



July 14, 2022

TO: WHHungerHealth@hhs.gov

RE: Request for Comments to Inform the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health

The [International Food Information Council \(IFIC\)](#) appreciates the opportunity to submit remarks to inform the upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health (WHC), with the aims of enabling consumers to make informed dietary choices and adopt and maintain healthy eating patterns.

IFIC is a §501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization with a mission to effectively communicate science-based information about food safety, nutrition and agriculture. To do so, we convene stakeholders from the private food sector (primarily food, beverage and agriculture companies), academia and government to offer balanced, clear, evidence-based messages on our food and beverage choices. One of IFIC's objectives is to elevate the understanding of Americans' eating habits and attitudes toward health and nutrition through consumer research, which we have been conducting for decades. IFIC's signature consumer research effort is its annual [Food and Health Survey](#), an online survey of over 1000 Americans ages 18 to 80, now in its 17th consecutive year. IFIC also frequently conducts consumer research that offers insights on a range of specific food-related topics. These research initiatives assist in helping to understand consumer viewpoints and behaviors and support the development of educational strategies that can be used to bridge knowledge gaps for the American public.

On July 7th, 2022, IFIC hosted a virtual convening of 33 stakeholders in our organization, including representatives from our private sector members, academic Trustees, Federal agency public liaisons and IFIC staff. What follows is a brief summary of the primary communications challenges highlighted at the convening and opportunities for science communications efforts to play a vital role in disseminating key health- and nutrition-related messages to the American public. We also emphasize that IFIC stands ready and able to support these efforts through our consumer research and by cultivating public-private partnerships, which we view as a crucial piece in achieving the goals laid out by the WHC.

Science Communications Challenges

Combating misinformation in its many forms is one of today's most significant challenges, and health and nutrition are two fields that are highly susceptible to a confusing media environment. IFIC's [2022 Food and Health Survey](#)¹ found that 7 in 10 Americans (71%) agree that because nutrition information seems to keep changing, it is hard to know what to believe. Similarly, 80% of respondents in the [2018 Food and Health Survey](#)² said they come across conflicting information about food and nutrition, with 59% confirming that conflicting information makes them doubt their choices. The perceived inability to access clear, consistent information on how

¹International Food Information Council. *2022 Food and Health Survey*. 18 May 2022. <https://foodinsight.org/2022-food-and-health-survey/>

²International Food Information Council. *2018 Food and Health Survey*. 13 May 2018. <https://foodinsight.org/2018-food-and-health-survey/>

to make healthy dietary choices is one probable contributor to 38% of respondents in the 2022 Survey¹ saying they would rather take a medication for a health condition than make a lifestyle change, an increase of 22% since this question was asked one decade ago.

Identifying trusted sources of scientifically-sound food and nutrition information is one way to combat the influence of sensationalist health and diet promotions, unfounded wellness claims and misleading messages that can pervade our health information environment. IFIC's research has found that personal healthcare professionals and registered dietitians are far and away the most trusted sources of information for food advice.¹ For those consumers who get information from their personal healthcare professional, 78% indicated making a change in their eating habits because of those conversations.² However, many Americans do not have repeated, reliable and cost-effective access to these sources, and it is well-known that nutrition education in medical school training is inadequate for providing high-quality nutrition care.³ As a result, less-trusted – but more accessible – sources such as news articles, headlines, or news on TV and friends or family members are frequently referenced as sources of information on food.²

Barriers to healthy eating are also present when it comes to food priorities and purchase motivators. For more than a decade, IFIC's Food and Health Survey has consistently demonstrated that for the average American, taste has the highest impact on food and beverage purchase decision-making, followed (in rank order) by price, healthfulness, convenience and environmental sustainability.¹ Additionally, limited time, budget and cooking skills, availability of nutritious foods and personal or family food preferences present hurdles for many Americans. As an example, a 2021 IFIC survey⁴ of parents and caregivers of young children found that top obstacles to healthy eating in the household were picky eating and the cost and taste of healthy food. This year, rising costs of food driven by economic and supply chain factors have meant that many people are buying fewer groceries overall than they otherwise would have (29% of those who have noticed an increase in food costs), purchasing fewer fresh foods (22%), and purchasing less-healthy options (18%) in an effort to keep their food budgets in check.¹

The final obstacle we will highlight as an important area of consideration is lack of availability and access to health professionals who reflect the diversity of this country. According to the most recent available data from the Commission on Dietetic Registration, just 16% of registered dietitians identify as part of a racial or ethnic minority group.⁵ Our food choices are intricately linked to culture, traditions, family and community networks, and underrepresentation in expertise, experiences and resultingly, relevant educational resources is a barrier to addressing racial and ethnic health disparities.

Opportunities for Science Communications to Make a Positive Impact

As outlined in the previous section, there are many sizable challenges to the provision of and access to science-based, accurate information on food and nutrition. Understanding these obstacles, as informed by the insights of the American public, offers an important opportunity to overcome them.

³Crowley J, Ball L, Hiddink GJ. Nutrition in medical education: a systematic review. *Lancet Planet Health*. 2019;3(9):e379-e389. doi:10.1016/S2542-5196(19)30171-8

⁴International Food Information Council. Knowledge, Understanding and Behaviors When Feeding Young Children: Insights from U.S. Parents and Caregivers. 4 March 2021. <https://foodinsight.org/parents-and-caregivers-are-focused-on-their-kids-nutrition/>

⁵Rogers D. Report on the Academy/Commission on Dietetic Registration 2020 Needs Satisfaction Survey. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2021;121(1):134-138. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2020.10.018

As a communications organization, IFIC understands the importance of a collaborative, multi-pronged approach to reach diverse audiences. Communicators across the food and health sectors all have a role to play in these efforts; this includes government, nonprofits, academics and the food industry working in coordination with community and faith leaders to meet the needs of every American, in an effort to improve our collective health and wellbeing.

The importance of aligned, consistent and compelling core messages across the public and private sectors cannot be understated. Thus, IFIC recommends that one of the action items coming out of the WHC be directed toward creating the infrastructure for a multisector communications collaboration that aims to 1) better understand challenges, priorities and decision-making around food and nutrition by conducting research (including consumer research); 2) deliver effective messages on health and nutrition from credible experts representative of the diversity of the United States; and 3) help Americans translate nutrition knowledge and information uptake into actionable behavior change. IFIC has founded, led and participated in initiatives with similar (albeit more targeted) objectives, including the Dietary Guidelines Alliance, the [MyPlate National Strategic Partnership](#) and the [Portion Balance Coalition](#). These examples could provide a model for ways in which the WHC could initiate a consortium of key stakeholders to formally share ideas and develop solutions to the challenges outlined above.

The scope of WHC outcomes and policy efforts has the potential to be wide-ranging, which underscores the importance of unified and credible communications efforts across all stakeholders working in food security, nutrition and health. IFIC looks forward to future opportunities to support the White House Conference and any actions that arise from it.

Sincerely,



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