



Recommendations

Defining Hunger: **Very Low Food Security**

As noted in the box in the Introduction, when we use the word “hunger” we mean households experiencing very low food security.

The latest USDA statistics, published in September 2015, show levels of hunger that are still elevated from the pre-recession period. This illustrates clearly that existing food assistance programs are not solving the problem—nor are they likely to do so without progress on the root causes of hunger. The Commission believes that we must continue to improve existing food assistance programs to alleviate hunger as effectively as possible, while also working to address the root causes. Accordingly, we offer the following recommendations for system changes, both statutory and administrative, across both the public and private arenas, to reduce hunger. However, we want to emphasize that although existing programs have not completely eliminated hunger, the research and information we reviewed and the testimony we heard support the conclusion that rates of hunger would be higher without them. Thus, they provide both opportunities for improvement and a strong foundation on which to build.

“¡Que Sabrosa Vida! (What a Delicious Life!)” by Mauricio Mora.

This painting hangs in the main lobby of El Centro de Salud Familiar (Family Health Center) La Fe’s Child and Adolescent Wellness Center in South El Paso. It is meant to capture the beauty of traditional and healthy Mexican-American foods.

Mindful of our charge to “provide recommendations to more effectively use existing [USDA] programs and funds,” our recommendations will not require significant new resources, but may lead to some future spending if further analysis or evaluations reveal opportunities for improvement.

We urge Congress to act on these recommendations as soon as possible, without waiting for bills (such as the Farm Bill) that are on a particular timeline. The child nutrition program improvements can be made through the upcoming Child Nutrition Act reauthorization process.

We make recommendations in six areas to comprise a total of 20 specific recommendations to Congress and the USDA.

- I. **Make improvements to SNAP** (10 recommendations in three categories: work, nutrition, and wellbeing)
- II. **Make improvements to child nutrition programs** (4 recommendations)
- III. **Improve nutrition assistance options for people who are disabled or medically at risk** (2 recommendations)
- IV. **Fund pilot programs to test the effectiveness of strategic interventions to reduce and eliminate hunger** (1 recommendation; 4 pilots)
- V. **Incentivize and expand corporate, nonprofit, and public partnerships to address hunger in civil society** (1 recommendation)
- VI. **Create a White House Leadership Council to End Hunger** that includes participation by a broad group of government and non-government stakeholders (2 recommendations).



With a little help, every nondisabled working-age adult has the capacity to pull themselves out of poverty and experience the life-changing, transcendent dignity that comes from gainful employment.

– Mary Mayhew, Commissioner, Maine Department of Health and Human Services (Portland)



Make Improvements to SNAP that Promote Work, Improve Nutrition, and Enhance Wellbeing

We identified 10 areas for improvement in SNAP, which we have placed in three categories: work, nutrition, and wellbeing.

Ensure That SNAP Promotes and Supports Work

While the primary goal of SNAP is to treat and prevent hunger, it can also serve as a way to help support families as they enter or re-enter the job market. The majority of people who receive SNAP benefits are not expected to work: they are the elderly, children, or people who are disabled. Another group of recipients includes adults who report earnings when they apply for assistance. In these cases, SNAP is acting to support work.

But a substantial number of working age, non-disabled adults who receive SNAP benefits report no earnings on their case budgets, and state SNAP administrators provide little help to these adult participants in their search for employment. This needs to change.

Encourage a greater focus on job placement, job training, and career development among SNAP recipients, and ensure necessary supports and infrastructure to facilitate finding work.

