subsidies influence production. Research is needed to increase the nutritional density of plant food commodities to positively impact human health and incentives should be provided to increase production of fruits, vegetables, and other specialty crops.

Support physical activity for all

- Being physical active on a regular basis helps to improve health outcomes for individuals and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases and conditions. However, many Americans do not have a supportive environment that is conducive to regular physical activity. Measures should be taken to improve the built environment to support physical activity for Americans, in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In addition to sidewalks, bike lanes, green spaces, and playgrounds, traffic calming measures, such as speed bumps and lowered speed limits, in urban environments are an important consideration for altering the built environment to promote physical activity.

- Physical activity requirements should be reinstated in all schools. Daily physical education should be provided to students in grades K-12, with instructional periods totaling at least 150 minutes per week in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week in middle and high schools and students engaged in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 50% of the class time¹.
- Community development assistance can help lead to improvements in the built environment and support programs that encourage regular physical activity in communities. In addition, health systems and other anchor institutions should support community development that leads to regular physical activity. Health care professionals have an important role to play in encouraging physical activity.

Enhance nutrition and food security research

- Increased investments in nutrition research and innovative research tools are needed for the primary federal agencies responsible for nutrition research, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In addition, increased investments are needed for nutrition surveillance and data monitoring such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and What we Eat in America. ASN proposes an additional \$2 billion for nutrition research and nutrition science across all federal agencies. Specifically, ASN requests a doubling of the \$2 billion current investment in nutrition science by the federal government at agencies including NIH, USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and others. An increase in nutrition research support will propel efforts to recruit cutting-edge nutrition scientists to the federal agencies and to train the next generation of nutrition scientists and practitioners and will usher in new initiatives to enhance and improve nutrition, which will have profound effects on the health of all Americans. In particular, increased leadership, coordination, and investment for nutrition research are needed within the NIH through the Office of Nutrition Research.
- In order to increase investments in nutrition research, the US government should determine incentives to catalyze public-private partnerships for nutrition research and private sector and philanthropic research funding that stimulates high-integrity, transparent, and unbiased research to address the nation's priorities related to hunger, nutrition, and health.
- A coordinated national nutrition science strategy should be unveiled to improve nutrition coordination and collaboration across all federal agencies and investment in federal

¹ <https://paamovewithus.org/national-physical-activity-plan/>

nutrition research focused on nutrition security and health to increase efficiency, maximize impact and return-on-investment, and promote equity. Part of this strategy would include for enhanced interagency coordination and utilization of research and data sharing to improve nutrition policies and programs across federal agencies. The strategy may include a nutrition science-specific advisory council that would engage stakeholders outside of the federal government, including state, local, and tribal governments as well as experts from academia and the private sector.

- This enhanced support should be coordinated by a revitalized Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research, given the staff, authority and budget resources needed to align all agencies to focus on nutrition support and coordination across the federal government. Given nutrition's inherently interdisciplinary nature, an ongoing, strong coordinating mechanism across all government agencies is essential as a 2021 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended in order to achieve the many promising opportunities in nutrition. The GAO report noted that nutrition currently crosses 21 federal agencies and 200 disjointed efforts. The Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research should be called upon to align the federal agencies in implementing the national strategy announced at the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.
- The Administration should establish a senior-level position to serve as the federal government's overall coordinator of nutrition-related initiatives. This individual would serve as a liaison across all government agencies and to the private sector and would ideally be a distinguished scientist in the field of nutrition science. As suggested in the white paper "Strengthening national nutrition research: Rationale and options for a new coordinated federal research effort and authority" (Am J Clin Nutr 2020), this may include a new Office of the National Director of Food and Nutrition (ONDFN). Such an office would be led by a principal food and nutrition advisor to the White House, who would serve as the President's advisor on all issues related to food and nutrition research. The ONDFN would serve as the principal coordinating agency and advisor on the topic of food security and diet-related chronic diseases, informing the White House, the heads of executive branch departments and agencies, senior military commanders, and Congress.

Thank you for your consideration of ASN's suggestions and recommendations, as well as ASN's involvement and support. The upcoming Conference will both highlight and advance the work of nutrition researchers and of organizations like ASN. ASN is encouraged that the outcomes from this conference will contribute to the prevention of diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity and heart disease, as well as improved food and nutrition security, and in that way, save lives and costs and help build a more equitable society. We look forward to lending our expertise to the conference and to implementation of the national strategy.

Please contact Sarah Ohlhorst, MS, RD, ASN Chief Science Policy Officer (240-428-3647; sohlhorst@nutrition.org) with questions or requests for additional information related to these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Martha A. Belury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'B'.

Martha A. Belury, PhD, RDN
2022-2023 President, American Society for Nutrition