

## **Ways and Means Committee hearing on chronic diseases prevention and treat**

### ***Recap provided by the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians***

September 18<sup>th</sup>, The Ways and Means Health Subcommittee held a hearing on Investing in a Healthier America: Chronic Disease Prevention and Treatment to discuss the growing challenge of chronic diseases. Witnesses included Former Senator Bill Frist, Chairman of the Executives Council, Cressey & Company, Dr. Mark Hyman, Founder Institute for Functional Health, Dr. Anne Peters, Senior Scholar, USC Schaeffer Institute, Dr. Francesca Rinaldo, Chief Clinical Innovation Officer, Senior Care Action Network (SCAN) Health Plan and Dr. Ashley Gearhardt, Professor of Psychology, Food and Addiction Science and Treatment, University of Michigan.

Witnesses testified to the fact that chronic diseases, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, are a leading cause of death and healthcare costs in the United States. Experts estimate that by 2030, the economic burden on our country could reach \$42 trillion. The emphasis of the testimony was to shift focus from treating diseases to preventing them through healthier lifestyles and food choices. The concept of "Food is Medicine" was a key focus during the hearing. Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL) voiced support for food as medicine, "Programs like 'Food is Medicine' in my district are showing that access to healthy, nutritious food can have a profound impact on managing chronic diseases. These programs should be a model for how we address health disparities in underserved communities."

Testimonies highlighted disparities in healthcare between affluent and underserved communities. For example, individuals in low-income areas face greater risks for preventable conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease due to lack of access to nutritious food and healthcare services.

Dr. Amy Gearhardt stated, "Ultra-processed foods are engineered to be irresistible, activating the reward centers in our brains. We're not just fighting an individual's choice; we're battling a food system designed to make us sick." Proposals included taxing unhealthy foods, implementing front-of-package labels, and restricting misleading advertising to children. Rep. Greg Murphy (R-NC) raised concerns about how to manage personal responsibility within government programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). He emphasized the challenge of regulating what people should and shouldn't buy, particularly in lower-income population.

Current healthcare reimbursement systems prioritize treating diseases over preventing them. "Our healthcare system understandably pays surgeons a premium for performing heart surgery or removing a leg, but doctors like me don't get paid much for preventing cardiovascular disease or an amputation. The misalignment of priorities is at the core of our chronic disease crisis." said Dr. Anne Peters. Witnesses recommended policy reforms, such as reimbursing physicians for patient outcomes and preventive care, and incentivizing lifestyle changes through programs like Medicare Advantage.

The potential of wearable technology, telehealth, and AI-driven healthcare was highlighted as a way to track health metrics.

The consensus among the committee was that solving the chronic disease epidemic requires a comprehensive approach. There was some pushback during the hearing, particularly around the balance between government intervention and personal responsibility. Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA) expressed reservations about additional regulations on the food industry, particularly since many companies are trying to respond to consumer demand.

The committee plans to hold follow-up hearings with a focus on specific recommendations, such as reforming SNAP, enhancing prevention strategies in Medicare Advantage, advancing legislation for food security, NIH research and food industry collaborations. They hope to develop bipartisan legislative packages aimed at enacting some of the proposed policy changes.

A recording of this hearing can be found here [Health Subcommittee Hearing on Investing in a Healthier America: Chronic Disease Prevention and Treatment – Ways and Means \(house.gov\)](#)