Rationale: *Having sufficient earnings is the best defense against hunger and reduces the need for nutrition assistance. If SNAP, as the number one nutrition assistance program, did more to help families move beyond the need for nutrition assistance, not only would it be an investment in improving the success, health, and productivity of low-income participants, but also, in the long run, it would reduce government spending.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress and the USDA** should require states to provide more opportunities for adults participating in SNAP to attain the skills they need and find jobs with wages sufficient to enable them to leave SNAP. All non-working, non-public assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or state cash assistance programs), non-disabled, non-pregnant heads of households (with or without young children) applying for or participating in SNAP should be strongly encouraged and supported in their efforts to seek employment or participate in work-related activities realistically designed to lead to available employment. SNAP eligibility case workers should, at all stages of the program (initial application, during household participation, and recertification), assist all employable heads of household to secure employment by promoting the importance of earnings both socially and economically. For adult, non-senior recipients who are not reporting earnings, not disabled, and not on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, states must provide more case management and employment services at initial application and recertification. Further, they should offer participants the ability to participate in existing SNAP employment and training programs or connect employable adults on SNAP to other existing job readiness, job development, and job placement providers in the community that offer case management, supervised job search, resume preparation, transportation assistance, soft skill training, and short-term career training related to available jobs in the local community. For households with children, families should be connected to subsidized, safe, accessible, and affordable child care. Such requirements on states to promote work and connect employable adults to appropriate services should be defined by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in regulations and implemented by the states.
- b. **Congress** should ensure that the USDA collaborates with the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other relevant agencies at the state and local level to facilitate the administration of programs that can support families applying for or participating in SNAP as they look for work and enter the workforce. Employers and community colleges should be integrally involved in designing career-directed training and skill development relevant to existing labor-market job opportunities. Specific services to ensure that families can find employment are outlined in (a) above.

- c. **Congress** should direct USDA to monitor and report annually, on a state-by-state basis, the share of working age, able-bodied adult SNAP recipients who do not report earnings and who are not receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. This may include adding new tables to the “Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households” report or beginning a standalone, annual report on the labor force participation and employment levels of SNAP recipients. In documenting these labor and SNAP participation dynamics, the USDA would provide reliable metrics to evaluate their performance in helping employable recipients successfully connect to the labor market.
- d. **The USDA** should allow states greater flexibility within their current SNAP Employment and Training funding to test innovative approaches that encourage work. Currently, the USDA has rigid and complex rules governing how SNAP Employment and Training funds can be utilized, which potentially stifle the creative and effective provision of employment services. For example, while other work support programs and SNAP Employment and Training can be integrated to leverage funds across programs, more should be done to help states to utilize Employment and Training funds for programs such as subsidized employment, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and legal aid services that help recent prisoners reenter the workforce. While 10 new SNAP Employment and Training pilots have been funded and will be evaluated for broader replication, awaiting their results should not be a reason to wait on efforts to improve the use of SNAP Employment and Training.

2

Ensure SNAP eligibility incentivizes work by improving responsiveness to earned-income fluctuations.

Rationale: *SNAP has a logical phase-down of benefits as income increases. Still, there is evidence that when people abruptly lose all SNAP benefits at the top end of income eligibility, they may have less time to adapt to new income realities and may report that they experience hunger.^{46,142,143} Faced with this possibility, some SNAP recipients may not seek out work or seize an opportunity to increase their earnings.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should allow states to offer all households leaving SNAP for employment that pays sufficiently to end their program eligibility an appropriate extension of their SNAP benefits at the pre-existing level to help them navigate pay lags and adjust household food budgeting. The period of extended benefits shall be determined by states. In implementing these adaptations, states should measure their effectiveness through outcomes such as household reports of hunger, amount of administrative savings and cost of benefits, and amount of churn (reapplications for benefits within 3 months).
- b. **The USDA** should encourage states to improve their administration of SNAP by mandating a more streamlined and effective approach to re-certification for recipients who are working.

Ensure that SNAP Promotes Improved Nutrition

3

Encourage the use of financial incentives to SNAP recipients to facilitate the purchase of fruits, vegetables, high-quality proteins, whole grains, and other healthy foods.

***Rationale:** SNAP is not only an opportunity to help families meet the costs of providing food for themselves and their families, but can also play a crucial role in promoting healthy choices and good nutrition.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should encourage the USDA to continue to develop mechanisms for incentivizing purchases of healthier foods and to promote cost-sharing opportunities with states, nonprofits, and municipal governments to incentivize purchases of healthy foods.
- b. **The USDA** should ensure mechanisms that provide broad, understandable, and culturally appropriate communication regarding these healthy incentives.

4

Exclude a carefully defined class of sugar-sweetened beverages from the list of allowable purchases with SNAP benefits.

