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White House Holds Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, Releases National Strategy and Announces Other Agency Actions

On Wednesday (September 28), the White House convened the first [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) since 1969, convening elected officials, advocates and activists, and leaders of business, faith, and philanthropy from across America to meet a bold conference goal: ending hunger in America and increasing healthy eating and physical activity by 2030. In opening the conference, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said that what was true in the last gathering decades ago still rings true today: “Food and nutrition security are central to our national security and our economic future.” The Secretary said that while we have made great strides in addressing food insecurity, it remains “unacceptably high” and that “much more needs to be done.” He provided an overview of the [Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#), which was released in advance of the conference, highlighting key initiatives from the five pillars:

- *Pillar 1 - Improve Food Access and Affordability.* Sec. Vilsack said that a critical step to reducing hunger is ensuring all Americans are economically secure, including through a permanent extension of the expanded, fully refundable Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- *Pillar 2 - Integrate Nutrition and Health.* Sec. Vilsack highlighted the Administration’s proposal to expand Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries’ access to “food is medicine” interventions, including a pilot to test coverage of medically tailored meals in Medicare for those experiencing diet-related health conditions.
- *Pillar 3 - Empower All Consumers to Make and Have Access to Healthy Choices.* Sec. Vilsack discussed the Administration’s support for incentives to boost access to healthy foods in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other food assistance programs.
- *Pillar 4 - Support Physical Activity for All.* Sec. Vilsack highlighted initiatives to build environments that promote physical activity, including connecting more people to parks and other outdoor spaces, particularly in nature-deprived communities.
- *Pillar 5 - Enhance Nutrition and Food Security Research.* Sec. Vilsack said we should advance innovative, inclusive, impactful, and science-based, policy solutions to address nutrition and food insecurity.

President Joe Biden also addressed the conference, calling for a bipartisan, whole of government response to meet the conference goal. He said, “The task before this conference is the important work of fellows in meeting this inflection point by nourishing the soul of America.” “In America,” he added, “no child should go to bed hungry. No parent should die of a disease that can be prevented.” In closing, he said that “we’re at our best we think big” and that “there is nothing beyond our capacity when we work together. So let’s work together.”

The administration also announced other actions and commitments in coordination with the conference. This includes a [fact sheet](#) detailing more than \$8 billion in new stakeholder commitments as part of the Conference’s call to action; a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [proposal](#) to update criteria for when foods can be labeled with the nutrient content claim “healthy” on their packaging; and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [approval](#) of Medicaid 1115 Waivers in Massachusetts and Oregon, which among other things will provide new authority to address unmet health-related social needs by testing coverage for evidenced-based nutritional assistance and medically tailored meals.

High-level overview of the National Strategy

In coordination with the conference, the Biden-Harris Administration released a [National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) in pursuit of their goal of “ending hunger and increasing healthy eating and physical activity by 2030 so fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases—all while reducing health disparities.” According to the Executive Summary, the strategy “identifies ambitious and achievable actions the Biden-Harris Administration will pursue across five pillars.” It also issues a Call to Action for all entities to do their part, saying that “The federal government cannot make these transformative changes alone. Accelerating this work will require actions by state, Tribal, local, and territory governments; academia; civil society; philanthropy; the private sector; and other partners.”

Below is a high-level overview of each pillar and suggested action items (not comprehensive):

Pillar 1—Improve Food Access and Affordability: End hunger by making it easier for everyone—including individuals in urban, suburban, rural, and Tribal communities, and territories—to access and afford food.

- Advancing economic security, including by pushing for Congress to permanently extend the expanded, fully refunded CTC and expanded EITC; raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour; close the Medicaid coverage gap; invest in affordable high-quality child care; and expand affordable housing programs.
- Helping more individuals experiencing food insecurity benefit from federal assistance programs, including increasing access to free and nourishing school meals; providing Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) benefits to more children; and expanding SNAP eligibility to more underserved populations.
- Investing in community and economic development to increase access to food, including leveraging housing and other community programs to increase food access; improving transportation options to and from grocery stores and farmers' markets; and increasing historically underserved communities' access to affordable and healthy foods.

Pillar 2—Integrate Nutrition and Health: Prioritize the role of nutrition and food security in overall health—including disease prevention and management—and ensure that our health care system addresses the nutrition needs of all people

- Providing greater access to nutrition services to better prevent, manage, and treat diet-related diseases, including working with Congress to pilot coverage of medically tailored meals in Medicare; testing Medicaid coverage of nutrition education and other nutrition supports using Medicaid section 1115 demonstration projects; expanding Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries' access to nutrition and obesity counseling; and increasing access to nutrition-related services through private insurance and federal programs beyond Medicare and Medicaid.
- Screening for food insecurity and connecting people to the services they need, including universal screening for food insecurity in federal health care systems; incentivizing payors and providers to screen for food insecurity and other social determinants of health (SDOH); supporting data infrastructure for food insecurity and SDOH screenings; and incentivizing hospitals to provide services focused on food insecurity and SDOH.
- Strengthening and diversifying the nutrition workforce, including training over 4,500 nutrition professionals and 30,000 practicing professionals on key topics related to nutrition and prevention through the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Nutrition Training Program; and partnering with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to recruit and train nutrition professionals from underrepresented groups.

Pillar 3—Empower All Consumers to Make and Have Access to Healthy Choices: Foster environments that enable all people to easily make informed, healthy choices, increase access to healthy food, encourage healthy

workplace and school policies, and invest in public education campaigns that are culturally appropriate and resonate with specific communities.

- Empowering all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices, including by proposing to develop a front-of-package labeling scheme for food packages; proposing to update the nutrition criteria for the “healthy” claim on food packages; prioritizing the FDA’s nutrition and labeling work; and facilitating making nutrition information easily available when grocery shopping online.
- Creating healthier food environments and a healthier food supply, including by expanding incentives for fruits and vegetables in SNAP; facilitating sodium reduction in the food supply by issuing longer-term, voluntary sodium targets for industry; assessing additional steps to reduce added sugar consumption, including potential voluntary targets; and addressing marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.
- Supporting robust and tailored nutrition education, including regular updates to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and carrying out a national education campaign; tailored nutrition education materials; and leveraging SNAP-Ed to promote healthy foods.

Pillar 4—Support Physical Activity for All: Make it easier for people to be more physically active—in part by ensuring that everyone has access to safe places to be active—increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity, and conduct research on and measure physical activity.

- Building environments that promote physical activity, including by expanding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program to all states and territories; investing in efforts to connect people to parks and other outdoor spaces; and supporting physical activity among children both in and out of school.
- Supporting robust and tailored physical activity education, including funding regular updates to and promotion of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans; tailored physical activity messages to different demographics, and facilitating physical activities in federal facilities.

Pillar 5—Enhance Nutrition and Food Security Research: Improve nutrition metrics, data collection, and research to inform nutrition and food security policy, particularly on issues of equity, access, and disparities.

- Bolstering funding to improve metrics, data collection, and research to inform nutrition and food security policy, particularly on issues of equity and access; and implementing a vision for advancing nutrition science.
- Evaluating federal assistance programs and innovative models to understand impact and areas for improvement and scalability to create a strong evidence base to allow for the creation of effective programs.
- Ensuring diversity and inclusion in nutrition, health, and food security research, including through expanding and diversifying the nutrition science workforce; better understanding the SDOH to health achieve healthy equity; and researching the intersection of climate change, food security, and nutrition.

If you have questions, please contact [Heather Meade](#) or [Laura Dillon](#).

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