

# defeat **malnutrition** today

October 29, 2021

Statement for the Record: “The State of Nutrition in America 2021”

The 114-organization Defeat Malnutrition Today coalition commends you, Chairman Booker, for scheduling this hearing on the state of nutrition in America.

We are here to say that with one of every two older Americans either malnourished or at risk for malnutrition; with disease-associated malnutrition costs exceeding \$51 billion per year; and with malnutrition leading to earlier deaths, longer hospital stays, higher risks of falls, and exacerbated chronic conditions... the state of nutrition in America is not good.

When a core problem such as malnutrition, simply defined as a lack of proper nutrients in one’s diet, continues to negatively impact our population, especially our older adults, it is time for bolder action by Congress and the Administration.

Some actions have already been taken, including the addition of malnutrition screening as a part of the Older Americans Act nutrition programs.

Some actions should have been taken by now, including the adoption of a composite quality measure by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure malnutrition screening, assessment, and care planning in acute care settings. This measure has been pending for five years, and we hope you will use your leadership to communicate your support of this measure to CMS.

There are other actions that need to be taken as well. We call your attention to a 2019 [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#) initiated by our coalition and formally requested by Sens. Patty Murray and Bob Casey. The title of the report is very relevant to your hearing today: “Nutrition Assistance Programs: Agencies Could Do More to Help Address the Nutritional Needs of Older Adults.”

The report focused on nutrition programs for older adults that are run by the Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture (HHS and USDA). In USDA’s jurisdiction, the GAO focused on the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

The report raised several issues worth exploring within this Subcommittee’s jurisdiction:

- The report stated that in February 2019, USDA issued new requirements for the CSFP food packages to include more whole grains and canned fruits and vegetables. The programs were to have until November 2019 to fully implement this change. It is worth learning if full implementation was achieved and what benefits this change in policy might have achieved.

- The report also focused on an important area that needs expansion and updating to improve the state of nutrition in America: nutrition education. The report noted that three of the four selected programs they reviewed that serve older adults (HHS's congregate and home-delivered meals programs and the CSFP) also require nutrition education to support efforts to meet older adults' nutritional needs. We hope the Subcommittee as part of its work will take a close look at the caliber and quality of nutrition education provided, whether it is SNAP-Ed or these three programs serving older adults.
- The report also called on the Administrator of USDA's Food and Nutrition Services to take steps both to improve its oversight of CACFP meals provided in adult day care centers and to better disseminate existing information that could help state and local entities involved in providing CACFP meals meet the varying nutritional needs of older adult participants. We hope the Subcommittee will follow up with oversight on these recommendations, both of which are key to ensuring that CACFP participants receive nutritious meals.

We believe that federal nutrition programs should recognize the varied nutrition needs of the populations served. Further, we need to exert the same level of commitment to combatting malnutrition as we do to combat hunger and food insecurity, since malnutrition is one of the more dire consequences of food insecurity.

We commend the focus of this hearing and your introduction of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health Act, which we are proud to have endorsed. We need to be honest about the state of nutrition in America. This should be the catalyst to a new national effort to combat poor nutrition and as Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian has previously advocated, to move us to a place where we are achieving nutrition security for all. We pledge to work with you and your staff and help in any way we can.