

Coordination of Federal Nutrition Policy

FEDERAL NUTRITION ADVISORY COALITION

Over the past two decades, diet-related conditions like obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes have continued to rise, with poor nutrition contributing to more than half a million deaths per year that disproportionality impact communities of color and worsening COVID-19 outcomes.ⁱ While the federal government currently funds several nutrition science projects dedicated to minimizing preventable diet-related deaths, these projects are scattered across 10+ different agencies and institutes and rarely aligned towards common goals. In turn, the Federal Nutrition Advisory Coalition (FNAC) is committed to developing a more strategic approach to enhance federal coordination and leadership on this issue, ensuring we

can effectively improve health outcomes, advance racial equity, address climate change, and reduce health spending.

As a primary objective, the FNAC is dedicated to coordinating and advancing a whole-of-government approach to address the transformational and cutting edge nutrition research needed, serving a critical role in unifying science and aligning relevant institutes at the NIH with agencies like the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Department of Defense (DOD) towards a unified approach to nutrition research, guidance, and regulation.

The FNAC, however, also recognizes alignment would require extensive input from nutrition stakeholders across the country. As such, our coalition is devoted to advancing any initiative that increases cross-coordination of federal nutrition science where possible. We have expressed strong support, for example, for the movement of the Office of Nutrition Research within the NIH Office of the Director.ⁱⁱ Without these types of alignment efforts, advancements in the field will continue to remain limited, dispersed, and largely underfunded.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES



The annual medical and economic costs of chronic diseases associated with diet alone have been estimated to exceed \$1.72 trillion.ⁱⁱⁱ For example, estimated annual U.S. government expenditures on direct medical care for diabetes, which totals \$160 billion,^{iv} exceeds the annual budgets of many individual federal entities, including USDA (\$150 billion),^v the NIH (\$42 billion),^{vi} the CDC (\$12.7 billion)^{vii} and the FDA (\$5.9 billion).^{viii}



Despite the small percentage of its budget dedicated to nutrition, **the NIH is still the largest biomedical research agency in the world** and largest funder of U.S. nutrition research with roughly 4,600 active projects.^{ix} While NIH nutrition research is conducted and supported across nearly all the 27 current NIH institutes and centers, coordination of these efforts has been tasked to successively smaller NIH offices with decreasing stature, staff, and resources.



A major effort to expand and harmonize federal nutrition research could have **large return-on-investment** based on reduced healthcare costs associated with diet-sensitive conditions, such as hypertension, food allergies, coronary heart disease, certain cancers, and more. As stated by the FDA Commissioner in 2018, “improvements in diet and nutrition offer us one of our greatest opportunities to have a profound and generational impact on human health [...] the public health gains of such efforts would almost certainly dwarf any single medical innovation or intervention we could discover.”^x

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CORE POLICY OBJECTIVES



Coordinate the more than \$150 billion per year in investments towards federal food and nutrition programming through the creation of a new Office of the National Director of Food and Nutrition (ONDFN). This senior executive branch position will provide coordinated, actionable information and recommendations to the President, the Cabinet, and Congress on food and health, racial/ethnic equity, and sustainability issues across diverse agencies and programs. This structure is modelled on the precedent and success of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which effectively coordinates \$50 billion per year in investments in national security across multiple agencies without incurring extra budgetary costs.



Create and fund a centralized, flagship federal entity to support foundational and translational research that addresses diet-related diseases and encourage health and well-being. A coordinating federal entity could also serve to align nutrition science across the NIH and with other government agencies (USDA, CDC, FDA, DOD and more), be a strong partner for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs), create clinical guidelines for Americans to address diet-related conditions like obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers (excluded by statute from the DGAs), train scientists and healthcare professionals in nutrition, and communicate with the public.



Organize and host the second White House Conference convening public and private stakeholders — including all relevant domestic federal agencies — to build a national consensus strategy around food and nutrition with a concrete plan of action and clear benchmarks to measure success.

ABOUT THE COALITION

The **Federal Nutrition Advisory Coalition (FNAC)** serves as an ad hoc alliance of more than 85 advocacy organizations, public health nonprofits, academic institutions, and global food brands dedicated to building national momentum and support for effective policymaking across three key areas:

- (1) **advancing nutrition science through strengthening funding, coordination, and authority within the federal government,**
- (2) **leveraging Food is Medicine interventions in healthcare, and**
- (3) **creating greater coordination of federal food and nutrition policy.**

Convened through the **Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University** with generous support from The Rockefeller Foundation, our coalition members recognize the need for greater investment and coordination in federal nutrition research, which can — and will — play a critical role in reducing health disparities, lowering healthcare spending, strengthening our food system, improving military readiness, and advancing innovations that stimulate economic growth. Our coalition assembles regularly to discuss and publish commentary on issues relevant to this effort, bringing evidence, objectivity, and actionable policy recommendations designed to accelerate solutions that address the United States' most pressing food and nutrition challenges.

The FNAC is an ad hoc alliance and may not fully represent the views of its members on all policy issues. To learn more, contact Nutrition@WaxmanStrategies.com, FederalNutritionResearch@Tufts.edu, or visit sites.tufts.edu/nutritionadvisory/about.

ⁱ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2678018>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-establishment-office-nutrition-research-within-nih-office-director>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://milkeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/reports-pdf/Mi-Americas-Obesity-Crisis-WEB.pdf>

^{iv} <https://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/41/5/917>

^v <https://www.usda.gov/obpa/home>

^{vi} <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-almanac/appropriations-section-1>

^{vii} <https://www.cdc.gov/budget/documents/fy2021/FY-2021-CDC-Budget-Detail.pdf>

^{viii} <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20191216/BILLS-116HR1865SA-RCP116-44.pdf>

^{ix} <https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/onr/nih-nutrition-report>

^x <https://www.c-span.org/video/?443227-2/fda-commissioner-scott-gottlieb-addresses-food-policy-conference>