***Rationale:** SNAP benefits should help families meet their nutritional needs, not contribute to negative health outcomes through poor nutrition choices. Recent scientific evidence suggests that the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, which are unhealthy, can have profound and serious negative effects on health, such as obesity and diabetes, especially among children.¹⁴⁴⁻¹⁴⁸ Reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages also follows the guidelines of leading health agencies such as the World Health Organization, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute of Medicine, and the Surgeon General of the United States. The technology to exclude certain items already exists at the participating retail store level. In light of the research and the recommendations of numerous health agencies, sugar-sweetened beverages should be added to the list of items excluded from the allowable purchase with SNAP.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should enact legislation to restrict the purchase of a carefully defined list of sugar-sweetened beverages developed in consultation with major health and nutrition organizations (e.g., the organizations mentioned above), nutritionists, and scientific experts.
- b. **The USDA** should ensure mechanisms that provide broad, understandable, and culturally appropriate communication regarding this new restriction.

5

Use evidence-based product placement strategies that encourage purchase of healthy products with SNAP benefits, and tie it to SNAP eligibility for stores.

Rationale: *Participating SNAP retail stores receive significant revenue from SNAP and should therefore promote the purchase of healthy products. If the amount of shelf space allocated to healthy foods is increased, and shelf space for sugar-sweetened beverages and other unhealthy products is reduced, consumers are more likely to purchase healthier foods.*

Action Item:

The USDA should create new standards for SNAP vendor eligibility to ensure that participating stores, including not just grocery stores, but other outlets, comply with improved health and nutrition standards. For example, the USDA should require retail stores that currently accept SNAP or apply to become a participating retailer to provide enhanced and immediately visible shelf space for healthy foods and beverages.

6

Reform SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) to ensure that efforts are likely to lead to measurable improvements in the health of SNAP recipients.

Rationale: *While there are other nutrition education programs in the USDA system, SNAP Ed, which operates in all 50 states, is the most comprehensive. The USDA spent about \$400 million on SNAP-Ed in fiscal year 2014.¹⁴⁹ While there are many evaluations of individual SNAP-Ed programs that demonstrate their impact on nutrition, there is an opportunity to standardize the data collection and evaluation across programs to assess the effectiveness of SNAP-Ed on improving health and hunger outcomes.*

Action Item:

The USDA should continue to collaborate with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services and other agencies and experts to ensure that funds designated for SNAP-Ed are supporting state-of-the-art nutrition education that is effective, relevant, and meaningful to SNAP participants. USDA can use multiple tools, such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Guide for Effective Nutrition Interventions and Education (GENIE), to define best practices within SNAP-Ed, develop or modify programs, and evaluate outcomes.¹⁵⁰ We note that, currently, SNAP-Ed outcomes data tend to focus on inclusion of fruits and vegetables in the diets of recipients. Future studies, however, should broaden that focus to include whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and high-quality proteins (including lean meat, fish, and eggs), in addition to fruits and vegetables.

Maximize SNAP's Ability to Promote Wellbeing

Overall, SNAP participation can improve health and wellbeing and help steer participants to make healthy choices. SNAP is often only one of the multiple services that a family or individual needs. For instance, given the evidence that food insecurity is related to increased risk of depression and poor mental health, or to unsafe housing conditions, or to employment barriers, SNAP application and administration provides an opportunity to assist families on a number of fronts. Building on this, the Commission recommends the following:

7

Continue to promote and facilitate greater coordination of means-tested programs across federal and state agencies and provide state incentives for establishing a “no wrong door” approach between SNAP and non-nutrition family support programs.

***Rationale:** Families that are eligible for SNAP are often eligible for other programs, such as Medicaid and housing assistance. Efforts are underway to find ways to serve families more holistically. However, these programs still have their own application mechanisms, facilities for application, and distinct funding streams at the federal level, which are attached to differing rules and regulations for eligibility and administration. This can create greater hardship for eligible families and increase the administrative burden and costs for states. In the case of Social Security/disability benefits, such rules and regulations can sometimes act at cross-purposes.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should intensify existing efforts to encourage collaboration across agencies to facilitate the coordination of programs and to serve families more holistically in terms of SNAP, housing, medical care, education, child care, and job training supports. Additionally, states should be encouraged to use the option for enhanced federal systems match funding to coordinate Medicaid, SNAP, veteran's benefits, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families more widely.
- b. **Congress** should increase their efforts to identify additional ways to link funding streams between different agencies to ensure greater collaboration between SNAP and other means-tested programs to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services, increased earnings, and reduced hunger.
- c. **The USDA** should find ways to ensure states are working to collaborate across agencies and should incentivize SNAP programming that collaborates with other state and federal agencies.

