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American Society for Nutrition Child Nutrition Reauthorization Recommendations

The American Society for Nutrition (ASN), a not-for-profit member society with more than 8,500 nutrition scientists and researchers, offers the following nutrition-related priorities that should be components of a new Child Nutrition and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Reauthorization Act. The following priorities align with ASN's mission, A Healthier World through Evidence-Based Nutrition.

ASN Priorities for CNR:

1) Generate and apply evidence to form the basis for Child Nutrition Program nutrition standards to ensure all school children have daily access to nutritious meals throughout their school years.

Research Funding Requests to Generate New Evidence:

- ***Investigate challenges with current dietary assessment methods*** (e.g., memory errors in 24-hour recalls) and propose improved dietary assessment approaches that would work specifically in the child nutrition program settings.
- ***Require a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) study*** to translate the latest edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* into school lunch and breakfast meal plans consistent with updated nutrition standards, as well as acceptable to program participants and priced viably for schools.
- ***Identify best practices, challenges, and solutions to implementing updated meal nutrition standards.*** For example, study salt taste and related sensory mechanisms, examine products that can meet specific sodium targets, and determine what sodium levels are reasonable given current industry technology. This may be in alignment with recent Food and Drug Administration voluntary sodium target guidance for industry.
- ***Study and make recommendations for consolidating applications/certifications across child nutrition programs*** and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to reduce the burden of a separate application process for each program and to ensure that participants have access to all nutrition assistance programs for which the family is eligible. Research should also determine the impact of consolidation on participants and programs, particularly for specific subgroups, and its role in advancing equitable access to federal child nutrition programs.

- ***Evaluate the impact of changes to child nutrition programs*** put in place in response to COVID-19, such as expanded eligibility, access, and waivers, and if these changes should become permanent.
- ***Support community-based participatory research*** on meal acceptability, cultural appropriateness, levels of nutrition knowledge, food insecurity, and more that consider the views of students and parents, as well as school foodservice administrators.
- ***Study the implementation logistics and impact of a universal school meals program.*** ASN supports universal school meals as a goal and recognizes that such a change should be informed by studying potential outcomes, challenges and benefits so that the change can be implemented appropriately and equitably.
- ***Determine innovative approaches to transportation challenges*** inherent to out-of-school-time feeding programs, including the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program and the Afterschool Care Snack Service.
- ***Study and make recommendations concerning barriers*** to participation in the Child Nutrition Summer Feeding Programs.
- ***Request NASEM updates*** of the WIC food package every 10 years.
- ***Convene a NASEM panel*** to review and update the nutrition standards and meal requirements for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).
- ***Study reasons for recent declines*** in WIC participation and recommend solutions, including the low participation in specific racial/ethnic groups.
- ***Study reasons for notable contrasts in participation*** between age groups, such as 1- year-olds versus 4-year-olds and recommend solutions.
- ***Evaluate technologies*** related to delivery of WIC services, such as telehealth and/or smartphone applications to support nutrition education and breastfeeding.
- ***Develop and implement health promotion interventions*** for postpartum women up to 2 years post-birth.

Application and Translation of Existing Evidence:

- ***Enhance nutrition education*** related to federal school meal programs so that families and students understand the nutritional value of the program and the nutrition standards that support it.
- ***Update menus*** for school and childcare programs, WIC food packages, and U.S. Department of Agriculture commodity purchases to adhere to scientific evidence-based nutrition standards (i.e., the latest edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*) and adapt the nutrition standards for the diverse dietary patterns, practices, and cultural food preferences of the communities served.
- ***Specify nutrition standards*** consistent with realistic phase-in, consideration of long- vs short-term targets, and establishment of periodic monitoring to track progress.

2) Increase collection and dissemination of program data to provide an enlarged basis for both program evaluation and additional nutrition research.

Research or Evaluation Needs:

- ***Oversample National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)*** data collections for

pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under the age of 2 and adolescents (especially among minority populations), to increase the amount of surveillance data on these populations.

- ***Establish redemption and food purchase data analysis*** as an ongoing evaluation component for all child nutrition programs.
- ***Develop data systems*** to capture food purchased for school and childcare programs and create linkages to meal service data, child attendance data, and child demographic data systems.
- ***Improve data collection*** and leverage existing data to better inform WIC agencies of new technology solutions and process changes and improve the participant experience.
- ***Embrace new data science technologies*** that allow for data to be shared more readily among nutrition programs, including WIC agencies, and other health and nutrition partners.
- ***Evaluate health impact*** of child nutrition programs at the state and local (community), as well as federal, levels.
- ***Evaluate state and local factors*** that impact participation and consumption, such as the cost of groceries to child nutrition program providers and participants.

3) Ensure access to child nutrition programs for all who are eligible and extend eligibility where appropriate

Access/Eligibility Needs: All Child Nutrition Programs

- ***Enhance cultural appropriateness*** of federal school meal and child nutrition programs as well as education and additional efforts to reach communities and populations most in need.

Access/Eligibility Needs: School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

- ***Increase funding*** for vegetable and whole grain purchases, particularly through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, to assist in meeting updated nutrition standards; provide for recalibration as necessary for school meal reimbursements based on current increased costs.
- ***Eliminate a reduced-price category*** and allow free school meals for children from families with incomes at 185% or below the federal poverty level.
- ***Specify the use of direct certification*** best practices to ensure the accurate determination of poverty within the school and in turn eligibility for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).
- ***Require schools to provide adequate time*** for students to consume meals (i.e., 20 minutes minimum seated lunch time within a 30-minute lunch period).
- ***Increase funding*** to allow updating of and improvements to physical infrastructure related to meal preparation, such as kitchen equipment and water bottle filling stations.
- ***Automatically enroll*** all schools who qualify for the CEP in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Farm-to-School Programs, and other applicable nutrition assistance programs.

Access/Eligibility Needs: USDA Child Nutrition Summer Feeding Programs and Out-of-School-Time Feeding Programs

- ***Require that USDA Child Nutrition Summer Feeding Programs and Out-Of-School-Time Feeding Programs operate as one*** avoiding both a barrier to participation and duplicative administrative burden (e.g., paperwork).

- ***Increase funding*** to serve a third meal as part of the SFSP.

Access/Eligibility Needs: WIC

- ***Extend eligibility:***
 - for children to 6th birthday; and
 - for postpartum women to 2 years post-birth.
- ***Extend the certification period to 2 years.***
- ***Fund activities to modernize and enhance*** online WIC administration including remote WIC enrollment and online document transfer.
- ***Increase the value of WIC food packages,*** particularly the cash value benefit for fruits and vegetables, which allows for maximum flexibility to meet diverse cultural preferences.

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