

August 2, 2024

The Honorable Monica M. Bertagnolli, M.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
900 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Director Bertagnolli:

We write to you to request that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) make robust investment in nutrition research, in particular by supporting the Metabolic Clinical Research Unit (MCRU) of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

The toll of diet-related disease is nothing short of alarming. Today, one in five children and 40 percent of adults have obesity. The number of Americans with type 2 diabetes is at a record high, and the rate of type 2 diabetes among children is expected to increase by 700 percent by 2060. Diet-related chronic diseases are leading causes of death in the United States. Nutrition research is essential to identify ways to reverse declining life expectancy and rising rates of chronic disease in this country.

Recent nutrition research has shown that consuming ultra-processed foods, which make up 73 percent of the American food supply, is linked to 30 health conditions. The MCRU is the only unit at the NIH Clinical Center that can conduct inpatient randomized controlled nutrition trials, the gold standard for research. Furthermore, the MCRU conducted the landmark study that demonstrated that diets high in ultra-processed food cause weight gain independent of their nutrient composition. Despite the critical research performed by the unit, the number of inpatient rooms in the MCRU was cut by 30 percent in 2018 after the study's enrollment ended. This reduction in rooms and nutrition and nursing support staff has severely limited scientific progress on important research to determine the mechanisms by which ultra-processed foods impact Americans' health.

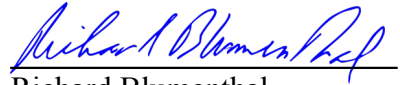
While there is a significant and growing body of research on the impact of ultra-processed foods, it is imperative for the NIH to continue to prioritize this work. In line with the 2025 US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's call for more high-quality randomized control trials on ultra-processed foods, the NIH must robustly invest in the MCRU. This should include, at a minimum, returning the MCRU to its 2017 capacity and staffing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator