



ASN Health and Nutrition Public Policy Newsletter December 18, 2007

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Oh Omnibus, Oh Omnibus

They are not singing “Deck the Halls” in Congress these days, or at least not yet. Instead Congress is racing to finish work on an omnibus appropriations measure—a large “bundled” bill that encompasses 11 of the 12 appropriations bills for fiscal year 2008—before adjourning for the year. On Monday night the House passed the \$515.7 billion Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2008. At press time, the Senate was poised to take it up with the goal of getting a bill to President Bush by the end of the week. The White House has yet to comment on whether the President will sign it.

The original plan for the omnibus bill included \$22 billion more than the President’s budget request for domestic spending, but after weeks of push and pull, Democratic leaders zeroed out any increase in domestic spending, thus meeting the President’s budget request. However, Democrats made spending shifts within the overall cap toward priorities such as health care, veterans’ benefits, medical research, home heating programs, law enforcement, and border security. Earmarks, while still included, were reduced 43 percent.

The bill provides \$329 million above FY 2007 levels for the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—\$760 million less than what was previously proposed in the vetoed Labor-HHS- Education Appropriations bill. However, medical research into diseases including Alzheimer’s, cancer, Parkinson’s disease and diabetes will get \$607 million more than the President’s request.

It also includes the public access language, requiring all investigators funded by NIH to submit an electronic version of their final, peer-reviewed manuscripts upon acceptance for publication, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also is allocated \$240 million less than the previously vetoed bill, yet the National Center for Health Statistics fares relatively well under the omnibus, with \$113.6 million appropriated. While this is \$2.8 million less than the level provided in the vetoed bill, it is still \$4.6 million more than the current level and \$3.6 million more than the President’s request.

With respect to research at USDA, the bill provides \$192.3 million for the National Research Initiative (NRI) at USDA, a mere 1.2 percent increase over current spending levels and far from the \$264 million called for by ASN in coalition with other food and agriculture-related scientific societies.

Programs at the Health Resources and Services (HRSA) Administration would receive a \$466 million increase, smaller than originally intended, and includes additional funds for community health centers, initiatives to increase minority health care professionals, health care services in underserved areas and graduate medical education programs at children’s hospitals.

The House version of the omnibus provides \$31 billion for military operations in Afghanistan, but prohibits the money from being used in Iraq. The Senate is expected to add \$40 billion in interim spending for Iraq to the bill. Until legislators can work out the details of the omnibus appropriations bill, a continuing resolution has been passed to extend fiscal year 2007 funding levels until

December 21. Should a veto-proof omnibus appropriations bill not pass, funding levels for 2007 may continue for the remainder of fiscal year 2008, essentially placing a funding freeze on government programs.

Farm Bill passes the Senate, conference expected in January

After weeks of gridlock, the Senate on Friday passed the Farm Bill by a vote of 79 – 14. Senate leaders managed to beat back attempts to enact significant reform by defeating all amendments that would have reduced crop subsidies and crop insurance, set lower payment limits and shifted funds to nutrition, research, and other USDA activities. In particular, the Senate soundly rejected an amendment by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), which ASN and other research groups supported, that would have increased funds for the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS). An amendment by Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA), supported by many nutrition groups, that would establish nutritional standards for competitive food and beverages sold in vending machines, school stores, and other locations on school grounds never made it to the Senate floor. Also withdrawn was the McConnell amendment to provide \$18 million to States for Team Nutrition education projects to educate school children and to conduct periodic surveys of foods purchased for school meals.

On a positive note, ASN's nutrition monitoring language was included in the bill that passed, as well as a modest restoration of IFAFS funds (\$45 million). Some stakeholders believe this is an important development, since both the House and Senate are now on record in support of resuming IFAFS funding, albeit at difference levels. Also of interest is Sense of the Congress language in support of nutrition education in the Food Stamp program and authorization of a study by the Comptroller General to determine whether U.S. agricultural policies have an impact on health, nutrition, overweight and obesity, and diet-related chronic disease. Further, it calls for the development of recommendations to guide or revise federal agricultural policies should the existing literature shows that there is a relationship between United States agricultural policy and health, nutrition, overweight and obesity, and diet-related chronic diseases.

A Conference Committee on the House and Senate approved farm bills should begin mid-January with the goal of completing the work by the end of the month. The question of a Bush veto remains. USDA officials reiterated the President's support for passage of a farm bill, but Bush likely will reject any bill that raises taxes to pay for nutrition and other programs, such as the approach in the House-passed farm bill. Since the 2002 Farm Bill provisions, extended once, are set to expire on January 1, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Peterson announced that, before Congress adjourns, language will be passed to provide short-term continuing authority through March 15 for nutrition and most other programs in that bill.

Full details of the legislation can be found on the [Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee website](#).

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

WIC Food Packages Interim Final Rule Released

USDA released the Interim Final Rule on Revisions to the Supplemental Food Program for Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) Food Packages, which was unchanged from the proposed rule, despite receiving over 42,000 comments. The new food packages largely reflect recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in its report, *WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change*. Changes also reflect recommendations in the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The food packages are

revised to add new foods including fruits, vegetables and whole grains, while reducing the amounts of milk, cheese, eggs and juice. Key changes to the WIC food packages include:

Fruits and Vegetables: The rule dramatically increases the quantity of fruits and vegetables provided through the WIC program. It provides vouchers of \$8 per month for women and \$6 per month for children to purchase fruits and vegetables. Women who are exclusively breastfeeding will receive \$10 per month. The rule includes a provision to adjust the maximum value of the fruit and vegetable vouchers for inflation, over time.

Juice: The rule reduces the quantity of juice provided through the food packages, to bring the juice quantities provided to children more in line with the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations, and also to free up funding to provide more whole fruits and vegetables.

Cereal and Bread: The rule requires half of the cereals provided through the WIC Program to have whole grain as the primary ingredient by weight AND meet labeling requirements for making a whole grain claim. The rule requires bread and tortillas provided through the program to be whole grain.

Milk: The rule decreases the quantity of milk provided through the food packages, since currently WIC (which is intended to be a *supplemental* nutrition program) provides more milk than is recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines*. Also, the rule reduces the fat content of milk provided for children two years of age and older and women, no longer allowing the provision of whole milk to these groups.

Cheese: The rule reduces the quantity of cheese provided to lower the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in the food packages.

Dairy Substitutes: The rule allows soy-based beverages and tofu to be substituted for milk in the food packages, but it requires medical documentation for children to receive soy alternatives.

Eggs: The rule reduces the quantity of eggs provided through the food packages. The IOM concluded that protein is no longer a priority nutrient for the WIC population, and eggs are a large source of cholesterol in Americans' diets.

Breastfeeding: The rule provides incentives for breastfeeding through provision of more fruits, vegetables, cheese, eggs, and canned fish for mothers who are exclusively breastfeeding than mothers who are not.

State agencies and local clinics have 18 months to implement the new food packages. The interim final rule was published in the December 6 Federal Register and is available at www.fns.usda.gov/wic/regpublished/foodpackages-interimrule.htm.

CDC Study Finds More Americans Reporting Regular Physical Activity

Survey results published last week in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* of the CDC suggest that Americans' exercise rates have increased slightly since 2001. Using data from two national, telephone-based surveys, researchers compared the self-reported physical activity levels of 205,000 respondents in 2001 with those of 356,000 adults in 2005. The surveys asked participants about their physical activity habits during non-working hours and classified respondents as active, if they reported engaging in at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days weekly or 20 minutes of vigorous activity three days weekly. According to the researchers, the percentage of physically

active women increased from 43 percent in 2001 to 47 percent in 2005, while the percentage of physically active men rose from 48 percent to roughly 50 percent.

For more information and to download a podcast on the topic, please visit the [CDC website](#).

HHS Launches Initiative to Coordinate Childhood Obesity Prevention Efforts

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the launch of a new effort to coordinate and expand existing federal childhood obesity prevention programs. Chaired by the Acting Surgeon General, Rear Admiral Steven Galson, the Childhood Overweight and Obesity Prevention Initiative will bring together HHS's Childhood Overweight and Obesity Coordinating Council, agency officials and community stakeholders. The Council will strengthen federal programs such as the CDC's School Health Index, the NIH's *Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition* program, the Indian Health Service's diabetes prevention efforts, the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) *Using the Nutrition Facts Label to Make Healthy Food Choices* program and the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports' National Fitness Challenge. These programs together will provide guidance and options for community-based interventions.

In addition, HHS will establish a National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play. The center will assist the Head Start program in evaluating playgrounds and educate children and their parents about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. The Administration for Children and Families will manage a national competition for a \$12 million, four-year grant to create the center and will allocate up to \$10 million for Head Start playground construction and improvement projects.

For more information, please visit the [RWJF Website](#) and the [HHS new release](#).

New data from What We Eat in America available

Data from the 2003-04 [What We Eat in America](#) survey is now available. The website includes both fact sheets and data tables with the mean nutrient intakes from foods for 21 gender and age groups by race, ethnicity and family. What We Eat in America is the dietary intake component of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and is conducted through a unique nutrition monitoring partnership between the National Center for Health Statistics at CDC and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at USDA.

