

Working Group on College Student Hunger Policy Priorities for the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health

College student hunger is a growing crisis. Nationally, [one in three](#) of today's college students reported experiencing food insecurity, and yet too often, state and federal policymakers have made it difficult or impossible for students to access resources and support to help them meet their basic needs, including food. In September 2021, our group of leading voices on college student hunger [shared research and testimony at the first ever congressional hearing on the topic](#). We believe the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health in 2022 is a crucial opportunity to continue that conversation, one that will continue to prioritize the needs of college students who are underrepresented in national public health efforts and develop a bold plan that endeavors to end hunger at all stages of the life course, not just make it more tolerable for those who experience it. We encourage the Administration to prioritize human dignity. The signatories on this letter are using the following principles in guiding our recommendations. We believe that the Administration should seek to reduce hunger by supporting policies which:

- Are informed by people with low-incomes who are given the opportunity to participate in the policy making process;
- Prioritize social determinants of health to reduce poverty and inequality;
- Center communities with inequitable rates of challenges by making intersectional (race, class, gender, ability, etc.) equity a priority in the shaping of and confirming the recommendations that will determine funding, policies, and solutions; and
- Take on a whole of government approach, inclusive of all federal agencies that oversee programs regarding basic needs.

The plan to end hunger in America must include a strong focus to address the crisis of hunger, homelessness, and other basic needs among college students. The Biden-Harris Administration must recognize the diversity of today's college student population and the key roles they play in physically and economically supporting their dependents, loved ones, and communities in their day-to-day lives. We congratulate Chairman McGovern and the Administration for securing \$2.5M to fund the Conference. Our community is eager to support the planning, hosting, and realization of the policies presented during our hearing.

With these principles guiding our recommendations, we have developed a list of policies that the Biden-Harris Administration and all stakeholders involved in the federal landscape can make the most meaningful contributions in their development plan to end hunger in America. The following recommendations focus on higher education given that educational attainment is a social determinant of health. Our key recommendations are the following:

1. Federal Nutrition Programs

1a. Through Executive Action

- Name and support codifying "college students (undergraduate and graduate students)" as a priority population of public programs along with children, single parents, disabled, veterans, and seniors. Students are overwhelmingly excluded from public programs and experience "othering" because they are currently not explicitly named as an eligible or priority population.
- Maximize college student's SNAP access under existing law to minimize loss of SNAP after public health emergency sunsets and while Congress works to eliminate the punitive work for food requirements.

- [The USDA should issue guidance](#) to states that clarifies that low-income students can meet current SNAP exemptions if approved for work study as part of their financial aid package; if enrolled in any state or local educational programs that improve their employability and should clarify that the “mental or physical unfitness” exemption includes being homeless, receiving disability or special needs accommodations through their colleges, and/or placed in college through their state’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program or meeting or other conditions. USDA has both the authority and obligation to remove barriers to access and equity under the existing rules.
- Authorize USDA to exclude as countable income for SNAP and other means-tested programs any state or local financial aid as well as the part-time income or stipends of full-time students, as is the case for earnings of high school students under age 18 participating in SNAP.
- Broaden USDA “[SNAP Outreach](#)” to encourage targeted outreach and social media that will increase college student participation in SNAP.
- Prioritize and establish a higher education subcontract in each state to conduct “[SNAP Outreach](#)” and enrollment support for college campuses across the country. USDA will provide guidance for identifying and assigning a higher education subcontractor to support outreach with primary state leads.
- Support food security by increasing access, availability, and consumption of nutritious foods to emerging adults, including college students, among whom fruit and vegetable intake is low.
- Establish an intra-agency agreement to automatically enroll students in higher education who were eligible for the National School Lunch Program into SNAP.
- Prepare an annual publication/briefing from Department of Education and USDA that provides updated examples of schools proactively using FAFSA data to guide and conduct SNAP outreach, free & reduced-price school lunch, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and other benefits.
- Allow categorical eligibility for enrollment in Head Start centers for children of students who are Pell eligible. This is already allowed for those who receive SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- Allow WIC enrollment to students (pregnant, postpartum, or with a child 1-4 years old) who are Pell eligible.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Education to conduct rulemaking on Cost of Attendance for students, by 2023-2024. (i) Rulemaking should set minimum standards for quality nutrition and methodologies that provide for equivalent of three nutritious meals per day for students. (ii) Regional cost differences must be taken into account when establishing the cost of meals that get factored into financial aid packaging. (iii) There must be proactive alignment across financial aid packaging and eligibility for social services in order to provide the best resources for students to have healthy, successful, and thriving experiences into, through, and beyond college.

