

[DATE]

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Vice Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, House Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services
266 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: \$121M Funding Request for the NIH Office of Nutrition Research

Dear Chairwoman Baldwin, Chairman Aderholt, Vice Chair Capito and Ranking Member DeLauro,

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) plays a crucial role in our nation’s ability to advance nutrition research and science aimed at tackling the causes and effects of diet-related disease. **To that end, we write to respectfully request that as the House and Senate complete work on Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations, at least \$121 million be allocated to the Office of Nutrition Research (ONR) within the NIH as outlined in the President’s budget.**

The administration’s FY2024 Budget Request proposes dedicating \$121 million to fund the Office of Nutrition Research, which was [relocated](#) in January 2021 to the NIH Office of the Director (OD) to better coordinate and lead research functions across NIH institutes and centers. Funding at this level would enable the ONR to secure the leadership, organizational structure, and resources to effectively perform its important work. This investment would also accelerate discoveries across numerous critical areas and positively impact public health (namely, food and nutrition security), economic and national security, and equity, simultaneously bolstering the Nation’s resilience to current and future threats such as COVID–19.

Poor nutrition is a driver of diet-related diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and some cancers, and has staggering costs to society. Diet-related diseases are the number one cause of death and disability in the United States. Nearly [three in four](#) U.S. adults have overweight or obesity, and one in two have diabetes or prediabetes. The federal and state governments spend more than \$160 billion each year on diabetes care alone, an increase of 25% from five years ago. [A 2021 GAO report](#) found that “chronic health conditions linked to diet are prevalent, deadly, and costly. The combined health care spending and lost productivity from suboptimal diets costs the economy [\\$1.1](#)

[trillion each year](#). Diet-related illness also undermines our country's military readiness: a striking [77% of young adults](#) are ineligible for military service, with obesity as the largest disqualifier.

[A 2019 NIH analysis](#) compared the amount of NIH funding for prevention research on risk factors for death and disability, and concluded that large gaps exist between the top causes of poor health and the research funding allocated to address them – with the top cause being poor nutrition. Despite this pressing need for more investment, funding levels for nutrition research and training (as a percentage of total NIH spending) have been flat at approximately [5% since FY2015](#). Recently, due to inflation and other factors, support for nutrition research has actually declined — even as diet-related diseases have persistently increased in prevalence.

The need for strong investments in nutrition research and policy is urgent. Robustly funding ONR at this level would allow ONR and the NIH to establish a strong foundation and increased capacity to:

- Attain scientific breakthroughs in the prevention and treatment of diet-related disease through a clearer understanding of how food interacts with the body, including through foundational research on topics such as the influence of nutrition on immune function, the role of the microbiome, and classifying and exploring the health effects of bioactive compounds in food;
- Drive groundbreaking science within Food Is Medicine, a rapidly expanding model of integrating food-based intervention into health care (and other avenues), including treatment of chronic disease;
- Ensure successful implementation of the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research and NIH Common Fund Nutrition for Precision Health initiative;
- Examine structural and social determinants that affect access to healthy food and contribute to disparities in diet-related diseases (namely, through the Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society [ComPASS] program);
- Provide training to build the next generation of diverse scientists capable of addressing diet-related diseases and health disparities;
- Increase the impact, visibility, and dissemination of nutrition science findings so that our scientific learnings quickly, directly lead to healthier communities;
- Structure a more formalized approach to engage strong external advisory mechanisms and strengthen input from other federal departments and agencies, academic institutions, advocacy groups, state and local governments, community members, and other stakeholders;
- Address health disparities by state, zip code, and other factors; and
- Strengthen military readiness.

Additional and ongoing research will help our nation build on existing knowledge and improve the health of all Americans. **It is time we close the gap between our investment in nutrition research and the heavy toll that diet-related diseases exert on the nation.** A strong investment would improve the health of the nation, making the country stronger and more competitive and reducing the human and economic burden of chronic disease for all Americans.

We appreciate your consideration of this request to provide at least \$121 million in funding for the Office of Nutrition Research at the NIH.

Sincerely,

[Signers]

The Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University

CC:

The Honorable Patty Murray, Senate Appropriations Chair

The Honorable Susan Collins, Senate Appropriations Vice Chair

The Honorable Kay Granger, House Appropriations Chair