The USDA should use its current flexibility to the greatest extent possible to support state innovations that would help clients to become more food secure and more self-sufficient, and should approve or disapprove these requests within 90 days of submission.

Rationale: *States have long been a valuable arena for trying new ideas and evaluating them to see if they could work on the national scale. In addition, not all states have the same problems or conditions, labor markets, or caseload composition. Therefore, it is important for the USDA to be receptive to state innovation and experimentation, both by encouraging demonstration projects and by reviewing proposed projects in a timely manner. The USDA should create a process and offer staff support to encourage such innovation, and maximize the demonstration and waiver authority of the programs within its purview, while adhering to the SNAP goal of treating and preventing hunger, maintaining client protections, and keeping program integrity safeguards intact.*

Action Item:

Congress should require that the USDA allow greater flexibility for states to apply for SNAP waivers and demonstrations, and ensure that the USDA approves or disapproves such requests within 90 days of submission, including a thorough explanation of the final decision.



A common sense approach is needed [that would enable] states ... to ensure welfare benefits are being used appropriately. Being closer to recipients, state governments can more effectively determine which program changes best fit their populations. ...[S]tates have made significant strides in some areas to tackle fraud, waste and abuse in the system.

– Jason Turner, Executive Director, [State Human Services] Secretaries' Innovation Group (Maine)



Create mechanisms for improved training for front-line SNAP caseworkers to maintain a customer service perspective that facilitates best practices of case management.

Rationale: *Although accessibility to participation in SNAP has improved, the relationship between front-line caseworkers and applicants could be more positive and effective. Front-line caseworkers are often a client's first encounter with a system meant to help them; therefore, they have the best opportunity to provide effective and appropriate assistance.*

Action Item:

The USDA should require states to provide comprehensive training and modern infrastructure support for front-line caseworkers that ensures strong knowledge of SNAP eligibility; an emphasis on the importance of positive client service that explores potential other problems (such as violence exposure or homelessness) faced by the applicant; cultural competency; and the ability to thoughtfully convey the benefits of full-time work and related work supports. Periodic retraining is also recommended, as program rules change often. Accountability mechanisms to demonstrate high performance on client service and case management standards should be built into caseworker performance reviews. The USDA should also measure the performance of states relative to customer service, in addition to the current focus on error rates and timeliness. Unless such new measurements and expanded training are added, client service will likely not improve. In many places, office hours extending beyond 9–5 and offsite access points for working families are already available and should be encouraged.



I urge the Commission to focus on the horizontal integration of these important programs, and not only linking these resources, but [also] making the individual programs easy to navigate. Because it is a social safety net, not a ropes course.

– Sarah Palmer, Policy Associate, California Association of Food Banks; former CALFresh (SNAP) Recipient (Oakland)



Support the wellbeing of families that have members who serve or have served in the U.S. Military.

Rationale: *Families with an active duty service member should have as much support as possible to stay healthy, well-nourished, and financially stable while their family member serves to protect our country. Likewise, veterans who have served our country should not have to struggle to put food on the table for themselves and their families.*

There is a particular policy issue that restricts some SNAP-eligible active duty military families from qualifying for SNAP benefits. For families living off base or in privatized on-base housing, the Basic Allowance for Housing is counted as income in the determination of eligibility for SNAP and may prevent or reduce eligibility for SNAP. However, the Basic Allowance for Housing is currently excluded as income for calculating income taxes and eligibility for other government programs, including WIC. The Basic Allowance for Housing is also counted as income in determining eligibility for the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance, a program administered by the Department of Defense that operates somewhat in parallel to SNAP and was created to move military families off of SNAP.

Finally, data on food security and SNAP participation among members of the military on active duty, veterans, and their families are not readily available.

