

July 24, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: White House Challenge to End Hunger and Build Healthy Communities

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of our 159,000 members, we would like to commend you for elevating the national discourse about food insecurity and diet-related disease. Your goal of ending hunger and increasing healthy eating and physical activity in the U.S. by 2030 will help galvanize action by advocates across the country, including health professionals.

The goal of the American Dental Association is to make people healthy, and we share your vision of building healthy communities. Healthy diets are vital to preventing all manner of diseases, including obesity, hypertension, heart disease, liver disease, and of course, dental disease.

Sugar consumption in the United States is the highest in the world. From a dietary perspective, excessive sugar consumption can lead to tooth decay and periodontal disease. As a result, these conditions can affect a person's ability to consume healthy food (e.g., poor chewing, etc.), their ability to learn, their employability, and their self-esteem.

While we are disappointed that oral health was not addressed at the March 24 conference, we are pleased that the White House National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health still calls for dental schools to enhance their curricula by including didactic instruction on diet and nutrition, as well as clinical training on the latest dietary screening and nutrition counseling techniques. We are also pleased the strategy calls for dental board exams to include questions about diet and nutrition, and for further research examining the interplay between nutrition, oral disease, and comprehensive health.

As you move forward with your efforts, we urge you to further emphasize the need to reduce the rates of tooth decay and periodontal disease attributable to sugar consumption, especially for children and adolescents. No amount of sugar can be consumed without increasing the risk for tooth decay. Sugar increases the build-up of plaque, a sticky, colorless, bacterial film that weakens tooth enamel and can potentially form a cavity. This applies regardless of whether the sugar is natural or added.

We are committed to raising awareness among dental professionals about the importance of diet in maintaining health. Answering your call to action is one way to do that.

To reduce the rates of tooth decay and periodontal disease attributable to sugar consumption—and to improve overall health, especially for children and adolescents—we pledge to:

- Provide educational opportunities for dental professionals to learn more about the relationship between diet, nutrition, and oral health, and incorporate the latest dietary screening and nutrition counseling techniques into their daily practice.
- Encourage dental educators to include the latest nutrition education and dietary screening and counseling techniques into their curricula and encourage the addition of diet- and nutrition-related questions on dental board exams.<sup>1</sup>
- Boost interprofessional awareness about the relationship between diet, nutrition, and oral health.
- Promote oral health education as a component of public food assistance and nutrition education programs (e.g., WIC, SNAP, NSLP, Team Nutrition, etc.).
- Press federal research agencies to develop the body of high-quality scientific literature examining, among other things, the extent to which dental caries rates fluctuate with changes in total added sugar consumption and over what periods.

It is worth noting that every year more than 27 million people visit a dentist, but not a physician.<sup>2</sup> Every one of those encounters is an opportunity to educate patients not only about sugar consumption, but healthy diets in general. Doing so will advance our shared goal, which is to make people healthy.

We recognize that it is neither practical nor possible to remove all sugary foods from the human diet. Even milk has a measurable amount of sugar. However, it is practical and possible to encourage healthy eating habits. We stand ready to help make that happen.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Robert J. Burns at 202-789-5176 or [burnsr@ada.org](mailto:burnsr@ada.org).

Sincerely,



George R. Shepley, D.D.S.  
President



Raymond A. Cohlma, D.D.S.  
Executive Director

GRS:RAC:rjb

---

<sup>1</sup> The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) Accreditation Standards for Advanced Dental Education Programs in Pediatric Dentistry already includes requirements for instruction in diet, nutrition and sugars, and their role in oral health and disease (Standard 4-14) and patient/parent/caregiver education on oral hygiene, diet, and nutrition (Standard 4-15). For more information, visit [coda.ada.org/standards](http://coda.ada.org/standards).

<sup>2</sup> Vujcic M, Israelson H, Antoon J, et al. A profession in transition. *J Am Dent Assoc* 2014;145(2): 118–21.