

CSPI policy menu to improve US population health and wellbeing, with a focus on children

September 19, 2025

Background

The “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) Commission’s “Make Our Children Health Again” Strategy Report was published on September 9, 2025, with the explicit goal of providing recommended strategies for the federal government to end childhood chronic disease. In response, below are CSPI’s recommendations for evidence-based food and health policies to improve US population health overall and reduce risk of chronic disease, with a focus on children. We include a range of strategies directed at the food system as well as programs that serve children and families, given the breadth and depth of the problem. We provide a detailed federal policy menu below and will release a similar resource for the state and local level soon.

Federal Policy Menu: Objectives and evidence-based strategies

1. Start with the science: US food policy should be evidence-based so that it will benefit the public’s health.

- Publish Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) that adopt and uphold the science-based recommendations of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) (HHS and USDA)
- Adequately fund nutrition and public health research and research infrastructure and allow the publication of publicly funded scientific findings without political censorship (NIH)

2. Our food supply should be safe, healthier, and more transparent.

- Overhaul the food chemical regulatory system to systematically ensure the US food supply is safe (FDA). This should include:
 - GRAS reform: Close the “Generally Recognized as Safe” (GRAS) loophole such that all new food ingredients are required to undergo a rigorous, transparent pre-market approval process by FDA
 - Post-market assessment reform: Implement a rigorous, transparent process for conducting post-market safety assessments of food chemicals that leads to the identification and elimination/restriction (e.g. through limitations on use, application of warning labels) of ingredients that no longer meet the federal safety standard for food additives according to current evidence and scientific practices
 - Set health-protective, binding limits on toxic heavy metals and other chemical contaminants in foods

- Reduce sodium and added sugars in the US food supply through industry reduction targets (FDA)
- Strengthen and finalize the proposed rule mandating interpretive, nutrient-specific front-of-package nutrition labels on packaged foods and beverages that are high in added sugars, sodium, or saturated fat (FDA)
- Increase transparency by mandating added sugars disclosure and sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar warnings at restaurants (FDA and Congress)
- Require warning labels for ingredients of concern (e.g., synthetic dyes) and products of concern (e.g., processed meats) (FDA and Congress)
- Require nutrition, allergen, and ingredient information to be disclosed at the point of sale for foods sold online (FDA, USDA, and Congress)
- Require nutrition, allergen, and ingredient information to be disclosed for alcohol (Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB))
- Provide an evidence-based definition of ultra-processed foods for policy and research (FDA, HHS, and USDA)
- Strengthen regulations and address misleading marketing of baby and toddler foods, including transition formulas and toddler milks (FDA)
- Grant FDA new authority and funds to support its food chemical and nutrition programs (Congress)

3. US food policy should reflect the needs and priorities of those most impacted by food system inequities.

- Community-informed policies and programs are needed to mitigate food insecurity and strengthen our domestic food system by centering the expertise of food system workers, consumers, and historically excluded producers.

4. Foods provided to children and their families should be healthy and safe.

- Ensure strong science-based nutrition standards for all federal child nutrition programs, including foods offered in schools, child and adult care settings, federal facilities that serve children (e.g., national parks) and as part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (USDA)
- Fully fund all federal nutrition assistance programs with sufficient resources to implement rules established by USDA and to ensure that the programs are available and accessible to all who need them (Congress)
- Reinstate and increase funding for SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed) (USDA and Congress)
- Pass a Farm Bill that meets a high bar for healthy food access by restoring funding for SNAP and SNAP-Ed, fully funding GusNIP (nutrition incentives), defining and measuring

Nutrition Security, strengthening SNAP stocking standards, and integrating incentives onto EBT cards (Congress)

- Improve access to safe and appealing tap water across the country (EPA)

5. Children should be protected from harmful products, including unhealthy foods, alcohol, and dangerous dietary supplements.

- Pass a sweetened beverage excise tax (Congress)
- Go further than merely exploring potential guidelines by bringing enforcement actions against deceptive and unfair practices that target children and adolescents with manipulative marketing of unhealthy foods, tobacco, alcohol, and certain dietary supplements (including weight loss and muscle-building supplements marketed to teens) (FTC)
- Update legislation requiring warnings on alcohol in response to the 2025 US Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk to disclose that alcohol increases risk of cancer (Congress)
- Regulate dietary supplements for safety and efficacy by requiring product registration and enhanced safety oversight (FDA and Congress)

6. Children and their families must have access to safe and effective medical care.

- Fully fund Medicaid and ensure it is available and accessible to families who need it (Congress)
- Ensure access to safe and effective medical devices and medications, including vaccines (HHS and CDC)