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should enact legislation to exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing as income for the determination of SNAP eligibility and benefit levels for families who have an active duty service member.
- b. **Congress** should direct the Department of Defense to undertake a comprehensive review of the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance program and recommend reforms that are directed at improving food security in active duty military families.
- c. In keeping with our country's priority of national security, **the USDA** should work jointly with the **Department of Defense** and the **Department of Veterans Affairs** to help with collecting data on food security, its causes and consequences, and SNAP participation among active duty military and veterans, and make this data available to Congress, the President, and to the public at regularly specified intervals.



Make Targeted Improvements to Child Nutrition Programs

Nutrition programs that are especially targeted to children provide much needed nutrition assistance in key periods of a child’s developmental growth, promoting their health and wellbeing and having an impact on their ability to learn, grow, and develop to their full potential. The WIC and school meal programs are widely available, show significant effectiveness, and should be sustained and enhanced. However, other programs, which seek to reach children outside of the normal school hours and academic schedule, can be improved. Below we make four specific recommendations.

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Improve access to summer feeding programs and congregate meals by reconsidering requirements for rural areas.

Rationale: *Children living in rural areas may have limited access to summer nutrition programs due to remote living conditions and lack of transportation.*

Action Item:

Congress should change the congregate feeding requirements based on a community's stated need and local context to allow them to substitute or supplement with different, more accessible approaches. This includes areas of high need in rural areas where congregate feeding can be a barrier to feeding as many children as possible.

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Change area eligibility for reimbursement of summer feeding from 50% of children eligible for free or reduced price school meals to 40% to help reach children in rural and suburban areas.

Rationale: *The summer feeding program uses an area eligibility test to determine whether to provide reimbursements for snacks and meals. This test defines a "low-income area" as one where more than 50% of children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. It is particularly hard for rural and suburban areas to meet this 50% requirement, because poverty is less concentrated in these areas. That keeps many communities with significant numbers of low-income children, but not a high enough concentration of poverty, from participating. In addition, the 50% test is inconsistent with federally funded summer programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs and Title I Education funding, which require only 40% school meal participation.*

Action Item:

Congress should change the area eligibility criteria for participation in summer feeding programs from 50% to 40% of children participating in free or reduced priced school meals.

Make the summer electronic benefit transfer option available by creating a mechanism that allows communities to apply for it if they can clearly demonstrate a barrier to congregate feeding related to remoteness, climate, or safety.

Rationale: *Despite a high prevalence of children at risk for hunger in some communities, participation in summer feeding programs can be very low. This may indicate that the need is not as serious as thought in some areas, but in others, may reflect chronic underservice due to transportation barriers related to remote living conditions, severe weather patterns, or parental concerns regarding community violence. These barriers can occur in both rural and urban settings. USDA pilot studies have shown that participation in an electronic benefit transfer option can reduce hunger among families with children by more than 30%.¹⁵¹ This is significant evidence of a targeted child nutrition program improvement.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should allow the USDA to offer summer electronic benefit transfer in communities that are especially at risk for hunger among children and where participation in summer feeding sites is restricted or minimized by remoteness, safety, or climate. The electronic benefit transfer option should be offered in areas (census tracts or school attendance zones) without the consistent presence of summer meals sites in an effort to minimize the duplicate use of summer electronic benefit transfer and congregate sites.
- b. **The USDA** should work with communities at risk to create an administrative mechanism through which funds can be provided directly to families with eligible at-risk children through an existing electronic benefit transfer mechanism.



At [our health center] we talk about **Nuestro Bienestar**, we talk about our total wellness. We talk about the categorical, dysfunctional system that we live in: where we talk about health and nothing else; where we talk about education and nothing else; where we talk about hunger and nothing else – as if each one were to lead a separate life. We know that all of them are intermingled. All of them are one.

– Salvador Balcorta, CEO, El Centro de Salud Familiar de La Fe (El Paso)



Streamline and simplify administrative processes among the child nutrition programs.

