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49 Signatories to White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health Letter

August 17, 2022

Dear Mr. President,

Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders and **Grantmakers In Health**, along with, **The Funders Network**, **Grantmakers for Education**, **Native Americans in Philanthropy**, and the **49 other philanthropic signatories** of this letter, commend the Biden-Harris Administration for convening the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health—the first convening of its kind in over 50 years. Our organizations serve and support hundreds of philanthropic organizations dedicated to bettering the nation and achieving equity for all communities, including rural and Native communities, and we firmly believe that this conference is an important opportunity to address nutrition security and its far-reaching impacts on the health and well-being of all people.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the widespread inequities and inadequacies of our nation's food systems that have long pervaded our society. The past few years have laid bare the need for transformational changes that better ensure that all people, especially those in our most vulnerable communities, have access to the food they need to be healthy, thriving, and productive members of society.

We applaud the Administration for its leadership in driving investments to transform our farm and food systems. Those investments matter and will make a real difference. However, much of that investment has come in the form of a one-time infusion of dollars rather than multiyear, permanent program investments. We recognize what the White House Conference is trying to achieve by naming five important pillars that can help create healthy food systems that better serve our nation's people. We believe the pillars need a solid foundation in systemic approaches to the underlying issues of poverty and discrimination—which have a direct impact on hunger, nutrition, and health—in order to be truly transformative.

Our organizations and our philanthropic networks have worked tirelessly to create healthier and more equitable communities that have access to fresh and nutritious foods, and we offer our wealth of experience and knowledge to help inform and guide the conference's efforts. We believe that the White House Conference should consider the following recommendations as it develops its roadmap:

Recognize and commit to alleviating poverty—the root cause of hunger, nutrition insecurity, and poor health outcomes.

Poverty is the most critical social determinant of health, a fact that has been recognized by nearly every leading health organization and agency in the world, and poverty is deeply intertwined with the issues of hunger and nutrition. Structural racism contributes to and perpetuates economic inequality, harming the health of marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Race-based practices of community-level redlining and disinvestment have exacerbated poverty and related factors, including high unemployment, poor schools, substandard housing, limited social mobility, and lack of universal access to health insurance, that affect low-income people across the board. Research is clear that these factors have disproportionate negative impacts on the health of people of color and immigrants and refugees. Poverty also impacts the health and well-being of our rural communities. Rural disinvestment is a critical issue that must be addressed if these communities are to succeed.

We believe the elimination of poverty is key to ending hunger and ensuring nutrition and health for all. Therefore, we encourage the Administration to consider including a government-wide exploration and commitment to policies focused specifically on reducing and eliminating poverty.

Commit to addressing the entire food system—socially, economically, and environmentally.

We must commit to examine the entirety of farm and food policy, in particular the policies and subsidy structures that favor certain production systems and practices, communities, and scales of operation. Under the guise of increasing efficiency and supporting family farmers and rural communities, many of these policies increase inequity in who has the ability to own and operate farmland, which crops are fully insurable, and who can access markets for both selling and buying. In addition, it is imperative that we create and support policies that eliminate barriers to capital for Black and Brown farmers and create innovative investment strategies for farmers who are most proximate to our most vulnerable communities. We cannot expect to fully address hunger, nutrition, and health if we fail to address the full range of farm and food policies that create social, economic, and environmental challenges and inequities.

Commit to restructuring hunger and nutrition policies by shifting support towards community-driven local and regional food systems.

During the pandemic, when national grocery supply chains faltered, small farms that produce for local and regional direct markets were a ready source of fresh and healthy food for families across the country, including SNAP recipients. The public also became aware of the importance of school meal programs as they were expanded to meet the needs of children. The USDA has recognized the importance of local and regional food systems and the infrastructure required to transform our food production and distribution systems across the country. We applaud the recent release of the USDA Food System Transformation framework. To be truly effective in increasing food sovereignty and community-driven solutions to the disparities in food security, nutrition and health, such efforts will require long-term investments rather than short-term, one-time infusions of dollars from pandemic response assistance. It will also be critical to reform the policies and regulatory frameworks that serve as barriers to community-driven local and regional food systems and school meal programs.

Commit to directly supporting health care providers and systems for preventing, not just treating, diet-related diseases.

One of the largest hidden costs of the food system are health impacts. A recent [report](#) released by the Rockefeller Foundation notes that the U.S. incurs \$1.1 trillion a year in food-related human costs, including \$604 billion attributed to diet-related diseases like hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers. Integrating nutrition security within the medical model (e.g., Food is Medicine) can help achieve the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim of improved health outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and lower healthcare costs. However, such programs can only continue to advance, expand, and achieve long-term viability if more payers can reimburse health care providers and systems for implementing these upstream strategies. Increased coordination between USDA and HHS will be critical to implementing these strategies and others to improve health and nutrition.

Likewise, providers need to be better educated on nutrition and hunger if they are to be a part of the solution. These issues are not commonly included in provider curricula and training, leaving our health care systems at a disadvantage. We encourage the Administration to leverage its resources to support the inclusion of nutrition and hunger in health care provider educational programs.

We encourage the Administration to work with the various federal agencies to prepare plans to implement the above recommendations leading up to and following the conference. Once again, we applaud your leadership to end hunger and increase nutrition and health by 2030. Philanthropy stands ready to work with the Administration towards these goals.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders

Grantmakers In Health

The Funders Network

Grantmakers for Education

Native Americans in Philanthropy

Angell Foundation

Ann Hunter-Welborn

Ardmore Institute of Health

Avila Fund

Claneil Foundation

Cone Health Foundation

Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation

Fair Food Network

Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)

Foodshed Capital

FoodShot Global

The Foundation for Delaware County

Foundation for Health Equity
From Now On Fund
HealthSpark Foundation
The Health Trust
Horizon Foundation of Howard County, MD
Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia
Jonas Philanthropies
The Leo and Peggy Pierce Family Foundation
Lydia B. Stokes Foundation
The Martha and Hunter Grubb Foundation
Maryland Philanthropy Network
Mat-Su Health Foundation
New York Health Foundation
Panta Rhea Foundation
Partners for Health Foundation
Patricia Kind Family Foundation
Pembroke Philanthropy Advisors
Philadelphia Health Partnership
Philanthropy Ohio
Phoenixville Community Health Foundation
Point32Health Foundation
Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Church USA
The Rockefeller Foundation
Sarah Vogel Donor Advised Fund
Sears-Swetland Family Foundation
St. Joseph Community Health Foundation
Shambly Fund
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland
Stardust
Sunflower Foundation
Swift Wings Foundation
Ulupono Initiative
United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Vermont Community Foundation
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
Washington Square Health Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation



Today, SAFSF, [@GIHealth](#), & 49 other fellow organizations in philanthropy sent a letter to President Biden in support of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, and recommendations on tackling root causes of hunger & health inequities.

<http://ow.ly/U8ns50Km2r6>

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<https://buff.ly/3A0GnPy>

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