Now Is the Time for Advocating for Federal Nutrition Programs

Given the conversations happening now at the federal level around funding for nutrition assistance programs for our nation’s highest-need communities, nutrition educators need to pay close attention. Whether you are someone who likes to work behind the scenes or take center stage, we need to be strong advocates for these programs to ensure that individuals and communities across the lifecycle have access to adequate and nutritious food. These programs are critical given their vital role in addressing food insecurity, improving public health, and fostering equitable opportunities for vulnerable populations.

One of the primary reasons for advocating for federal nutrition programs is their pivotal role in combating food insecurity specifically for individuals of low income, children, pregnant women, and the elderly. These programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), provide critical support to individuals and families who struggle to afford nutritious food. By advocating for the expansion, protection, and improvement of these programs, we can ensure that the most vulnerable members of society have access to the nourishment they need for their health and well-being. We also prioritize the well-being and dignity of those who are most at risk of food insecurity and its associated consequences.

Federal nutrition programs also have a direct impact on public health. Access to nutritious food through these programs helps prevent and manage chronic diseases, improve overall health outcomes, and reduce healthcare costs. As such, these programs provide a critical step toward achieving equity and social justice. They aim to level the playing field by providing equal access to nutritious food for individuals and communities, regardless of socioeconomic status or background. By advocating for federal nutrition programs, we contribute to the promotion of healthier diets, reducing the burden of diet-related illnesses, and fostering a healthier population. On a larger scale, we address systemic disparities in food access, support underserved communities, and promote a more just and equitable society.

So, what can we do?

First and foremost, stay informed. The Advisory Committee on Public Policy (ACPP) of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (https://www.sneb.org/public-policy-resources/) provides pertinent and timely information on public policy priority issues as well as aids in the development of position papers, letters of endorsement, and opportunities for testifying in front of Congress. Second, participate in public comment opportunities. Recently we have had opportunities to provide commentary on important issues regarding changing school meals and expanding the community eligibility provision. More is coming as we advocate for Healthy School Meals for all. Lastly, JNEB wants to publish your work showing the impact of nutrition programs at all levels (federal, state, and local) on the health and wellness of our communities. One of our biggest strengths is our research. We are looking for more papers highlighting the effectiveness of nutrition programs in combating food insecurity, diet-related chronic disease, and overall health outcomes.

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