Rationale: *Currently, the various child nutrition programs have different application processes, even though the same organizations and sponsors frequently administer these programs. Having to complete separate applications and comply with differing or conflicting regulations places undue administrative burdens on the community-based programs that run these programs. Currently, community-based organizations operate the Child and Adult Care Food Program's At Risk Afterschool Meal Program and the Summer Food Service Program separately, even though they are serving the same children, often at the same sites, throughout the year. This approach not only burdens community organizations, but also incurs unnecessary USDA costs to review and respond to multiple applications from the same providers under complex regulations.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should allow the USDA to streamline and consolidate the application processes, funding mechanisms, and regulations for the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program's At Risk Afterschool Meal Program into one program for community-based sponsors.
- b. **Congress** should allow the USDA to permit school food authorities, with a single application, to provide and administer the School Breakfast Program, the National School Lunch Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program's At Risk Afterschool Meal Program under National School Lunch Program regulations.



It's very difficult on the SNAP and Medicaid side to have the kind of effective streamlined eligibility access that leads to that integrative perspective that we want to see, because they are driven by different rules. That is something that is within the hands of national policy makers to change – it's a modernization. We know that if we can get services delivered faster in earlier ways to families, and we're not caught by the fact about whether someone qualifies for Medicaid or for SNAP or vice versa, we're serving families better and ultimately reducing tax-payer dollars because we're driving down the cost of health.

– Tracy Wareing Evans, Executive Director, American Public Human Services Association





Improve Nutrition Assistance Options for People Who Are Disabled or Medically at Risk

People with disabilities or multiple, debilitating health conditions are at increased risk for hunger and poor nutrition status. Additionally, homebound seniors and others with disabilities with limited ability in activities of daily living are also at nutritional risk. Such problems can exacerbate illnesses, decrease functioning, lower productivity, and increase health care costs. In our research, as well as in our field visits and hearings, we heard from agency administrators, people who are disabled and medically at risk, and physicians about ways to improve programming for medically vulnerable people. Below we make two recommendations that will improve conditions for people who are frail or disabled.

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Expand Medicare managed care plans to include coverage for meal delivery for seniors with physician recommendation.

have been found to be highly effective in improving seniors' nutritional intake and reducing health care costs.¹⁵⁴ Access to this type of programming for underserved seniors would be important, especially as the baby-boomers are approaching their senior years, drastically increasing the numbers who will need assistance and who will be looking to be productive citizens in their own communities. This approach is appropriately the responsibility of the health care financing systems, because increased home-delivered meals could be an important cost-effective approach to reduce costly hospital admissions and readmissions. Currently, Medicare Advantage plans under Medicare Part C that cover home-delivered meals in certain circumstances are available in some areas. However, since these areas can be small, the reach of existing plans is difficult to determine.

Action Item:

Congress should work with the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services to leverage existing efforts under Medicare Part C to create a national mechanism to provide home-delivered meals to seniors as a reimbursable cost through Medicare.

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Expand Medicaid managed care plans to include coverage, with a physician recommendation, for meal delivery for individuals who are too young for Medicare, but who are at serious medical risk or have a disability.

Rationale: *Home-delivered meals for medically at-risk patients can promote health and prevent readmission to the hospital; as noted earlier, 20% to 50% of patients admitted to the hospital are malnourished, and readmissions among this group cost the health care system approximately \$25 billion annually. Programs such as Meals on Wheels, as well as greater attention to early nutrition assessment and intervention, are critical to preventing complications and lowering costs. Additionally, some people who are too young to receive Medicare have multiple debilitating health problems that affect their functioning and activities of daily living. Such patients should be afforded the same assistance as people over 65. Currently, some states offer home-delivered meals via a Medicaid Section 1915(c) Home and Community Based Services waiver or a Section 1115 demonstration waiver. However, these waivers cover a broader range of services than home meal delivery, so reach is difficult to determine.*

Action Item:

Congress should work with the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services to leverage existing efforts under Medicaid waivers to create a national mechanism through which to provide home-delivered meals to people at risk and find a way for this to be a reimbursable cost through Medicaid.

