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Recommendations for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 2009

Adult Diseases in Children: The Importance of Federal Nutrition Policy

The health of children should be paramount. Today children are increasingly affected by obesity and related conditions. Child health also sets the stage for adult health. Current trends are disastrous for our society, our community, and our economy. In the past 20 years, while adult obesity rates have doubled in the United States, the prevalence of overweight in children ages 6 to 19 has tripled. Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and cancer—all chronic diseases once associated with older adults—are now being found at alarming rates in children and adolescents

Federal nutrition policy plays a critical role in the health of children. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CNR) presents an opportunity to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity and related diseases. Almost 30 million children receive lunch and breakfast through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program authorized in the CNR. These programs represent the most direct way that federal policy impacts what American children eat.

Numerous scientific studies have shown that a low-fat, high-fiber, plant-based diet is the healthiest way to eat. Plant-based diets are promoted for chronic disease prevention by the American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association, the American Cancer Association, and the American Institute for Cancer Research. These and other organizations are calling on the federal food assistance programs to emphasize vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, and nondairy vegetarian foods. Entirely plant-based meals are lower in total fat and saturated fat than commonly served lunch foods that rely heavily on animal products such as milk, cheese, and meats.

All schools face economic challenges in providing healthful foods. However, a strong federal investment in good food for children pays off for many years to come. All students have a right to have healthful meals available in their schools. We call on Congress to require schools to reduce calories and saturated fat in school meals and provide daily nondairy, vegetarian meal options and a healthful nondairy milk alternative in their regular meal service.

Recommended Legislative Actions

1. All schools participating in the NSLP and SBP must provide a nondairy, vegetarian meal option and a healthful nondairy beverage.
2. USDA should deem calcium-rich nondairy beverages as satisfying the milk requirement in fulfilling the definition of reimbursable meals. Whether due to lactose intolerance, allergy, ethics, or taste preference, a student who desires soymilk instead of cow's milk should not need a note from home or a doctor.
3. Reimbursement rates for NSLP and SBP should be increased by 20 percent for exemplary schools with meal averages as follows: saturated fat <7 percent and fiber >7grams.
4. Commodities should be selected based on current scientific evidence about the role of diet in health and illness.