



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHAIN DRUG STORES

Statement
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(NACDS)

For

United States Senate
Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry

On

“Farm Bill 2023: Nutrition Programs”

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Introduction: Americans See Pharmacy-Nutrition Connection

The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) appreciates the opportunity to submit a statement for the record for the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry’s hearing, “Farm Bill 2023: Nutrition Programs.”

NACDS represents drug stores, supermarkets, and mass merchants with pharmacies – including regional chains with a minimum of four stores and national companies.

A recent poll¹ conducted by Moring Consult and commissioned by NACDS suggests a linkage between Americans’ perceptions of pharmacies, pharmacists and pharmacy teams, and the nutrition issues that the Committee is considering.

Some of the poll’s results may be predictable:

- 86% say it is “very easy” or “somewhat easy” to access pharmacies – ranking their accessibility the highest among healthcare destinations tested.
- 79% say pharmacists are “very credible” or “somewhat credible” sources when it comes to information about how to save money on prescription drugs – ranking them highest among those tested.
- 86% support pharmacists counseling patients to help them take medications as prescribed.

However, pharmacies’ and pharmacy teams’ accessibility and trust also translate into findings like these, which relate to the Committee’s work:

- 80% support pharmacists helping patients to understand their nutritional choices.
- 80% support pharmacists helping patients prevent chronic disease such as heart disease and diabetes.

Pharmacies’ Total Store, Total Person Approach to Health and Wellness

Increasingly, NACDS members are leveraging the pharmacy, the total store, and external partnerships to innovate in areas including food as medicine, comprehensive health and wellness, and chronic disease prevention and management.

That is not to say that NACDS’ engagement in these issues is new. Historically, NACDS has engaged with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and with other agencies to foster a comprehensive focus on health and wellness and on improving individuals’ lives. NACDS has engaged in thought leadership with organizations including the World Health Care Congress to help confront social determinants of

¹ Morning Consult conducted this poll between December 7-December 12, 2022, among a sample of 20,010 Adults. The interviews were conducted online and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of Adults based on gender, age, race, educational attainment, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage points. NACDS commissioned the poll.

health – and the relationship among poverty, poor education, poor nutrition, diminished health and wellness, and exacerbated healthcare costs that crowd out other investments and that perpetuate these problems. NACDS has supported the *Medical Nutrition Therapy Act of 2021* (S. 1536/H.R. 3108 in the 117th Congress) to enhance Medicare coverage for MNT to more conditions and to expand referring capabilities to help patients most at risk of experiencing health disparities.

From this perspective, NACDS looks forward to working with the Committee on issues within its jurisdiction, as well as with a wider eye toward holistic approaches to health and wellness.

NACDS’ Engagement in White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

NACDS was pleased to collaborate with the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health throughout the summer of 2021, and at the actual event on September 28. We continue to execute on NACDS’ commitments related to the White House Conference, and the subject matter remains essential to the Association’s mission.

NACDS Pre-Conference Policy Recommendations

In July 2022, in anticipation of the White House Conference, NACDS submitted five key recommendations. They flowed from a series of NACDS-led collaborative listening sessions with the Association’s retailer and supplier members. The recommendations focus on the primary goal of the White House Conference: to end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030, so that fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

Germane to the work of the Committee, the White House National Strategy announced at the White House Conference reflects aspects of NACDS policy recommendations – including those related to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). In addition, the White House National Strategy reflects NACDS policy recommendations regarding scope of practice expansion for qualified health professionals, improved access to medical nutrition therapy, and the need to incentivize payers to cover more services.

For the Committee’s information, the following are the complete recommendations provided by NACDS to the White House Conference:

Recommendation 1: Further empower pharmacists’ and other healthcare professionals’ ability to deliver health and wellness care services, including for example, point-of-care testing to inform prevention and management efforts for diet-related conditions. Pharmacies are the most accessible healthcare destination. Located within five miles of 90 percent of Americans, pharmacies exist as key community access points for the public to receive various care interventions related to the linkage between nutrition and health. This accessibility offers a vital opportunity to improve care and foster equity to support nutrition and promote better overall health.

Recommendation 2: Pass the bipartisan *Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act* (H.R. 7213 in the 117th Congress) to support Medicare Part B beneficiary access to clinical care delivered by pharmacists. Pharmacies have a crucial role to play in meeting the health and wellness needs of Americans and in addressing social determinants of health and inequities. Enactment of the legislation would help ensure the continuity of accessible pharmacy-based care, during public health emergencies and every day. The Future of Pharmacy Care Coalition, of which NACDS serves on the Executive Committee, continues to advocate for this legislation, and we anticipate re-introduction in the 118th Congress.

Recommendation 3: Incentivize payers to cover health and wellness programs to support better public access to healthcare professionals – such as dietitians and pharmacists – who can provide preventive and management support for diet-related conditions and mental health. Providing patients with holistic care, including nutrition and wellness services, can help improve health outcomes – especially for those with diet-related diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and chronic kidney disease. Better coordination with health plans would improve patients’ access to care and support the prevention, management and education of nutrition and diet-related conditions.

Recommendation 4: Leverage the accessibility and clinical expertise of pharmacists, pharmacies and other healthcare providers, to participate in existing national prevention programs for conditions including diabetes (Medicare Diabetes Prevention Program) and cardiovascular disease (Million Hearts Initiative) – in addition to future programs. Research continues to support the ability of pharmacists to improve prevention and management of diet-related diseases, especially cardiovascular disease and diabetes, among others. Pharmacies can help close access gaps and promote health equity if they are better integrated into such programs and if barriers are removed to facilitate the role of pharmacists and pharmacies in these programs.

