



Harvard Model Congress Boston 2024

Addressing Nutrition in the United States Update

Toward the end of 2023, emergency funding began to dry up for nutrition programs for elderly citizens under the Older American Act. There was a stark increase in seniors requesting nutrition assistance under the pandemic, and the Administration for Community Living would have been unable to meet their needs. The CEO of Meals on Wheels America and the director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs begged Congress in an op-ed in *The Hill* to allocate \$1.2 billion OAA Nutrition Program, writing that “the loss of the pandemic-era funding levels has led to a hunger cliff. Yet, it does not have to be this way” (Hollander and Blancato 2024). There has yet to be clear Congressional action toward the OAA.

Arguably more severe than just funding for senior nutrition was the fact that the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) stood at risk of being entirely shut down as Congress stalled – and continues to stall – on a final budget deal (Taylor 2024). As with the OAA, WIC funding spiked during the pandemic while inflation caused a dramatic rise in the price of food, leading to an increased dependency on the WIC program (Ramm 2024). As budget negotiations stretched through Fall 2023, Congress approved an emergency stopgap bill that extended funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Program through September 2024. However, WIC funding was only extended through January 19th, 2024 in the original stopgap bill (Douglas 2023). As advocates feared the program could run dry entirely, Congress passed another stopgap, though it only extends government funding through March 1st. It will incumbent upon the committee to quickly consider the long-term viability of the WIC program.

Looking to the executive branch, President Joe Biden’s Department of Health and Human Services hosted a bipartisan “Food is Medicine” summit early in 2024 to discuss healthy living and nutrition habits. The overall “Food is Medicine” agenda was funded by Congress in 2023, with the direction that HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra would develop a federal nutrition strategy. In the days leading up to the conference, Biden announced partnerships with Instacart, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Feeding America focused on nutrition and health (Samuels 2024). However, the Center for Science in the Public Interest said in September that Biden and his administration had only completed a

quarter of 82 key commitments toward reducing hunger and improving nutrition (CSPI 2023).

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