IV

Fund Pilot Programs to Test the Effectiveness of Strategic Interventions to Reduce and Eliminate Hunger

As with any endeavor, research and development is required to consistently find ways to improve government programs and systematic efforts designed to reduce and eliminate hunger. There are many valid and empirically based ideas that suggest that USDA should make a strong commitment to testing particular interventions. We recommend funding the following demonstration projects. An evaluation component should be part of each pilot, based on multi-year, rigorous, random assignment protocols that include statistically valid sample sizes and a cost-benefit analysis that pays special attention to documenting potential savings in health and education spending. This list of projects is not meant to be exhaustive; many additional approaches are worthy of adequately funded research, but are beyond the time constraints of the Commission to elucidate fully.

Congress should allot funds to the USDA to implement, evaluate, and disseminate results of multiple pilot programs to assess their effectiveness on reducing hunger.

Pilot A: Investigate the effect on hunger of changing the SNAP benefit calculation from the Thrifty Food Plan to the Low Cost Food Plan.

Rationale: While families are meant to supplement their SNAP allotment with 30% of their own net income after deductions, the combination of the Thrifty Food Plan and additional family dollars may not be adequate to provide enough healthful nutrition for their families. Health and nutrition experts, including the Institute of Medicine, contend that the Low Cost Food Plan shows promise in reaching the appropriate nutrition levels for low-income families and individuals. Testing this theory will shed important new light on this issue.

Pilot B: Test the effect on working families of three different increases to the earnings disregard compared to the current 20% (control).

Rationale: Providing a higher income disregard may reduce the danger of losing benefits before families are ready to transition to self-sufficiency. A higher income disregard may provide families time enough to stabilize their economic situations, and may also promote entry into the workforce and job retention by eliminating a potential disincentive to increase earnings or to engage in work.

Pilot C: Test the impact on hunger of increasing the maximum excess shelter deduction/allowance in SNAP. Focus test demonstrations on the five markets with the highest housing costs.

Rationale: Research has linked the lack of affordable housing with hunger.^{152,153} If the shelter allowance was raised to more realistically account for the cost of housing, this change could reduce hunger.

Pilot D: Further assess the effectiveness of public and private forms of nutrition education on purchasing habits, nutrient intake, health, and food insecurity, and conduct meta-analyses to better understand and build on collective evidence across these domains.

Rationale: Multiple federally funded studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of federal nutrition education programs at improving purchasing habits, health, and nutrient intake, but the evidence is mixed. Additionally, there is limited research on how both public and private nutrition education programs impact hunger. While there is a foundation of studies analyzing the scope of nutrition education programs, their barriers, and characteristics of successful programs with programmatic recommendations, the USDA should invest additional funds to test, rebuild, and re-analyze these programs using standard methodologies across a variety of domains and demographic sectors.

V**Incentivize and Expand Corporate, Nonprofit, and Public Partnerships to Address Hunger in Civil Society**

Federal government programs are not and cannot be the only answer to hunger—civil society plays a vital role as well. Many stakeholders are already deeply involved in addressing the issues faced by households that report hunger. For instance, corporations, faith-based and community organizations, agriculture programs, and government entities at all levels (e.g., local health departments) have a role to play in providing fresh and nutritious foods for all people in the United States by, for example, keeping food costs low or providing strategic guidance and resources.

Community efforts should engage corporations in joint community impact efforts. Additionally, it has been a long-standing tradition in the United States for non-profits, institutions of higher education, and faith-based organizations to find creative and meaningful ways to help people rise out of poverty through outreach to potentially eligible households regarding existing public benefit programs and the strategic provision of food, resources, technical assistance, education and training, and behavioral health supports. Many times, government programs cannot reach all eligible people in need, and sometimes the added efforts of our community organizations, private philanthropy, and corporations can not only help reach the most vulnerable, but also provide strategic solutions to improve government programs. Therefore, we make the following recommendation.

Incentivize and expand civic engagement efforts on reducing and eliminating hunger.

