



**Statement by Dorothy A. Fink, M.D.  
Acting Assistant Secretary for Health**

**Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services  
U.S. House of Representatives

**“Better Meals, Fewer Pills: Making Our Children Healthy Again”**

Washington, D.C.  
September 9, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on a matter of urgent national importance: the rising epidemic of chronic disease in America's children. Addressing chronic disease in children—including obesity, hypertension, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, mental health conditions, and cancer—is a signature priority of President Trump's Administration and Secretary Kennedy's U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

For too long, the public health and medical establishments have described conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and obesity as progressive, incurable, and lifelong conditions. Americans are bombarded with advertisements suggesting that medications alone can manage these conditions. Missing from this narrative—and central to Secretary Kennedy's vision—is the recognition that many of these conditions are preventable and potentially reversible.

Chronic diseases take a heavy toll on children, families, and our economy. Every day, the Administration is advancing efforts not only to treat but also to reverse and prevent these conditions. On February 14, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14212 establishing the President's *Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission*, which aims to end the childhood chronic disease epidemic. This past May, the MAHA Commission released its groundbreaking assessment identifying the key drivers of childhood chronic disease.

The American people should know there is hope. We can change the trajectory of these conditions through evidence-based prevention, nutrition, physical activity, and lifestyle interventions. In my clinical experience as an endocrinologist, I have had patients who believed their diseases were irreversible regain their health and vitality through such interventions. To

change the trajectory of chronic disease, HHS is putting greater attention on prevention and research into the root causes of disease.

For instance, in regard to maternal and infant health, HHS funds programs that address maternal obesity to promote healthy pregnancies and optimal birth outcomes. Promoting lifelong health and nutrition begins at birth with the goal of exclusive breastfeeding or providing breastmilk for at least the first six months. This approach provides infants with optimal nutrition and antibodies while also benefiting maternal health. Breastfeeding remains the gold standard for infant nutrition, lowering risks of infection, obesity, asthma, and diabetes. Through Operation Stork Speed, HHS is working to ensure that safe, nutritious, and wholesome formula options are available to every mother, child, and family when supplemental or exclusive formula is necessary for the babies' growth or survival.

As children grow, they are exposed to unprecedented levels of processed foods that are high in sugar and chemical additives. In combination with a lack of physical activity, each packaged meal loaded with sugar and chemicals pushes our children further toward chronic disease. The results are devastating. For instance, in 2020 an estimated 8.4 million adolescents aged 12-17 years, or 32.7% of the US adolescent population, had prediabetes.<sup>1</sup> In 2023, an estimated 36.2% of children and adolescents in the United States had excess body weight.<sup>2,3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> NHANES data; CDC. Spotlight on Diabetes Data, Prediabetes in US Adolescents. 2025.

<https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/diabetes/diabetesatlas-spotlight.html>.

<sup>2</sup> NHANES data; *QuickStats*: Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Persons Aged 2–19 Years — United States, 1999–2000 Through 2021–2023. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2024;73:936.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7341a5>.

<sup>3</sup> Fryar CD, Carroll MD, Afful J. Prevalence of overweight, obesity, and severe obesity among children and adolescents aged 2–19 years: United States, 1963–1965 through 2017–2018. NCHS Health E-Stats. 2020 [Products - Health E Stats - Prevalence of Overweight, Obesity, and Severe Obesity Among Children and Adolescents Aged 2–19 Years: United States, 1963–1965 Through 2017–2018](#).

Furthermore, American girls are reaching puberty earlier,<sup>4</sup> and boys are experiencing declining testosterone levels and reduced sperm counts compared with previous generations.<sup>5</sup> These trends may be linked to diet, obesity, and environmental exposures, and they demand immediate investigation. The long-term health of future generations depends on our ability to confront these issues with urgency and evidence-based solutions.

The good news is that these outcomes are not inevitable—in fact, they are often preventable. To counter these trends, HHS is prioritizing access to whole, nutritious food in schools and communities, updating the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to reflect gold-standard science, improving federal nutrition programs for low-income families in partnership with the Department of Agriculture. HHS is also investing in comprehensive nutrition education, ensuring that physicians and health professionals understand how food impacts health while equipping families with practical tools for healthy eating. At the same time, HHS is restoring physical activity as a central part of childhood development. By reestablishing the Presidential Fitness Test and working with schools and families to integrate daily exercise, we are giving children the tools to build strength, endurance, and lifelong habits of movement. These strategies, taken together, may offer an alternative to medications for many children.

Beyond diet and lifestyle, we face new and pressing concerns. The mental health crisis among adolescents has led to increasing use of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs, despite the FDA’s 2004 black-box warning noting an elevated risk of suicidal thoughts and

---

<sup>4</sup> Martinez GM. Trends and Patterns in Menarche in the United States: 1995 through 2013-2017. Natl Health Stat Report. 2020 Sep;(146):1-12. PMID: 33054923.

<sup>5</sup> Lokeshwar SD, Patel P, Fantus RJ, Halpern J, Chang C, Kargi AY, Ramasamy R. Decline in Serum Testosterone Levels Among Adolescent and Young Adult Men in the USA. Eur Urol Focus. 2021 Jul;7(4):886-889. doi: 10.1016/j.euf.2020.02.006. Epub 2020 Feb 18. PMID: 32081788.

behaviors in young people. While these medications may have benefits, they must be paired with careful monitoring and expanded access to non-pharmacologic interventions in adolescents that address the underlying causes of depression and anxiety.

We stand at a crossroads. The chronic disease epidemic in our children is the defining public health crisis of our time. But we can change course. By focusing on safe, wholesome food, clean water and environment, nutrition education, and physical activity, we can reverse disease, reduce dependency on medication, and restore hope to millions of families. Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Kennedy, HHS is committed to *Making America Healthy Again*. But success will require strong collaboration with Congress. Together, we can ensure that America's children are not burdened with lifelong illness but instead thrive as the healthiest generation in our nation's history.

Thank you.