

November 24, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
The President-elect

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RE: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Public Policy Priorities

Dear President-elect Biden:

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics welcomes the opportunity to work with the Biden-Harris administration to accelerate improvement in global health and well-being through food and nutrition. Representing more than 107,000 registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs)¹, nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs) and advanced-degree nutritionists, the Academy is the largest association of food and nutrition professionals in the United States and is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of nutrition and dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

As experts in all aspects of food and nutrition, Academy members play a key role in shaping the public's food choices, improving people's nutritional status and preventing and treating chronic disease. Academy members are valued for their expertise in translating science and evidence to empower consumers to make healthful choices through education, medical nutrition therapy and intensive behavior therapy. To achieve the Academy's vision of a world where all people thrive through the transformative power of food and nutrition, Academy members must be at the table to work with policy leaders at every level of government to promote health and reduce the burden of chronic disease through nutrition services and interventions.

Urgent COVID-19 Administrative Priorities

It is critical that the Biden-Harris administration maximize all opportunities to increase access to health care and federal nutrition programs during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. The Academy recommends:

- Instruct the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services to reconsider the National Coverage Determination for intensive behavioral therapy for obesity to allow patients to see a wider range of qualified health care professionals including registered dietitian nutritionists. Equitable access to health care for individuals with obesity is a crucial first step in providing access to those at greatest risk for COVID-19 complications.
- Rescind rules that limit access to federal health care and nutrition programs, including the Public Charge and rules limiting access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and National School Lunch and Breakfast programs
- Support swift implementation of program flexibilities for SNAP, school meals, WIC and senior nutrition programs

¹ The Academy approved the optional use of the credential "registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN)" by "registered dietitians (RDs)" to more accurately convey who they are and what they do as the nation's food and nutrition experts. The RD and RDN credentials have identical meanings and legal trademark definitions.

- Rescind any school nutrition standards proposed rule changes that do not move towards alignment with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.
- Ensure that immigrant children and adolescents in the custody of any federal agency receive an adequate supply of healthful and safe foods that promote optimal physical, cognitive and social growth and development. And ensure that breastfed infants have continuing access to their mother’s milk.

Urgent COVID-19 Relief Legislative Priorities

The Academy is eager to support the Biden-Harris campaign promise to aggressively address the current health crisis, especially given its disproportionate impact on communities of color who are already experiencing significant health disparities as compared to their white counterparts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that people from racial and ethnic minority groups are being hospitalized and dying from COVID-19 at much higher rates than white people. The situation is particularly dire for Black people and other minority groups that have long faced chronic disease health disparities due to socioeconomic inequalities and reduced access to health care, healthful foods and safe places to be active. To help mitigate these complications, public policies intended to increase access to health care, healthful food and culturally appropriate nutrition interventions must be enacted. The Academy recommends:

1. Provide adequate access to nutrition care in Medicare

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified health disparities. The CDC lists people with obesity, diabetes and heart disease, as well as those undergoing dialysis for chronic kidney disease, as being at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, putting minority communities that experience health disparities at higher risk of poor outcomes.²

Access to nutrition care through Medicare is one tool that can help prevent, manage and treat many of these chronic conditions. The Medical Nutrition Therapy Act of 2020 (H.R. 6971/S. 4504) would expand Medicare beneficiaries’ access to medical nutrition therapy for a range of chronic conditions. And the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (H.R. 1530/S. 595) would expand Medicare beneficiaries’ access to intensive behavioral therapy for obesity.

2. Strengthen and expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to address food insecurity

- Boost the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent
- Increase the monthly minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30

Food insecurity significantly impacts the health and well-being of individuals and is a risk factor for negative psychological and health outcomes.³ It also increases the prevalence and severity of diet-related disease, such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers, all

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness. CDC.gov.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>. Accessed May 14, 2020.

³ Hartline-Grafton, H. (2017). The Impact of Poverty, Food Insecurity, & Poor Nutrition on Health and Well-Being. Washington, DC: Food Research & Action Center.

of which put individuals at greater risk of complications from COVID-19.^{4,5,6} SNAP helps reduce stress for struggling individuals and families worried about finances, which is significant given the high correlation of stress with poor health outcomes⁷ and the level of stress that Americans are under during this unprecedented national emergency.

3. Ensure that school nutrition and child care programs receive emergency relief funds

School nutrition programs and Child and Adult Care Food Program centers rely on reimbursement from meal service to pay for expenses. Many of these institutions across the country maintained or incurred more expenses than normal during the COVID-19 pandemic while seeing a significant decrease in revenues from lower meal participation during school and business closures. This unanticipated loss of revenue has forced programs to tap into fund balances and draw upon lines of credit. In order to sustain these essential feeding programs while protecting jobs and precious education resources, support must be provided to make programs financially solvent and to maintain the integrity of essential food security programs as the recovery process continues. These emergency funds have been outlined in the Feed the Children Act (H.R. 6801).

4. Diversify allied health professions including dietetics to provide culturally appropriate care to communities of color

Cultural competency and relatability are often the touchstones of success for engaging patients and clients and motivating them to change dietary patterns. For these reasons, the Institute of Medicine's report *Unequal Treatment Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care* recommended increasing the proportion of health professionals from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups through grants set aside for Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Tribal Colleges and Universities Minority Serving Institutions such as Primarily Black Institutions; Hispanic-Serving Institutions; and Asian American, Native American and Pacific Islander Institutions to strengthen and grow their allied health education programs, including nutrition and dietetics.

Academy Priorities for Consideration during the First 100 Days of the Biden-Harris Administration and the 117th U.S. Congress

The Academy looks forward to working with the Biden-Harris administration and the 117th U.S. Congress to support nutrition-related policy initiatives that will advance racial equity and address health disparities, support job development and economic recovery and address climate change.

Racial Equity

⁴ Franklin B. Jones, A., Love, D., Puckett, S., Macklin, J., & White-Means, S. (2012). Exploring mediators of food insecurity and obesity: a review of recent literature. *Journal of Community Health*, 37(1), 253-264.

⁵ Berkowitz, S., A., Karter, A., J., Corbie-Smith, G., Seligman, H. K., Ackroyd, S. A., Barnard, L. S., Atlas, S. J., & Wexler, D. J. (2018). Food insecurity, food "deserts," and glycemic control in patients with diabetes: a longitudinal analysis. *Diabetes Care*, 19, 171981.

⁶ Gregory, C., A., & Coleman-Jensen, A. (2017). Food insecurity, chronic disease and health among working-age adults. *Economic Research Report*, 235. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

⁷ Juster, R-P., McEwen, B. S., & Lupien, S. J. (2010). Allostatic load biomarkers of chronic stress and impact on health and cognition. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 35(1), 2-16.

- Support medical nutrition therapy as an effective chronic disease management and treatment strategy to reduce chronic disease health disparities
- Expand programs and services to reduce maternal and infant morbidity and mortality
- Expand access to healthful food for all children through universal school meals during the school day
- Expand evidence-based nutrition interventions, including malnutrition screening and nutrition education in the Older Americans Act programs to ensure that access to food is paired with access to quality health care professionals
- Increase access to healthful foods through an investment in SNAP.

Job Development Priorities

- Continue to support efforts that meet the health care needs of consumers by investing in efforts to build out a more diverse field of allied health professionals.

Climate Change

- Align agricultural policies with health policies by creating a federal task force on sustainable nutrition
- Support expansion of and investment in nutrition research at National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and United States Department of Agriculture that will help reduce the national burden of diet-related chronic diseases
- Support the development and implementation of evidence-based, transparently crafted 2020-2025 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* by reviewing proposed research protocols, evaluating evidence reviews and making recommendations to inform the Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

The Academy is poised to work with the Biden-Harris administration on these critical nutrition priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, now more than ever, the need for and importance of strong nutrition policies, from access to high-quality health care to sustainable food systems.

We have attached a full set of nutrition policy recommendations to this memo. We look forward to setting up an opportunity to talk through these recommendations in detail. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Linda T. Farr, RDN, CSOWM, LD, FAND
 President, 2020-2021
 Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics