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October 16, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to support initiatives related to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to continue to provide incentives for healthful foods and disincentives for unhealthful foods, and to harmonize SNAP food offerings with those of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

The increase in chronic diseases linked to poor nutrition, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease pose a national threat. This is relevant to SNAP because low-income Americans are more likely to have nutritionally inadequate diets than higher income individuals. SNAP provides food for one in seven Americans and, in addition to alleviating hunger, can play an important role in reducing poverty, improving birth outcomes, and improving general health and well-being.

As you may know, one of the AMA's top priorities is reducing the incidence of pre-diabetes and hypertension. While we appreciate that USDA has undertaken initiatives to strengthen SNAP and increase access to healthy foods, we believe that more can be done. For example, the WIC program updated its nutrition standards and has successfully shifted to a limited selection of more healthful foods by promoting fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and whole grains while reducing saturated fat, cholesterol, and sugar. Researchers from the University of Connecticut found that making these changes appeared to have a significant impact on the entire shopping cart of WIC beneficiaries, with families buying more healthful food and improving their health as a result of the changes made to the program. We urge USDA to apply similar incentives and disincentives to SNAP as a way to improve health outcomes for program beneficiaries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD