



June 7, 2022

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
Domestic Policy Council
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ambassador Rice,

On behalf of Nemours Children's Health, we thank you for your leadership in planning the upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health (Conference). As you work with your team to develop priorities for the Conference, we urge you to consider the enclosed recommendations for incorporating child health in all the identified pillars.

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, including two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of nearly 75 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org. The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves.

Nemours Children's is a Steering Committee member of the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA) Coalition and as such, we are fully supportive of NANA's recommendations for the Conference agenda. Further, we encourage the Conference organizers to spotlight effective, scalable programs and interventions that address hunger and enhance access to healthy, nutritious foods through partnerships across key child-serving sectors. Included in this letter are Nemours Children's recommendations for innovative and effective approaches in the early care and education (ECE) and health care sectors that support equitable access to nutritious food for children and their families and align with key conference pillars.

We look forward to the upcoming Conference and the policy changes that will follow. Nemours Children's would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss programs and policies that could improve the health and well-being for current and future generations of children. If you have questions, please reach out to Daniella Gratale, Director of the Office of Child Health Policy and Advocacy, at 202-425-5805 or daniella.gratale@nemours.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kara Odom Walker".

Kara Odom Walker, MD, MPH, MSHS
Executive Vice President
Chief Population Health Officer
Nemours Children's Health

Recommendations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition & Health

The upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health (the Conference) has great potential to catalyze important policy changes that support children's healthy development. Nemours Children's Health recommends that the Conference spotlight effective, scalable approaches that address hunger and enhance access to healthy, nutritious foods through partnerships across key child-serving sectors. In particular, the early care and education (ECE) and health care sectors can play a meaningful role in supporting equitable access to nutritious foods for children and their families.

CONFERENCE PILLARS: IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY & SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ALL

Effective Approaches in the Early Care and Education (Child Care) Sector

Early childhood is a crucial time for developing healthy habits in young children. Substantial evidence demonstrates that quality ECE programs¹ can improve long-term health outcomes across the lifespan by supporting the development of healthy habits. ECE programs can provide young children with healthy food and implement best practices to encourage healthy development.

The Conference offers an opportunity to highlight effective programs that can be scaled to reach more children, nationally. One such program is the National Early Child Care Collaboratives (NECCC) program, an obesity prevention program funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. **The NECCC program supports 12 states to improve access to quality nutrition and physical activity in the ECE sector through sustainable changes that support healthy child development.** The current iteration of the NECCC program has reached 7,100 child care programs serving more than 260,000 children through direct training and technical assistance (TA) to child care providers. Concurrently, participating state partners pursue systems level change to embed best practices into the systems that support all ECE providers in their respective states. This includes changes to improve professional development, financing, the Child and Adult Food Program (CACFP), Quality Rating and Improvement System, licensing and the TA networks that support ECE professionals. **Program achievements to date include:**

- In Virginia, the NECCC program supports a state partner in leading strategic efforts to expand participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in order to increase access to healthy foods for young children. The state partner convenes a workgroup of child care and nutrition stakeholders, including state agency leads and community partners. This workgroup shares information and resources and streamlines services and resources for child care programs. As a result of the collaboration, the state partner launched a CACFP Ambassador training program, which trains state, regional and local partners, including key agency staff, to better understand CACFP and assist child care providers with enrollment and TA.
- In Alabama, the NECCC program provides TA to a state partner in collaborating with other state and local organizations to successfully implement the state's new Child Care Licensing and Performance Standards. The standards went into effect for more than 1800 licensed programs on September 13, 2021. Now, children attending licensed child care in Alabama will receive at least 60 minutes of outdoor play and physical activity daily, meals that meet CACFP guidelines and a greater restriction on screen time. In addition, standards that impact the care of infants were updated to include multiple opportunities to go outside each day, a limit on the amount of time spent in restrictive equipment, and elimination of screen time. These updated standards will improve the quality of care of over 50,000 Alabama children that

¹ ECE programs include child care centers, Early Head Start/Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and family child care homes.

either participate in the federal child care subsidy program or attend Early Head Start or Head Start programs, as well as numerous other children that attend licensed child care. The NECCC program provides the state partner with necessary resources and tools to support ECE programs as they work to achieve these standards.

- In Georgia, the NECCC program provides TA to a state partner to develop and expand the availability of a state-wide, comprehensive training program focused on enhancing wellness policies and practices within ECE settings. The state developed a state-based Nutrition and Physical Activity Assessment online platform enabling ECE providers to evaluate their program compared to best practices, create action plans and submit evidence of impact. The 2021 evaluation report showed improvements across all indicators for all participating ECE sites. Further, the partner created a state-based recognition system for centers exemplifying high standards in nutrition and physical activity. The partner will explore how to incorporate the recognition system into the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as a professional development opportunity for ECE professionals, which can lead to even more sustainable changes. Additionally, the partner will collaboratively develop strategies to improve equity in QRIS participation by focusing on rural ECE providers and those serving low-income families.
- In Wisconsin, the NECCC program provides funding and TA to support a state partner's efforts to improve food access and food security in the ECE setting. The state partner works with state stakeholders to identify challenges ECE programs face in procuring and preparing healthy food options for children. This year, the initiative will expand through partnerships with food systems and food retailers to develop strategies that address healthy and affordable food procurement and preparation needs with ECE programs. NECCC funds also support the state partner to promote early childhood outdoor learning environments (OLE) in the state by training ECE professionals to effectively implement OLE in their programs to support children's socio-emotional health and active play.

The NECCC program is currently active in 12 states: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, South Carolina, Virginia and Wisconsin. Nemours Children's administers the program, provides TA to state implementing partners and organizes learning opportunities across states.

CONFERENCE PILLAR: INTEGRATE NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Effective Approaches in the Health Care Sector

Research indicates that up to 80 percent of an individual's health outcomes can be attributed to social determinants of health (SDOH), which can include access to health care and quality nutrition. Health systems are well-positioned to play a key role in addressing SDOH, and some states and health systems have begun this work. The Conference is an important platform for highlighting existing activities and models designed to improve child health and wellness by integrating health care and community supports to address health-related social needs, such as access to healthy food. Health care providers can play a critical role in breaking down silos and linking patients and their families to nutrition and safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Medicaid.

One example is the implementation of a social needs screening tool in Delaware and Pennsylvania.

- In 2021, Nemours Children's implemented an evidence-based social needs screening tool across 20 pediatric primary care sites in Delaware and Pennsylvania. The tool asks families 13 questions related to 10 social domains including food insecurity, housing, transportation, and legal needs. Based on 2021 results, food insecurity was among the top three needs screened for families in our care. To date, the social needs screening tool has been offered to over 47,000 primary care patients/families with approximately 13.5% reporting at least one need. Once a need is identified, families are asked

whether they need or want help to address it. Of the families with an identified need, almost 35% wanted assistance. When families opt for help, they receive a referral from Nemours Children's to community organizations that can help address the identified need. Nemours Children's is working with Delaware 211 on a closed-loop system approach. This would help to identify the number of families who received support from community organizations for the need that they identified in the screening tool and to follow up with those who did not yet receive services to provide assistance.

Health systems can also help increase opportunities for families to develop skills in growing food. For example:

- At Nemours Children's Hospital, Delaware, the Can Grow Garden helps empower families to grow food at home. The raised bed serve as both a demonstration garden for inspiration and learning, but also as a source of fresh produce for patient families who may need it. All food grown in the garden is harvested and consistently offered to patient families as available. Any unclaimed produce is donated to the Delaware Food Bank. In addition to produce, Nemours Children's Estate gardeners also propagate at least 1,000 tomato plants each year in the Estate's greenhouse to give away to Nemours Children's families. These plants, easily growable in containers, can help families to supplement their food stores throughout the summer. This year for the first time, Nemours Children's Estate will also provide regularly scheduled learning and therapeutic horticultural programs for patients. These programs will scaffold on the opportunities already presented in the garden to spend time with nature and learn about growing food.

Health systems can provide resources to support new mothers and their babies. For example:

- Nemours Children's *Nemours Cares Closets* provide essential baby items such as diapers, wipes, clothing, food, baby formula, breastfeeding supplies, and diaper rash creams to mothers and families coming into Nemours Children's primary and specialty care practices in Wilmington and Milford, Delaware. All items are purchased through Nemours Children's Community Engagement department. Recently, through a partnership with a local food bank, one of the *Nemours Cares Closets* locations now provides fresh food to families in need. In 2021, the program served 433 families, of which 61% have children born after 2020. Additionally, 43% of families received food in addition to other items from *Nemours Cares Closets*. While 90% of families were Nemours Children's patients, the program also takes in families with referrals from Delaware's Northeast State Service Center as well as other community partners. Programs like *Nemours Cares Closets* help to bridge the gap between health care entities and the needs of the communities that they serve. With additional exposure, other health systems could opt to pursue similar approaches.