

The U.S. Has Made Progress on Malnutrition Care

Now is the Time to Expand

Malnutrition is preventable, costly, and often missed.

20-50%

of hospitalized patients may have malnutrition, yet only

9% of hospital stays have a documented diagnosis.

\$79 billion*

in estimated annual costs from disease-associated malnutrition among adults age 65 and older. Over \$1,000 per older adult.

Malnutrition

(undernutrition) occurs when the body does not get or use enough nutrients to maintain health and function.

National Blueprint for Achieving Quality Malnutrition Care for Older Adults

The **National Blueprint** provides a **shared roadmap** for improving the prevention, identification, treatment, and follow-up of malnutrition across healthcare and community settings. Since 2017, it has **guided action** in care, access, research, and public health.

The **2026 update** highlights **progress** and **remaining opportunities**, informed by background research and seven expert interviews across healthcare, community, payer, and research sectors.

Read the Blueprint: <https://defeatmalnutrition.today/national-blueprint/>

Progress Since 2020 Update

2020

Malnutrition added to the Older Americans Act's purpose—requiring state and area plans on aging to address it.

2022

Malnutrition risk screening is included in the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants, with **19.5% of participants identified as “at risk” in its first year.**

2022-2026

The **Malnutrition Care Score (MCS)** is the **first nutrition-focused quality measure** included in CMS's Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (IQR) Program—**125 hospitals** voluntarily reported on the MCS in its first year. As of 2028, MCS reporting will be mandatory for IQR participants.



The **Older Americans Act** established the Aging Network and supports home- and community-based services—including nutrition services—to support whole-person health as we age.

Policies Working Together

The Age-Friendly Hospital Measure can address malnutrition using the MCS as part of broader age-friendly care
**Two Measures, Shared Goal:
Better care for Older Adults**



Progress Continued...

Expanded Coverage for Nutrition Services

In 2025, **65% of Medicare Advantage plans** offered meal benefits—up **19% since 2020**—and a 2024 analysis identified **19 states** with approved or pending Medicaid waivers that included nutrition services.

A Foundation Ready to Grow

The **National Blueprint** and **Aging Network** provide an established framework and delivery system for expanding malnutrition screening, referrals, nutrition services, and follow-up across settings.

Scaling Malnutrition Care: Three Policy Priorities

Expand Quality Malnutrition Care Across Settings

- Expand malnutrition quality measures beyond hospitals through the **CMS quality reporting and other quality programs**.
- Include nutrition risk, diagnoses, interventions, and care plans in discharge/transfer records.
- Establish referral pathways between healthcare providers and **aging and community-based nutrition services**.

Strengthen Workforce and Care Infrastructure

- Increase access to registered dietitian nutritionist services across acute, post-acute, and community settings.
- Expand malnutrition training for healthcare and social service professionals through **federal programs, professional organizations, and health systems**.
- Adopt **interoperable nutrition data standards** so nutrition information follows patients across settings.

Growing Demand for Dietitians

6,200

dietitian job openings projected each year through 2034.

Nutrition Research Investment

4%

of the National Institutes of Health funding supports nutrition research and training.

Advance Evidence, Payment, and Implementation

- Increase **federal investment** in malnutrition and nutrition-services research.
- Integrate malnutrition care into **Medicare, Medicaid, and value-based payment models**.
- Test and scale evidence-based hospital-to-community models through **federal demonstrations, grants, and public-private partnerships**.