



September 21, 2022

The Honorable Marcia Fudge  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban  
Development  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Cory Booker  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Susan Rice  
Domestic Policy Council  
White House  
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Jim McGovern  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

To Secretary Fudge, Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Becerra, Director Rice, Senator Booker, and Representative McGovern:

On behalf of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, National Alliance to End Homelessness National Low Income Housing Coalition, and [Opportunity Starts at Home](#) campaign that we co-lead, we write to urge you to ensure that the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health focuses on the underlying root causes of hunger, including America's homelessness and rental housing affordability crisis which most severely impacts our nation's lowest-income and most marginalized households. We appreciate the administration calling for the creation of a National Strategy with actions the federal government will take to drive solutions to hunger. It is critical, however, that any national strategy to address hunger include the need for large-scale, sustained investments and reforms to ensure that renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable place to call home and can afford to buy adequate and nutritious food. **A national strategy to end hunger must include universal rental assistance for every eligible household, significant investments to preserve and increase the supply of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes, permanent resources to prevent eviction and homelessness, and robust renter protections to help keep renters stably housed.**

*Opportunity Starts at Home* is a long-term, multi-sector campaign to meet the rental needs of the nation's low-income people. We launched the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign together with Children's HealthWatch and a steering committee of partners including Catholic Charities USA, the Children's Defense Fund, Community Catalyst, the Food Research and Action Center, JustLeadershipUSA, NAACP, National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Association of Community Health Centers, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Education Association, the National League of Cities, the National LGBTQ Task Force, the National Women's Law Center, the Natural Resources Defense Council and UnidosUS.

Millions of households across the country face impossible choices each day between paying rent and meeting their other basic needs, such as buying groceries and taking care of their health. Ending hunger requires expanding proven housing solutions - including Housing Choice Vouchers, national Housing Trust Fund, and public housing - to help the lowest-income and most marginalized families pay rent and make ends meet.

Renters with extremely low incomes are often forced to prioritize shelter over other needs, with the lowest-income, severely cost-burdened renters spending 38% less on food and 70% less on healthcare than their peers without cost burdens in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Extremely low-income renters have little if any money available for other necessities after paying their rents because, as Pulitzer prize-winning sociologist Matthew Desmond has said, “the rent eats first.” In 2021, for example, a severely housing cost-burdened family of four with an extremely low income of \$2,050 per month renting a typical two-bedroom apartment at a fair market rent of \$1,295 would have spent 63% of its income on housing and had only \$755 remaining for all other non-housing expenses. Such a family could not afford the \$863 per month estimated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in its Thrifty Food Plan as being necessary for covering the costs of food for a family of two adults and two children,<sup>2</sup> let alone the costs of other necessities like healthcare, childcare, and transportation.<sup>3</sup>

People experiencing food insecurity are likely experiencing additional resource-related hardships, such as housing instability, that can contribute to poor nutrition, health, and disease management.<sup>4</sup> Access to affordable housing provides families with more available income to buy adequate and nutritious food. A growing body of research finds that federal housing assistance helps protect children from hunger and buffers families from food insecurity and other health risks.<sup>5</sup> Children’s HealthWatch found that compared to families on a waitlist for assistance, children living in subsidized housing are more likely to be food secure, less likely to be seriously underweight, and more likely to be classified as “well” on a composite indicator of child health.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the combination of housing subsidies with nutrition assistance improves housing security. Low-income families receiving housing assistance in combination with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits were 72% more likely to be housing secure than those receiving housing subsidies alone.<sup>7</sup>

The Biden administration’s national strategy to end hunger, improve nutrition and physical activity, and reduce diet-related diseases and disparities must include robust housing investments to ensure that households with the greatest needs have stable, accessible, and affordable homes.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information or to discuss further, please contact NLIHC Senior Vice President Sarah Saadian ([ssaadian@nlihc.org](mailto:ssaadian@nlihc.org)).

Sincerely,

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities  
National Alliance to End Homelessness  
National Low Income Housing Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. (2022). *America’s rental housing 2022*. Cambridge, MA: Author. Retrieved from:

[https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_Americas\\_Rental\\_Housing\\_2022.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_Americas_Rental_Housing_2022.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022). *Official USDA thrifty food plan: U.S. average, December 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/media/file/CostofFoodDec2021Thrifty.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2022). *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Rental Homes*. Retrieved from: <https://nlihc.org/gap>

<sup>4</sup> Food Research & Action Center. (2017). *The impact of poverty, food insecurity, and poor nutrition on health and well-being*. Retrieved from: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-impact-poverty-food-insecurity-health-well-being.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign. (2022). *Hunger & housing*. Retrieved from: <https://www.opportunityhome.org/related-sectors/hunger-housing/>

<sup>6</sup> Children’s Health Watch. (2009). *Rx for Hunger: Affordable Housing*. Retrieved from: [https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/rxforhunger\\_report\\_dec09-1.pdf](https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/rxforhunger_report_dec09-1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Sandel, M., Cutts, D., Meyers, A., Ettinger de Cuba, S., & Coleman, S. (2014). *Co-enrollment for child health: How receipt and loss of food and housing subsidies relate to housing security and statutes for streamlined, multi-subsidy application*. Retrieved from: <http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Co-enrollment-for-Child-Health-1.pdf>