In October 2022, the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) was invited to participate in the historic in-person White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. This bipartisan event was attended by nearly 600 people from multiple sectors and different levels of government, including Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Ambassador Susan Rice, Congressmember Jim McGovern, Senator Mike Braun, and Senator Cory Booker, as well as leaders in industry, higher education, and philanthropy. Most notable was the presence of more than 30 people who have experienced food insecurity. The conference organizers worked with the organization Equitable Spaces to ensure that people with lived experience were at the center of the discussion. We applaud this strategy, as it supports a more authentic discussion around multifaceted issues such as food security and ensures that the solutions are more equitable and just, which is a central philosophy of SNEB.

In preparation for this event, the White House invited SNEB and other organizations to solicit member feedback on how the White House should approach these issues. After conducting a series of listening sessions, SNEB presented the information to the White House. Shortly before the conference, the Biden-Harris administration released a National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, And Health,¹ which outlines how they will move these issues forward. The national strategies included increasing access to nutrition counseling through Medicaid and Medicare coverage, improving access to food as medicine programs, and supporting efforts for universal school meals. Many of the recommendations and actions in the national strategy are recommendations in the official SNEB comments² and represent the work our members are doing. As a member-driven organization, it is important for members of SNEB to participate and support policy efforts as they can support change. We appreciate the White House’s efforts to harness our collective wisdom and present such a comprehensive strategy.

One thing that seemed to be missing from the strategy is an integration of climate-friendly solutions. The SNEB comments stated that “the food system both significantly impacts and is significantly impacted by climate change and ecosystem fragility.”³ How climate change will impact our food system and how our food system decisions can either mitigate or exacerbate climate change was not emphasized. In President Joe Biden’s opening comments for the conference, he discussed Hurricane Ian and how we will support those affected by this disaster in Florida; however, he missed the opportunity to make the connection that storms, floods, fires, and droughts are becoming more common as our planet warms.³ The connection between our food system and climate has never been clearer. We sincerely applaud the federal government for the efforts to incorporate sustainability in the nutrition and food systems⁴ work; however, by excluding it from the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, we feel there is a missed opportunity for further action. The national strategy will be used by multiple sectors to advance work in these areas, and without a clear climate-friendly directive from the administration, we can lose sight of this important issue. Many of the actions in the strategies can be strengthened by encouraging environmental sustainability practices. As a society, we will continue to participate in the opportunities to discuss these critical issues and support the national strategies, while considering the effects our collective efforts have on both planetary and human health.

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REFERENCES


