



The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
Presidential Transition Office  
1401 Constitution Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

December 22, 2020

## **Re: The Biden Administration's Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Cancer Priorities**

Dear President-Elect Biden:

The [American Institute for Cancer Research \(AICR\)](#) appreciates your commitment to scientific research and to evidence-based policies that improve our nation's health and well-being. AICR is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that is part of the [World Cancer Research Fund International \(WCRF\)](#) network and the leading U.S. authority on the links between diet, weight, physical activity and cancer prevention and survival. AICR's mission is to champion the latest and most authoritative scientific research from around the world on cancer prevention and survival, relevant to these lifestyle factors, to help people make informed choices to reduce their cancer risk. AICR recognizes the pivotal role that U.S. federal lawmakers play in achieving this life-saving mission. Thus, [AICR advocates](#) for legislation and regulations that provide federal funding, evidence-based policies, and access to information and interventions that prevent cancer in the first place and improve outcomes for cancer survivors.

Like many American families, we recognize that yours has been touched by cancer, as cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. In 2020, more than [1.8 million](#) Americans will be diagnosed and [more than 600,000](#) will die from cancer. We appreciate that you used your family's personal tragedy as a springboard to champion increased investment in cancer research, innovation, and treatment through the Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot and the Biden Cancer Initiative that will undoubtedly benefit many American families for years to come. While improved cancer therapies are essential, [between 30 and 50 percent of cancers](#) and their costly treatments can be prevented. Eating a healthy diet, being active each day, and maintaining a healthy weight are - after not smoking - the most important ways to [reduce cancer risk](#).

**As President, we hope that you will use your authority and work with Congress to increase investment in research and programs, enact and implement evidence-based policies and ensure access to information and interventions that prevent cancer in the first place and improve outcomes for cancer survivors.**

**Specifically, we recommend that you and your Administration prioritize the following policies and initiatives:**

***Increase investment in cancer research, with an emphasis on prevention.***

The National Cancer Institute (NCI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is the largest funder of cancer research in the world. Thanks in part to cancer research funded through NCI,

the rate of new cancer cases has [declined](#) 29 percent from 1991 to 2017. This includes a 2.2 percent decrease from 2016 to 2017, the largest single-year decline in history. However, not all population groups have benefitted equally, and rates of preventable cancers among certain populations remain high. Rising rates of obesity also threaten to derail this progress, as excess body weight [increases the risk](#) of 12 different types of cancer, [including](#) three of the deadliest cancers: breast, colorectal and prostate.

**As a member of One Voice Against Cancer (OVAC) and the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research, AICR asks that you prioritize a new federal investment in cancer research, with an emphasis on cancer prevention and lifestyle risk factors.** While AICR has invested more than \$109 million in cancer research itself, increased federal funding is needed to accelerate research on the impact of lifestyle factors on cancer prevention and survivorship and identify best practices to influence behavior change. More funding would also help to meet the overwhelming demand for research grants at the NCI, address cancer health disparities, mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on cancer clinical trials and patient screenings and treatment, and bolster efforts to use research and development to spur the nation's economic recovery. A new federal investment in cancer research and prevention would build on President-Elect Biden's past successes and further cement his legacy as a champion in the fight against this horrible disease.

***Ensure the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans are based on cancer prevention research and serve as the basis for federal policies, programs, and communications.***

AICR champions the latest and most authoritative research on diet, obesity, physical activity and cancer, and advocates that the federal [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) reflect this research.

AICR is pleased that the 2018 *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* recognize the benefits of an active lifestyle for cancer prevention and survivorship. AICR supports policies that make it easier for people of all ages to get enough physical activity to reduce the risk of cancer, promote a healthy weight, and achieve a myriad of other health benefits.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* form the basis of all federal food and nutrition policies, programs, and communications. This includes the school lunches that nearly 30 million students eat each day, the educational programs that support healthy choices for the more than 34 million people receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and the My Plate educational resources for building a healthy meal. The Dietary Guidelines also inform many state and local government and private sector nutrition guidelines. The 2020-2025 DGA are expected to be released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) before President-Elect Biden takes office. **We urge the Biden Administration's USDA and HHS to update educational materials and nutrition standards for federal programs, such as the school meal programs, to align with the new DGA.**

We also ask that your Administration's HHS regularly revise and update the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#).

