



January 21, 2026

Joint Chambers,

On June 4th, 2024, your American Heart Association released a Presidential Advisory outlining a trajectory which is alarming, yet we can make transformational change if we start today.

At least 6 in 10 U.S. adults (61%), more than 184 million people, are expected to have some type of cardiovascular disease within the next 30 years, reflecting a disease prevalence that will have a \$1.8 trillion price tag in direct and indirect costs.

It is projected from **2020 to 2050**,

- Obesity will increase from 43.1% to 60.6%, impacting more than 180 million people.
- People aged **20-64 years** also will have the highest prevalence and highest growth for obesity, with more than 70 million young adults having a poor diet.

As you reflect on this, think about our 5-year-old children today. 25 years from now, they will be 30 years of age and could have the highest prevalence and highest growth of obesity. Let's not only think of today's impact, let's think of 25 years from now. The cost to feed children nutritious meals today is less than paying for medical bills 25 years from today.

This is concerning yet there can be optimism as together we can create an environment in which all North Dakotans can have nutritional security every day through various initiatives, good policy development and implementation, providing a worthy return on our investments.

Poor nutrition is a leading contributor to the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Food insecurity, a household-level social or economic condition of limited access to sufficient food, contributes to disparities in chronic disease outcomes, especially cardiovascular diseases. While many US food policies and programs are designed to address food insecurity, there is a growing consensus that the focus should be broadened to include nutrition security.

Nutrition security is defined as having equitable and stable availability, access, affordability, and utilization of foods and beverages that promote well-being and prevent and treat disease. Shifting focus to nutrition security is critical for addressing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in nutrition and chronic diseases.

In North Dakota, deaths by **heart disease have risen from 2018 to 2022 by 12%** and is the **number 1** cause of death in North Dakotans. And, earlier this year the **North Dakota Multi-Partner Health Collaborative (MPHC)** was formed to help North Dakota become the healthiest state in the nation and nutrition is a critical conversation to achieving this aspirational vision.

As mentioned earlier, good policy development is one of those key levers to becoming the healthiest state in the nation and one of those policies would be implementing Healthy School Meals for All in North Dakota.

Beyond the fact we may not be able to afford the prospective cost of **\$1.8 Trillion dollar bill** by 2050 if we don't change our current behaviors, a systematic review of 47 studies, 25 in the United States and 22



conducted in other countries and developed economies, there are 7 reasons why Healthy School Meals for all is a good investment today:

1. Providing healthy school meals for all is associated with increases in the number of students **participating** in the school meal program.
2. Providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with better student diet quality, particularly in the presence of strong school nutrition standards that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
3. Providing healthy school meals for all improves **food security** among students and families with lower incomes.
4. Providing healthy school lunches for all is positively associated with students' **academic performance**.
5. Providing healthy school meals for all significantly improves student **attendance** among students from lower-income and food-insecure households
6. Healthy school meals for all with strong nutrition standards have been shown to not increase student **Body Mass Index**.
7. There is evidence in the U.S. that school food service budgets benefit from use of the community eligibility provision (CEP), an option that allows schools in high poverty areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students; In particular, schools with a high percentage of students from low-income households may benefit **financially** from CEP due to increased revenues from federal reimbursements of school meals served.

We ask you today to vote **YES on HB 1624** which is a worthy investment as one policy lever to help become the healthiest state in the Nation, once again.

With respect & sincerity,

Tony Burke, BA, CCMP

Government Relations Director, Regional Team Lead

American Heart Association

ND/SD/NE

M 605.351.5939