

American Heart Association  
Advocacy Strategic Vision for Nutrition Policy: 2023-2030

[Executive Summary/Overview](#)

Despite a steady increase in the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases, the quality of the American diet has not improved. The diet of Americans is characterized by high levels of added sugars, sodium, and saturated fats, and low levels of fiber, potassium, and other nutrients. This report outlines the American Heart Association's advocacy strategy for nutrition policy from 2023 to 2030, focusing on the following key areas:

up to 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and 70 percent of freshwater use, making it a large contributor to global environmental change. At the retail and consumer level, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that 31 percent of the food supply is lost or wasted, equaling 133 pounds of food and almost \$162 billion annually. Looking ahead, climate change is projected to reduce the protein and micronutrient content of plant foods and increase the price of basic food commodities. The most severe impacts of climate change disproportionately fall on underserved communities, particularly racial and ethnic minority communities.

Shifting from the current, somewhat narrow focus on food to a broader approach of nutrition security will ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to consume food that will promote well-being and prevent and treat chronic disease and is critical to addressing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in nutrition and chronic diseases.

As explained in the Association's recent policy statement on Strengthening Food Policies and Programs to Promote Equity in Nutrition Security, nutrition security means having equitable and available availability, access, affordability, and utilization of foods and beverages that promote well-being and prevent and treat disease. Nutrition security is comprised of four main pillars:

- Availability means that every community must have sufficient quantity (calories) and appropriate quality (nutrients) of food.

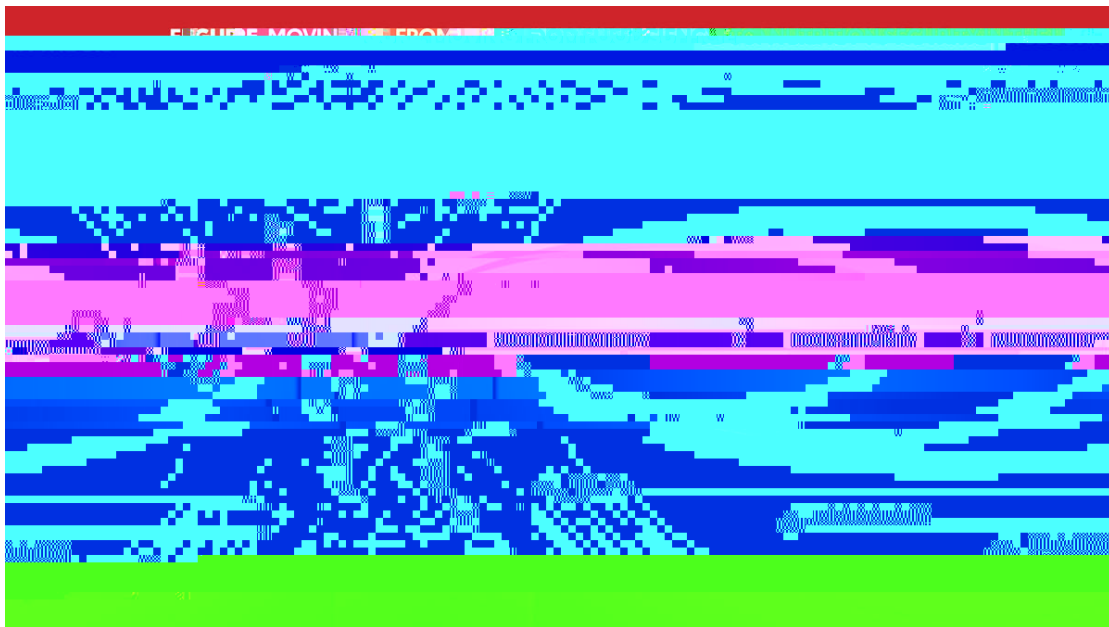
- Accessibility means that nutritious foods are attainable by individuals of all physical and mental conditions and in all geographic locations and that nutritious foods are available and align with individuals' cultural, social, or other dietary preferences.

- Affordability means that individuals have sufficient resources to acquire nutritious foods and that nutritious foods are available at a cost that can be purchased by all individuals.

- Utilization includes all steps that occur between the time of access to food to the time when the nutrients from food are available to be used by the body, such as food storage and preparation with the necessary kitchen tools and equipment.

- Stability ensures that all people have availability, accessibility, affordability, and utilization of nutritious food at all ages.

Availability, accessibility, and affordability are the foundation of food security and nutrition security but to achieve nutrition security, we must also consider policies and programs that support utilization and stability of nutritious food. Within utilization, individuals must be able to properly store food, have access to knowledge and tools to prepare food, and have the time and physical and mental capacity to utilize food and improve nutrition security. Nutrition security also requires stability of a nutritious diet across the lifespan, which means that all people have availability



accessibility, affordability, and utilization of nutritious food at all ages. Current U.S. nutrition policies and programs help ensure stable access to nutritious food for several populations. However, there are numerous gaps within and between these programs that create barriers to nutrition stability. Addressing our pillars of nutrition security will enable individuals and communities to move from food sufficiency to nutrition security, and from a state of health disparities to health equity.

In this Strategic Vision for Nutrition Policy and Advocacy, we lay out a framework for addressing the four pillars of nutrition security, along with environmental sustainability, according to the main sectors of the food system in which public policies are established.

### The American Heart Association's Role

For the past 40 years, the Association has supported legislative and regulatory proposals across all levels of government that help improve nutrition security across the country. While we recently started to use the term nutrition security, our focus has always been on ensuring that food policies and programs improve equality and improve the heart health of as many people as feasible. Our 2022 policy priorities related to nutrition security were designed to “support an equitable, sustainable food system that provides healthy, affordable food for all.” The Association purposefully targeted

The Association's Strategic Vision for Nutrition Policy and Advocacy defines how we will approach our nutrition-related work through the end of the decade. The Strategic Vision is grounded in nutrition security as a means of chronic disease prevention and treatment and health disparities reduction. Recognition of the serious impact of both health equity and environmental sustainability on nutrition security, we identify these as core elements of the vision. Finally, since public





Together, the policy grading process and organizational framework are critical to determining the most impactful Organizational Strategic Policy Agenda that help the Association drive toward Strategic Vision through the end of the decade.

## Metrics

Traditionally, nutrition-related data collection has centered around food security instead of nutrition security. In the U.S., food security is measured using the USDA food security survey modules that assess a household's ability to afford and access sufficient calories. However, U.S. national data prevalence of food insecurity fail to capture the number of Americans who are lacking in adequate nutrition because of resources. In addition, these measures do not robustly assess a household's ability to afford and access sufficient nutritious food and consume a diet consistent with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In fact, no standard measures of nutrition security currently exist.

To meaningfully improve nutrition security, it is critical that national measures of nutrition security are developed. In the Strengthening U.S. Food Policies and Programs to Promote Equity in Nutrition Security policy statement, the Association suggests this may be done by adding new modules to the USDA food security screening tool to include questions about a household's ability to consistently access nutritious food, such as fruits and vegetables, among all age groups. Research to develop and validate questions to assess nutrition security is also needed. Such questions could be integrated into national surveys such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health and Nutrition Survey to monitor progress in achieving equity in nutrition security.

Nutrition security data could also incorporate existing metrics that assess the overall quality of a dietary pattern in terms of nutritious food consumed. Two common, validated metrics of dietary quality include the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) and the Alternative Healthy Eating Index (AHEI). HEI measures diet quality by assessing how well a set of foods aligns with key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans using a scoring system to evaluate a set of foods with scores ranging from 0 to 100. An overall HEI score of 100 indicates that the set of foods measured is in alignment with key dietary recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The overall HEI score for Americans in 2015 was 58 out of 100, which shows that the average diets of Americans do not align with dietary recommendations. This score was determined using the most recently available data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), collected in 2015-2016. However, given the delay in the data, the HEI for Americans does not reflect current dietary practices. The AHEI is an alternative measure to HEI and assigns ratings to foods and nutrients predictive of chronic diseases using a scoring system to evaluate a particular diet with scores ranging from 0 to 110. An overall AHEI score of 110 indicates that the diet measured is in perfect adherence with the diet oriented toward reducing the risk of chronic disease. However, both the HEI and the AHEI as dietary quality assessment tools have their challenges. For instance, standard measures (e.g., 24-hour dietary recalls, food frequency questionnaires) tend to be burdensome and expensive, whereas briefer measures (e.g., dietary screeners) are less specific and tend to be less rigorous, especially regarding validity and reliability.

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# Appendix

## [Strategic Policy Prioritization Grid](#)

## [Policy Categorization Framework](#)

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