1b. Through Legislative Action

- Permanently end the unjust (i) *work for food rule* and (ii) *college student work requirement* to expand SNAP access to low-income college students. Prevent a food cliff for students receiving SNAP benefits through the temporary expansions made in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021. The pandemic era waiver [proved effective as thousands of students](#) enrolled in SNAP.

- Pass and enact the EATS Act of 2021 H.R. 1919 / S. 2515 to include the pursuit of postsecondary credentials to meet compliance, work participation, and/or core activity requirements for public benefit programs.
- Pass and enact the Student Food Security Act of 2021 S.1569. / H.R.5591.
- Pass and Enact the BASIC Act of 2021 S. 2004.
- Pass and enact the Food for Thought Act of 2022 H.R. 6934 that would create a pilot within the National School Lunch Program to allow community colleges to serve free meals to students.
- Authorize USDA to allow the deduction of student loan payments, as is the case for expenses on shelter, dependent care, and other basic needs.

2. Federal Financial Aid and Housing Programs as Related to Nutrition in Higher Education

2a. Through Executive Action

- Direct the U.S. Department of Education to ensure full execution of the FAFSA Simplification Act, and ensure colleges' estimates of the total cost of attendance are reasonable, employing a minimum standard of quality in their methodology, and takes into account regional differences in the cost of living across the country.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Education to conduct continuous outreach to identify and inform students who fill out a FAFSA form of their eligibility for federal assistance programs such as SNAP, Head Start, HUD rental assistance, WIC, TANF, and with the USDA/FNS on how to pursue enrollment in these programs.
- Reform inequitable Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies to reflect student food insecurity and the fact that many students drop out of taking fewer classes due to experiencing hunger or other basic needs insecurity.
 - Establish more flexibility for students to appeal loss of financial aid due to SAP based on extenuating circumstances like food insecurity (as well as homelessness) and ensure that students who leave college can have their financial aid eligibility restored no later than two years after leaving.
- Ensure that the U.S. Department of Transportation is part of the planning conversation for student nutrition and well-being since they are allocated billions for infrastructure dollars. They must ensure that students/colleges/universities are at the table when counties are deciding on community infrastructure investments (for example, improving food access and pathways to affordable food outlets in the built environment).
- Direct the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to issue guidance to housing authorities to allow for categorical eligibility for Section 8 Choice Housing Vouchers if you are Pell eligible and require housing authorities to have a certain number of vouchers set aside for college students, with prioritization around students with dependents. This is something that Moving to Work Housing Authorities already have the authority to do.

2b. Through Legislative Action

- Pass and enact legislation to double the maximum Pell Grant, so that grants once again reflect increasing college prices and the true cost of living, and students can use grants to address multiple forms of basic needs insecurity, including food insecurity and hunger.
- Pass and enact the America's College Promise Act, which would create a federal-state partnership to make community college tuition-free, and would allow students to use federal and state financial aid to consistently afford healthful and nutritious food.

- Pass and enact legislation, such as the Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act, to create a permanent emergency aid program modeled after the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, which would allow students experiencing hunger and other basic needs insecurity to apply for grants to meet their needs and stay enrolled.

In summary, by increasing access to healthy and sufficient food among college students through public programs, such as SNAP, we expect better outcomes in terms of mental and physical health as well as academic. We also anticipate that when students are nourished, they are better able to learn; therefore we anticipate impacts on college retention and completion. Additionally, students who are sufficiently nourished may obtain adequate nighttime sleep in addition to having more energy to be physically active, thereby reducing risk for cardiometabolic disease. Furthermore, educational attainment is one of the largest predictors of Alzheimer disease and related dementias, and therefore, by ensuring that college students have the nutrition to succeed is instrumental. Emerging adults, especially college students, have long been underrepresented from health research and federal programs; however, it is time for national investment and prioritization of this population in order to see an improvement in the Nation's health. Our Higher Education community is grateful for and energized to support the transformative progress that will be accomplished in the planning, hosting, and implementation strategies after the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health.

Thank you for your commitment to Higher Education and consideration of these priorities.

[Signature: Name, Role, Organization, State]

Submit: <https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/white-house-conference-hunger-nutrition-and-health/share-your-ideas-and-stories>