

OFFICE OF NUTRITION RESEARCH

The NIH **Office of Nutrition Research (ONR)** aims to advance and coordinate federal investments in nutrition science to support and coordinate basic and translational research to ultimately promote health and reduce burdens of diet-related diseases among all Americans. The ONR will:

- coordinate implementation of the **Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research**, released by recent NIH Director Francis Collins;
- identify cutting-edge research projects that deserve expanded effort and support by the NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs);
- develop, lead, and manage trans-NIH nutrition research projects in collaboration with the ICs;
- represent the NIH on intradepartmental or interagency committees on nutrition research and related policy issues; and
- advise NIH leadership and other key officials on matters relating to research on nutrition.

The FY 2024 President's Budget recommends funding ONR at \$121 million in Fiscal Year 2024, which would help secure necessary leadership, staffing, and resources for ONR to effectively fulfill its critical mission of advancing science that will promote better nutrition and prevent and reduce diet-related diseases. This represents only 0.25% of the FY24 NIH budget, and a far smaller fraction of the \$1.1 trillion in annual health costs of poor nutrition in the U.S.

Poor Nutrition is Harming our Country

Nearly **three in four** U.S. adults have overweight or obesity and **1 in 2** are living with diabetes or prediabetes. And these challenges start in our youth: 1 in 4 U.S. teens already have prediabetes. Overall, diet-related diseases are the number one cause of death and disability in the U.S., and the combined health care spending and lost productivity from suboptimal diets costs the economy **\$1.1 trillion** each year. These burdens **disproportionately harm** people with lower incomes, people living in rural areas, and people in minority racial and ethnic groups, contributing to and exacerbating existing U.S. health disparities.

While many diseases are well understood by the general public as closely connected to diet, scientists are still working to better understand the innumerable connections between diet and our health.

Beyond obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, there is an urgent need for investment in foundational science to understand the impact of our food on:

- Optimal **maternal health** during pregnancy
- Healthy **child development** in utero and during early life
- Incidence and severity of **Alzheimer's disease** and other dementias
- Onset and treatment of multiple **cancers**
- Risk of **autism, ADHD** (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), and **allergies** in children
- Depression and other mental health conditions
- **Gut health**
- **Personalized health and nutrition**

Individuals and families, the health care system, our military, and our nation are in dire need of access to better nutrition, and that begins with fully understanding the science of good nutrition – which can only be achieved with investments in basic science and translational research.

The Critical Need to Invest in Nutrition Research

Relative funding for nutrition research has remained **flat for over 40 years**, even as diet-related diseases like diabetes, obesity, and related conditions have skyrocketed.

A 2021 GAO report found that the federal government currently invests in **200 different efforts** to improve Americans' diets, including 119 related to nutrition science, but that these efforts are **fragmented** across 21 agencies. With appropriate ONR funding, these efforts will be far better coordinated and more effective at achieving their goals.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) plays a crucial role in our nation's ability to advance research aimed at clarifying the causes and effects of disease and identifying effective prevention and treatment solutions. Yet, a 2019 **NIH analysis** compared the amount of dedicated NIH funding for risk factors of death and disability, and concluded that large disparities exist between the top causes of poor health and the prevention research funding allocated to address them – with the largest gap existing for nutrition.

The NIH is the ideal government agency to coordinate and conduct foundational scientific research in nutrition and health.

THE NEW NIH OFFICE OF NUTRITION RESEARCH WILL HELP DRIVE GROUNDBREAKING SCIENCE

The ONR was **established in the NIH Office of the Director by Francis Collins** in 2021, after the NIH concluded that nutrition research and its vast implications would be best served by greater strategic planning and coordination across the NIH's 27 institutes and centers. ONR is tasked with implementing the **2020-2030 Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research** across the NIH as well as with other federal agencies.

The requested FY 2024 increase in funding will allow ONR and NIH to establish a strong foundation and increased capacity to:



Attain scientific breakthroughs in the molecular effects of food and nutrition in the body;

Catalyze groundbreaking discoveries to help prevent and treat priority disease conditions (listed in the box above) that have strong links to diet and nutrition but require much more research;

Ensure access to quality nutrition in a child's first 1,000 days, leading to an optimized diet, increased maternal health outcomes, and successful child development;



Coordinate and support cutting-edge research in a new series of NIH Food is Medicine Centers of Excellence across the nation, building on the highly successful model of the NIH Cancer Centers of Excellence which have created major breakthroughs in the treatment of cancer;

Promote the training of the next generation of diverse research scientists to catalyze new discoveries around food, nutrition, diet-related diseases, and health disparities;



Ensure successful and efficient implementation of the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research and NIH Common Fund's Nutrition for Precision Health initiative; and

Structure a more efficient and effective approach to coordinate research and discoveries in nutrition other federal departments and agencies, and with academic institutions and the private sector.

With this appropriate \$121 million investment, the NIH ONR will help answer the foundational scientific questions necessary to improve the nation's health, economic competitiveness, and military readiness, while reducing health care spending and health disparities for all Americans. Investment in nutrition research will also launch new American small businesses and jobs, building upon the rapidly growing private capital investments in nutrition innovation.