

Call to action for stronger, better-funded federal nutrition research

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The nation needs to strengthen and increase funding for federal nutrition research and improve cross-governmental coordination in order to accelerate discoveries, grow the economy, and—most

importantly—improve public health, food/nutrition security, and population resilience, according to a high-level group of research, policy, and government experts.

Their new white paper, supported by The Rockefeller Foundation and entitled "Strengthening national nutrition research: Rationale and options for a new coordinated federal research effort and authority," is published today in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* from the American Society for Nutrition (ASN).

The group's recommendations were announced during a live streaming event on July 15 hosted by the Bipartisan Policy Center. A coalition of major organizations is standing in support of the paper and the need for greater investment and coordination in federal nutrition research.

Currently, nutrition research is separately conducted and supported by more than 10 federal departments and agencies. The authors lay out two complementary strategies for harmonizing these efforts and expanding federal investment in nutrition science. The strategies are:

- improving cross-government coordination of nutrition research, through policies such as a new Office of the National Director of Food and Nutrition or new U.S. Task Force on Federal Nutrition Research; and,
- strengthening and accelerating nutrition research within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including creating a new National Institute of Nutrition, among other options.

"Every day, our country suffers massive health, social, and economic costs of poor diets. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the burdens of diet-related diseases on population resilience," said Dariush Mozaffarian, M.D., Dr.P.H., principal investigator and dean and Jean Mayer Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

at Tufts University. "The nation has come together to achieve major science challenges in the past, such as putting a man on the moon. We need a similar major national effort to address current nutrition challenges, generating the critical science to rapidly treat and prevent diet-related diseases, improve health equity, increase population resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics, and drive fundamental and translational discoveries for better lives."

Over the last 20 years, the number of adults with diabetes has more than doubled and today, half of all American adults suffer from diabetes or pre-diabetes. Cardiovascular disease afflicts about 122 million Americans and causes roughly 840,000 deaths each year. These preventable diet-related illnesses are resulting in skyrocketing healthcare costs, widening diet-related health disparities, and weakened national security and military readiness. Our food systems are also creating unparalleled challenges to our natural resources.

"The American Society for Nutrition has long advocated to strengthen nutrition research, and this new white paper comprehensively assesses federal nutrition research efforts, bringing to light challenges and opportunities for better health for Americans," said ASN Past President Richard D. Mattes, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D.. "Strengthening and investing in federal [nutrition](#) research will generate new discoveries to improve the [health](#) of Americans; reduce chronic diseases, disparities, and healthcare costs; strengthen military readiness and American businesses, and reinvigorate farming and rural communities."

More information: Guiomar Masip et al. The genetic architecture of the association between eating behaviors and obesity: combining genetic twin modeling and polygenic risk scores, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqaa181](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa181)

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