Recommendation 5: Expand eligibility for the SNAP and WIC programs. Good nutrition is critical both for disease prevention and management – yet many Americans face challenges to accessing foods to meet their specific health and nutrition needs. To address these barriers, the White House should modernize the SNAP and WIC programs to incentivize and support access to more nutritious foods — so that lower income individuals who qualify for these programs have greater access to better nutrition.

NACDS stated in its recommendations: “Pharmacies continue to be at the forefront of accessible, person-centered healthcare delivery. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies reach vulnerable and diverse populations and play an important role in addressing the most pressing public health problems. We look forward to partnering on the policy ideas outlined. We also have creative ideas on how our industry can partner with government to advance the nation’s health more broadly and look forward to future opportunities to collaborate on advancing health and addressing disparities in communities nationwide. We want to be a resource to the White House on this initiative and in your preparation for the Conference.”

NACDS Commitments

In addition to making policy recommendations in conjunction with the White House Conference, NACDS made commitments. A White House fact sheet highlighted NACDS' commitments this way:

“[NACDS] will undertake a nationwide public education campaign to communicate the importance of nutritional health and preventive screenings to improve outcomes for diet-related disease. NACDS will also partner with at least two national patient advocacy organizations to develop and distribute educational resources on nutrition and diet-related disease to community pharmacies, in addition to hosting at least two sessions on diet-related disease at NACDS meetings in 2023.”

For the Committee's information, the following are the complete commitments made by NACDS in relation to the White House Conference:

Launch a health status public education campaign. NACDS commits to undertaking a nationwide public education campaign focused on equitably amplifying the importance of preventive screenings and raising nutritional awareness as a part of lifestyle changes to improve outcomes for diet-related conditions including diabetes and hypertension. The goal of this campaign is to improve public awareness of the importance of preventive screenings with reach to millions of Americans in all 50 states, including rural and underserved populations, and to improve uptake of preventive screenings by 15% for diet-related conditions with emphasis in areas with moderate to high social vulnerability. This campaign will be built with message-tested approaches to maximize receptivity among key target audiences. This campaign also will leverage the fact that pharmacists are among the most trusted health and wellness professionals.

Support better public access to preventive screenings at pharmacies. In tandem with our public education campaign, NACDS commits to supporting the nation's more than 55,000 community pharmacies to provide improved access to preventive screenings at pharmacies across diverse communities nationwide. Pharmacies are well positioned to improve needed access to preventive screenings including in vulnerable and underserved communities given that patients visit pharmacies ten times more frequently than they see other healthcare providers and the fact that 90% of Americans live within five miles of a pharmacy. NACDS will support expanded access to preventive screenings by working to modernize the existing operational and sustainability barriers that currently prevent broader public access. NACDS also commits to uncovering creative and sustainable solutions, through collaboration of stakeholders, to help clear operational and sustainability barriers that otherwise prevent pharmacies from offering additional screenings that examine social determinants of health including hunger and food insecurity, for example.

Expand resource sharing & educational awareness. NACDS commits to forming proactive partnerships with at least two national patient advocate organizations and collaboratively distribute relevant educational resources on nutrition and diet-related diseases among community pharmacies, in addition to hosting at least two programmatic sessions on diet-related disease and nutrition concepts across NACDS meetings in 2023.

Continue to engage the NACDS membership in support of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health and execution of the forthcoming National Strategy. In advance of the White House Conference and forthcoming National Strategy, NACDS strategically engaged its vast membership through listening sessions. These interactive listening sessions informed the recommendations that NACDS submitted to the White House in July 2022.

Aim to support the nation’s health and wellness goals considering the following key issues:

- Leverage scope expansion of pharmacists, the pharmacy, and the whole store in alignment with the Conference goals. Optimize sustainable delivery of pharmacy care services that can help move the needle on hunger, nutrition, and health.
- Amplify the need for broader coverage of health and wellness programs to support better public access to healthcare professionals such as dietitians and pharmacists. These clinicians can help provide preventive care and management support for diet-related conditions, including through existing national programs for conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, in addition to future programs.
- Further leverage pharmacies as healthcare access destinations in coordination with the potential expanded eligibility of the SNAP and WIC programs.

Commit to amplifying our more than seven-year collaboration with the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) to address hunger for our neighbors locally:

- Maintain corporate partnership with AFAC with a minimum of two events per year. These partnership opportunities include the sponsorship of donated food and contributions to AFAC hosted-events.
- Opportunity given to 100% of NACDS staff team members to volunteer at events each season. NACDS commits to hosting a minimum of four well-doing events each year, which can include food drives, gleaning produce at local farms, assisting at the AFAC warehouse, and participating in Hunger Action Month. At the time of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, NACDS staff packaged 5,000+ pounds of produce to support local families through AFAC.

Importance of Hunger Relief Efforts

To reflect similar and extensive work of member companies, NACDS for more than seven years has engaged with AFAC, mentioned above.

Whenever NACDS has a forum to address nutrition issues, the Association takes the opportunity to spread the message that Americans can play an important role in improving the health and wellness of their neighbors by volunteering or contributing to local food banks and other entities that confront food insecurity.

Particularly following the pandemic and amid a time of inflation, food insecurity has intensified and the needs of food banks have only escalated. NACDS thanks members of the Committee who personally help to raise awareness of these needs in their states and communities.

Conclusion

NACDS thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide our perspective on nutrition and its relationship to broader health and wellness issues. For questions or further discussion, please contact NACDS' Bill Tighe, Christie Boutte, vice president, federal government affairs, at WTighe@NACDS.org or 703-837-4214.