Rationale: *Addressing hunger should not be the responsibility of individuals and government alone, but should be shared with multiple stakeholders and a large volunteer base of committed community leaders for widespread community impact. Much ingenuity arises out of such community-based or corporate-led efforts, and these efforts should be rewarded and encouraged, as the strong desire to help our neighbors and to empower others is part of our American values and social fabric.*

Action Items:

- a. **Congress** should designate existing funds to measures such as tax incentives, matching funding programs, and other similar measures that provide incentives to and catalyze the development of greater private efforts to address hunger and support existing partnerships with government.
- b. **The USDA** should provide incentives for creating and sustaining public-private partnerships (which should adhere to the same standards of non-discrimination that apply to fully public programs) while also placing greater emphasis on and providing funds for
 - i. Hunger-Free Communities collective impact efforts.
 - ii. Efforts that improve the quality of emergency food and reduce food waste by enabling grocers, restaurant owners, caterers and other food service providers, and food producers to donate extra food to emergency food providers and others who serve low-income communities (this requires improved Good Samaritan laws).
 - iii. Programs that provide incentives for farmers to contribute food to food banks and other food providers.
 - iv. Social enterprise that supports job training and education, and placement strategies for high-risk groups.

VI

Create a White House Leadership Council to End Hunger that Includes Participation by a Broad Group of Government and Nongovernment Stakeholders

As stated above, the root causes of hunger are many and varied, and many of the consequences of hunger are far beyond the reach and effectiveness of nutrition assistance programs. For instance, employment trends and labor market dynamics, housing costs, disability, access to quality education, the rising prevalence of single parent families, behavior, income dynamics, and access to medical care all have an impact on hunger, but cannot be addressed effectively solely through nutrition assistance programs. Therefore, just as hunger cannot be solved by food alone, national efforts to alleviate hunger cannot be carried out by the USDA alone. To improve the overall health and wellbeing of people in the United States, the White House should mount a thoughtful, coordinated, and focused effort to address hunger and its root causes.

This strong commitment will demand

- A willingness to review all programs meant to assist low-income families for their effectiveness and to candidly discuss economic dislocation, discrimination, and the family structure and formation issues that contribute to hunger.
- Cross-agency collaboration among, at minimum, the following agencies: the Departments of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Energy, Defense, Education, and Veterans Affairs; the National Institutes of Health; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
- Strong representation, participation, and commitment from the corporate, non-profit, university, and faith-based sectors.
- More civic engagement in our communities, as well as meaningful initiative and involvement from those experiencing hunger.

Therefore, we make the following two recommendations.

Establish a mechanism for cross-agency collaboration to facilitate improved public assistance programming and evaluation through enhanced technology, data sharing, and coordinated funding streams that protect effective programs and encourage coordinated efforts to address larger issues of poverty.

Rationale: *Currently, mechanisms for funding streams, eligibility and delivery systems, and accountability are separate, resulting in a variety of disparate and uncoordinated rules and regulations confusing to administrators and recipients alike. Additionally, there is no single agency that can improve hunger alone. A national, coordinated plan among multiple government and private sector partners to address hunger and its root causes should be developed. This plan must build upon and improve current public and private programs and have the mutual goals of improved outcomes and cost efficiency.*

Action Items:

- a. **The President** should establish a **White House Leadership Council to End Hunger** with representation from government, corporations, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, community leaders, program beneficiaries, private foundations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to eliminate hunger, and should ensure that the Council has adequate resources and staff.
- b. **The President** should establish, convene, and lead the White House Leadership Council to End Hunger through the office of the Domestic Policy Council. The White House Leadership Council to End Hunger will be charged with developing a coordinated plan for ending hunger.

The White House Leadership Council to End Hunger and its members should monitor hunger at the federal and state level, with a specific emphasis on the following at-risk populations:

- (a) seniors,
- (b) single parent households with young children,
- (c) people with disabilities,
- (d) veterans and active duty military,
- (e) American Indians,
- (f) those reentering society from prison,
- (g) survivors of violence, abuse, and neglect, and
- (h) immigrants (including documented and undocumented, asylum seekers and refugees).

***Rationale:** The groups listed above are particularly vulnerable to hunger. Their individualized and unique issues are often misunderstood and too often go unaddressed.*

Action Item:

The **White House Leadership Council to End Hunger** should oversee progress within the involved government agencies and report annually to the Administration, Congress, and the public regarding the status of hunger nationwide among all families and individuals, as well as those particularly vulnerable populations outlined above. They should also report annually on the progress being made to eradicate hunger. Further, as part of their charter, they should regularly review program efficiency and effectiveness and recommend to the Administration and Congress any changes necessary to accomplish their goals.