

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)

Resolution HHS-23-05

PROMOTING EQUITY IN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

WHEREAS, a healthy diet consisting of proper nutrients and adequate caloric intake can promote healthy childhood development, as well as help people achieve and maintain good health throughout the lifespan;

WHEREAS, nutritionally inadequate dietary intake is a leading contributor to the development of chronic cardiometabolic diseases;

WHEREAS, to better improve public health and address inequities contributing to diet-related illnesses, federal nutrition programs and policies should expand their focus on access to healthy foods through successful public-private partnerships such as online purchasing, grocery delivery, and nutrition incentive programs;

WHEREAS, food insecurity, a common cause of inadequate nutrition, is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a “household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food”;

WHEREAS, food insecurity contributes to disparities in chronic disease outcomes, especially for cardiovascular diseases;

WHEREAS, nutrition security refers to an individual or household condition of having equitable and stable availability, access, affordability, and utilization of foods and beverages that promote well-being and prevent and treat disease;

WHEREAS, there is growing consensus that U.S. food policies and programs should continue to focus on “nutrition security” in addition to the broader scope of “food security”;

WHEREAS, emphasizing nutrition security will expand and strengthen existing U.S. food assistance policies and programs in a more equitable manner, while also developing and implementing novel policy approaches;

WHEREAS, nutrition incentive programs such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) and produce prescriptions provide free or reduced-price produce to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants while empowering individuals to make healthy purchasing choices;

WHEREAS, digital food access provides more options for people who experience barriers to brick-and-mortar food access, including those living in hard-to-reach areas and individuals facing mobility challenges or time constraints;

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WHEREAS, challenges to consuming a heart-healthy diet are perpetuated by lack of access to a broad array of affordable and culturally-relevant food options, structural racism, and long-standing inequitable policies disproportionately affecting communities of color;

WHEREAS, worsening socioeconomic disparities in diet quality are increasingly recognized as drivers of chronic disease disparities;

WHEREAS, these disparities are potentially brought about by chronic stress that results from experiencing food insecurity or other adverse social determinants of health and by poor dietary quality related to low consumption of nutritious food and overconsumption of nutrient-poor foods commonly due to lack of brick-and-mortar grocery stores and/or delivery options;

WHEREAS, in 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic), 10.5% of U.S. households reported being food insecure, with rates of food insecurity at 14.8% for households with children, 15.3% for households with children under the age of 6, 21.7% for Black non-Hispanic households and 17.2% for Hispanic households, 27.7% for households headed by a single woman and 16.3% for households headed by a single man, and 28.6% for households with incomes below 185% of the poverty threshold;

WHEREAS, in Fiscal Year 2019, 43% of SNAP recipients were households with children, 36.5% were white and not Hispanic households, 25.8% were African American and not Hispanic households, 16% were Hispanic households, 3.3 were Asian and not Hispanic households, 1.5% were Native American and not Hispanic households, 0.8 were multiple races and not Hispanic households, and 16.1% did not report their race;

WHEREAS, SNAP recipients should have access to use benefits to purchase available culturally-relevant food items, regardless of whether sold by a retailer directly or through its third-party seller marketplace, and some marketplaces are currently ineligible for SNAP per U.S. Department of Agriculture policies;

WHEREAS, the pandemic has demonstrated the important role that technology plays in connecting customers to nutrition access and providing new opportunities to address food inequities;

WHEREAS, further technological modernization within federal nutrition programs could offer participants increased accessibility and convenience, bringing greater equity to the food shopping experience;

WHEREAS, the SNAP online purchasing program should be made permanent so that customers can continue accessing nutrition for their families from a wide range of online retailers;

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WHEREAS, participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) should be able to redeem their benefits online, which is currently not allowed due to restrictive U.S. policies;

WHEREAS, technical challenges due to Point of Sale (POS) system complexities and paper-based and/or unique nutrition incentive projects should be resolved since they make it difficult for retailers to establish an online system at scale that allows for customers to use SNAP, WIC, nutrition incentives, and/or other public assistance benefits in the same transaction;

WHEREAS, public-private partnerships are critical to the success of federal nutrition programs. Nutrition models should be tested in a partnership between grocery retailers, the government, and academia/research;

WHEREAS, these models should be tested quickly and should not require lengthy legislative actions to enable; and

WHEREAS, testing models in this fashion will allow for quick learnings and fast failings, which is what technology can enable in an industry that touches everyone.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) recognizes that to equitably improve the health and wellbeing of all Americans, the U.S. government must invest in public-private partnerships, education and policies that incentivize healthy food access and healthy eating; and use technology to more efficiently incorporate federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP and WIC into retailers' online platforms;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL supports extending Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) eligibility for children from age 5 to age 6 to address the gap in nutrition assistance prior to entering kindergarten;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL urges Congress, and in the absence of federal action, state lawmakers, to expand access of school meals, including breakfast, lunch and summer meal programs to all children through universal free meals for all;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL supports strengthening nutrition standards for school meals, including breakfast, lunch, and summer meal programs;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL supports the increase in SNAP benefit levels established by October 2021 by updates to the Thrifty Food Plan to help cover the cost of a nutritious diet;

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL supports increasing federal funding to expand access to all eligible older adults by reducing lengthy waitlists and eliminating meal costs, and expanding options to include more culturally appropriate food;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL recognizes that additional policy solutions are needed for all Americans to reach nutrition security; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

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Sponsored by: Asm. Akilah Weber (CA)

Policy Committee: Health and Human Services (HHS)