

THE NUTRITIOUS DEAL

ISSUE:

Improving access to healthy foods is crucial for promoting community health and well-being and advancing public health outcomes. Unfortunately, many people in the United States still face significant barriers to accessing healthy foods. To address this issue, we propose a comprehensive approach that includes expanding the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as implementing a nationwide healthy eating and nutrition education campaign. By adopting these measures, we can help ensure that all Americans have access to the healthy foods they need to lead productive lives and achieve optimal health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), focusing on nutrition alone can result in substantial cost savings due to the prevention of chronic diseases.

BACKGROUND:

In 2022, approximately 19 million Americans lacked access to supermarkets or larger grocery stores, creating "food deserts" that limit access to nutritious foods like fresh produce. This leads residents to turn to cheaper, unhealthy options that can cause chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Poor nutrition is a rapidly growing burden for the US, with diet-related diseases costing up to \$50 billion and contributing to mental health issues, obesity, and chronic illness.

To address this issue, we propose a two-pronged strategy that includes expanding the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) while implementing a national healthy eating and nutrition education campaign. The HFFI is a federal program that provides financing and technical assistance to support the development of grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other food retail outlets in underserved areas. The SNAP program provides low-income individuals with additional support to purchase healthy foods.

Investing in nutrition assistance programs is crucial to ensuring equal access to healthy foods and reducing healthcare costs associated with chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer, which are among the most common and costly diseases in the US. Heart disease and strokes alone cost the healthcare system \$216 billion annually and result in \$147 billion in lost productivity.

PROPOSAL:

Strengthen HFFI and SNAP

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are effective tools for improving access to healthy foods in underserved areas and reducing food insecurity. To expand their impact, Congress should provide additional funding for HFFI to support the development and renovation of food retail outlets in underserved areas. Additionally, Congress should increase funding for SNAP and expand eligibility to ensure all low-income individuals and families have access to healthy foods, and consider offering bonus benefits for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. To further promote healthy eating, a national education campaign should be implemented, including public service announcements, social media campaigns, and community-based education programs. Congress should fund nutritional workshops, cooking classes, and other programs tailored to specific communities. By investing in these policies, Congress can improve public health and save billions in medical costs.

Implement a National Healthy Eating and Nutrition Education Campaign

A national education campaign on healthy eating and nutrition would increase awareness of the importance of healthy eating and provide individuals with tools to make informed dietary decisions. The campaign would include public service announcements, social media campaigns, and community-based education programs. Congress should fund this campaign along with the expansion of HFFI and SNAP, ensuring the programs' long-term sustainability. The funding should also include nutritional workshops, cooking classes, and community-based programs tailored to promote healthier lifestyles for citizens. According to the CDC, a 10% reduction in obesity could save \$16.5 billion in medical costs by 2030. Congress must take immediate action to support these policies and invest in the long-term health and well-being of all Americans. Improving access to healthy foods is a critical public health issue that requires comprehensive solutions