National nutrition monitoring issues are critical to the nation and play a key role in shaping a variety of policies including food safety, child nutrition, food assistance and dietary guidance. Collected data are essential for informing policymakers and researchers, as well as the public, on the health and nutrition status of American adults and children. In addition to having an impact on billions of dollars in federal expenditures, the information from national surveys leverages billions of private sector dollars allocated to nutrition labeling, food product development and production.

Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program Database

The Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) supports a broad spectrum of food and nutrition assistance research. USDA's Economic Research Services (ERS) has compiled an electronic database of the hundreds of peer-reviewed reports and articles based on FANRP-supported research published at ERS and elsewhere. The database is searchable by title, lead author, topic and year-of- publication as well as by exact word(s) or phrases contained in the publication's bibliographic citation.

For more information, please visit the [Food Nutrition Assistance Research Findings Website](#).

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

New Childhood Obesity Guidelines from Medical Experts

A panel of medical experts convened by the federal government and the American Medical Association released comprehensive guidelines to help physicians prevent and treat childhood obesity. The guidelines, which replace less specific recommendations issued in 1998, will appear in an upcoming issue of *Pediatrics*. Touted as the "most aggressive, thorough guidelines ever issued" for childhood obesity, the latest recommendations call on physicians to measure children's weight annually; offer weight counseling, regardless of their weight status; and follow a four-stage treatment plan considering the possibility of medication or surgery for persistently overweight children. The panel also recommends that physicians address obesity, diabetes and heart disease when collecting family medical histories and screen overweight children for high cholesterol.

With respect to prevention, the new guidelines for children recommend at least an hour of physical activity daily, limiting intake of beverages high in sugar and fast food, and reducing sedentary behaviors such as television watching and computer use. For overweight and obese children, the guidelines offer more specific diet and fitness recommendations and call for more frequent physician check-ups.

RWJF Funding Alert: Healthy Eating Research Calls for Proposals Released

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has posted two separate calls for proposals (CFPs) in the Childhood Obesity program area. Healthy Eating Research is a national program of the RWJF that supports research on environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. Findings will advance the Foundation's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

The CFPs described below focus on the following four targeted topic areas:

1. Food pricing and economic approaches;
2. Food and beverage marketing and promotion;
3. Improving access to affordable healthy foods in low-income communities; and
4. Evaluations of other promising food-related policy and environmental strategies.

Healthy Eating Research Round 3

Application Deadline: February 6, 2008 (3 p.m. ET)

Approximately \$3.5 million will be awarded for two types of research grants focused in the four areas listed above:

Small- and large-scale studies:

- 12- to 18-month awards up to \$150,000 each.
- 18- to 36-month awards up to \$400,000 each.

Macro-level analyses:

- 12- to 18-month awards up to \$100,000 each.

Healthy Eating Research Special Solicitation Round 2

Application Deadline: February 6, 2008 (3 p.m. ET)

The Special Solicitation is a funding opportunity from RWJF for New Connections grants through the Healthy Eating Research program. New Connections grants are for junior investigators from

historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities who have completed their doctorate or terminal degree within the last seven years (after September 1, 2001). These grants are for individuals who are in the early stages of an independent research career.

A total of up to three grants will be awarded. There are two categories of funding focused on the four areas listed above:

Small-scale studies:

12- to 24-month awards of up to \$100,000.

Macro-level analyses:

12- to 24-month awards of up to \$75,000.

Visit the Healthy Eating Research Web site for more details about these CFPs and information on how to apply, at www.healthyeatingresearch.org

Study Finds Healthy Changes to School Menus Do Not Increase Costs or Reduce Sales

A study in the December issue of the *Review of Agricultural Economics* suggests that schools that change their menus to offer more nutritious foods in the cafeteria do not experience a drop in lunch sales or an increase in food costs. Researchers from the University of Minnesota analyzed five years of data from 330 Minnesota public school districts on their compliance with federal standards for calories, nutrients and fat in school lunches. They found that, contrary to popular belief, schools serving the healthiest lunches did not see a decline in demand compared with schools selling less nutritious meals. The study also found that using nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables, which cost less than processed foods, offset staff training and kitchen upgrade costs. To encourage schools to implement nutritional improvements, the researchers recommend enacting tighter restrictions on school lunch program budgets to limit indirect costs, such as electricity and janitorial services.

For more information, please visit the [RWJF Newsroom](#).