***Prioritize physical activity across the federal landscape, and support physical activity assessment, prescription, and referral in health care.***

Being physically active is one of the most important lifestyle behaviors people can engage in to maintain physical health, mental health and well-being. Physical activity [decreases the risk](#) of colon cancer, post-menopausal breast cancer, and endometrial cancer. Currently, only 26 percent of men, 19 percent of women, and 20 percent of adolescents [report sufficient activity](#) to meet the relevant aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity guidelines. Even so, current population physical activity levels [avert](#) 3.9 million premature deaths globally and 140,200 premature deaths in the US on an annual basis.

As a founding member of the Physical Activity Alliance, the nation's broadest coalition dedicated to promoting physical activity for health, **we ask that your Administration prioritize physical activity across the federal policy landscape**, including coordinating physical activity research across the federal government, creating a federal interagency task force or White House Council focused on policies to support physical activity throughout the lifespan, and pursuing a physical activity in all policies approach. **We also ask that you support physical activity assessment, prescription, and referral in health care** through standardization of a measure for physical activity in electronic health records and the development of performance and quality measures for providers. **In addition, we request that you ask the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to support coverage and payment determinations for physical activity prescription and virtual delivery of interventions.**

***Provide for insurance coverage of nutrition counseling for cancer survivors.***

[Evidence is growing](#) that lifestyle interventions are an effective means to increase quality of life in cancer survivors. While these types of interventions are in-demand from this population, insurance coverage is often uneven or nonexistent, leading to patient confusion, under-utilization of services that are available, and high costs. Accessibility for such services often depends on where the patient receives oncology care, whether the care is provided in an inpatient or outpatient setting, and their ability to pay, leading to vast disparities in care. While rehabilitative services, such as exercise rehabilitation for cancer survivors, are covered as an Essential Health Benefit within the ACA, these services still can incur high costs from co-pays and deductibles, making them inaccessible to many. In a [study](#) of 215 outpatient cancer centers, 94 percent reported having at least one registered dietitian on staff, but the dietitian-to-patient ratio was extremely high, and 77 percent of these centers did not bill the patients for their nutrition services due to a lack of insurance coverage.

**AICR urges the Biden Administration to work through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to enact regulatory policies and pilot innovations and with Congress to pass legislation to increase insurance coverage for lifestyle interventions, particularly for those that are tailored to fit the unique needs of cancer survivors. In particular, we urge passage of the [Medical Nutrition Therapy Act](#), which would expand access to medical nutrition therapy, a counseling service provided by a licensed nutrition professional, for Medicare recipients with certain chronic conditions, including cancer.**

***Provide nutrition labels and information that make it easier to identify healthy options.***

To support people making healthy choices that align with AICR's *10 Cancer Prevention Recommendations* and the Dietary Guidelines, AICR supports updates to nutrition labels and food standards that incentivize production of more nutritious options and give consumers the information and tools to make better choices. AICR also advocates for consumer education about these tools and how to use them in their everyday lives. AICR supports implementation of the updated Nutrition Facts label, which makes calories and serving size larger and includes added sugar content, to help with managing weight. The requirements for the updated Nutrition Facts label were established by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) during the Obama-Biden Administration and implemented during the Trump Administration. AICR also appreciates the FDA's current focus on reducing diet-related diseases such as cancer through updating food standards, nutrient claims, nutrition labeling, and nutrition education. **AICR asks that you request the FDA to prioritize updating regulations that improve nutrition and reduce diet-related chronic disease, particularly actions to increase awareness and intake of whole grains.** While AICR's research has shown that whole grains [decrease the risk](#) of colorectal cancer, Americans of all ages consume [too few whole grains](#) and too many refined grains. Consumer research suggests that lack of whole grain products in the marketplace and [consumer confusion](#) about which products are whole grain may be contributing to the low levels of consumption. **We ask your FDA to initiate action focused on increasing consumer awareness and intake of whole grains to reduce colorectal cancer risk.**

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. AICR looks forward to working with your Administration to prioritize policies to support nutrition, physical activity, and cancer prevention and survivorship. If you have any questions or we can discuss any of these recommendations in more detail, please contact Deirdre McGinley-Gieser, AICR's Senior Vice President, Programs & Strategic Planning, at [d.mcginley-gieser@aicr.org](mailto:d.mcginley-gieser@aicr.org) or (703) 237-0159.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kelly B. Browning', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kelly B. Browning  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Institute for Cancer Research