



July 14, 2022

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
Room 469, Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Biden and Ambassador Rice,

DC Greens commends your tremendous efforts to address nutrition insecurity in the United States. We are optimistic that the outcomes of the White House Conference on Nutrition, Hunger, and Health can catalyze true systemic change to address widespread food insecurity, rising rates of diet-related chronic disease, and disproportionate food access.

DC Greens is a nonprofit organization working to advance health equity by creating a just and resilient food system in the nation's capital through programming and policy change. Currently, the organization coordinates two food-related initiatives:

- **Produce Prescriptions:** DC Greens' Produce Rx Program allows health care providers to prescribe fruit and vegetables to Medicaid patients who are diagnosed with hypertension, pre-diabetes, and/or diabetes. Patients can then fill their prescriptions free of charge in the produce section of their local grocery store. Today, our program provides fresh and frozen produce to 853 participants in partnership with 15 clinics, all DC Medicaid providers, DC Healthcare Finance and 5 Giants across Washington D.C.
- **The Well:** The Well is an intergenerational farm and community wellness space that we launched in June 2022 in the Congress Heights neighborhood of Ward 8, in Southeast, D.C. DC Greens created this space after four years of community visioning, and we have hired community residents to lead the project. Working in partnership with DC's Department of Parks and Recreation, and community-based nonprofits The Green Scheme, The Friends of Oxon Run, and Soul of the City, The Well is a place-based health initiative where DC Greens channels resources for community members to define wellness on their own terms. The Well is a strikingly beautiful space designed by SHoP Architecture, with a central pavilion designed and built by EarthBound, a black-owned, worker-owned timber construction company. Given the topical relevance and relative proximity to the White House, we believe that The Well could provide a stunning backdrop should the conference be seeking a location for a press moment.

DC Greens also acts as a community powerbuilder, working to advance equity-focused policy solutions by amplifying marginalized voices and enhancing cross-sector collaboration. Over the years, DC Greens has been a leader on a number of local and federal policy initiatives:

- Increasing SNAP benefits and boosting senior-focused food and nutrition programming
- Improving DC school and jail food

- Expanding the adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program and boosting technical assistance
- Increasing access to healthy and medically appropriate food through the health care system (Food is Medicine)

As inflation continues to rise, individuals are being forced to make more difficult choices to support their basic needs such as housing, health care, food, and utilities. Research shows that for families already facing food insecurity, food budgets are often the first to be cut during times of financial hardship, exacerbating the severity of food insecurity and often decreasing the quality of foods that are consumed. Expanding and fortifying public policy and programs to ensure consistent and adequate access to healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate foods for all individuals is of the utmost importance.

DC Greens' work touches many of the pillars that this conference will focus on. Below, we have outlined specific recommendations under the pillars most relevant to our organization's work. Implementing these recommendations will have cross-cutting benefits and will help our nation create a more equity-focused, sustainable, and healthy food and nutrition system that all Americans can rely on to adequately meet their needs.

Pillar 1: Improve food access and affordability: DC Greens urges the administration to improve food assistance programs by expanding eligibility, increasing participation, and boosting benefit amounts. Specifically, we ask the federal government to:

- Increase the value of the WIC cash value benefit for the purchase of fruits and vegetables;
- Increase monthly SNAP benefits and expand produce-specific benefits; and
- Expand senior food assistance and farmers' market incentive programs.

Pillar 2: Integrate nutrition and health: Medically appropriate food and nutrition programming such as medically tailored meals, medically tailored groceries, and produce prescription programs should be widely available through the health care system to prevent, manage, and treat chronic conditions.

[Mainstreaming Produce Prescription Programs: A Policy Strategy Report](#) and [Addressing Nutrition and Food Access in Medicaid](#) are two key resources that should inform a federal strategy to integrate nutrition and health. To broadly expand access to produce prescriptions programs, DC Greens encourages federal agencies to:

- Broaden coverage of produce prescriptions within Medicaid and Medicare;
- Increase nutrition education among health care providers to further integrate nutrition and health; and
- Implement widespread food insecurity screening and referral systems and infrastructure.

Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices: To ensure that all populations have access to healthy food choices, we must consider the role of institutional food environments. Institutional food is not only a safety net for food insecure community members, but a critical intervention point to support good nutrition and set a trajectory for a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, consumer empowerment begins with consumer engagement. DC Greens recommends the administration to:

- Provide healthy school meals for all students in public schools across the country;
- Boost nutrition education programming in public schools;
- Improve federal standards of jail and prison food;
- Implement values-based purchasing standards such as the GFPP; and
- Establish and continue specific accountability mechanisms for the federal government to engage people experiencing food insecurity in decision-making processes.

Pillar 5: Enhance Nutrition and Food Security Research: Effective policy and programs rely on high-quality research. Opportunities to collect data from large scale pilots and natural experiments generated by policy changes should be prioritized. To enhance nutrition and food insecurity research, the administration should prioritize implementing large-scale pilots and natural experiments. The [Food is Medicine Research Action Plan](#) provides detailed recommendations on how to improve Food is Medicine research; the administration should consider the report a key resource. Immediate opportunities to boost large scale pilots include:

- Authorizing coverage of produce prescriptions within the Veterans Affairs medical benefits package; and
- Integrating produce prescriptions into Indian Health Services by adopting the IHS Produce Prescription Pilot and providing additional funding in FY23 for Produce Prescription pilots within IHS.

The White House Conference planning committee has done a phenomenal job creating multiple avenues for community engagement and has been exceptionally interested in hearing from community-based organizations and experts in the field. **DC Greens urges the planning committee to also create opportunities to engage directly from individuals with lived experience of food insecurity; those experiences should be centered in policy and program creation.**

Our organization is grateful for the opportunity to provide input on how to address issues related to hunger, health, and nutrition in the United States and we are hopeful that the conference will drive deep systemic change. Please contact Kristin Sukys (kristin.sukys@gmail.com), Health Policy Specialist, with any follow-up questions.

Sincerely,

DC Greens



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