



POSITION STATEMENT

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Food Stamp Program Should be Expanded to Include Nutritional Supplements Providing Vitamins and Minerals

Americans deserve equal access to the benefits of vitamin and mineral supplements to prevent illness and improve health

- Nutritional supplements providing vitamins and minerals are especially relevant and important to low-income individuals as a means to enhance nutrition, improve health, prevent disease, enhance quality of life, increase individual productivity, and slow the increase in our nation's rising health care costs.
- Vitamins and minerals are a supplement to—not a substitute for—a well-balanced diet. They are a safe, affordable and reliable means of filling nutrition gaps and ensuring adequate intake of a variety of nutrients.

Currently, food stamps can be used to purchase foods with little or no nutritive value, but not a multivitamin

- Food stamp recipients can use their benefits to purchase “any food or food product intended for human consumption,” regardless of nutritional value, yet USDA policy prohibits the use of food stamps to purchase vitamin and mineral supplements whose specific function is to improve nutritional status.
- The food stamp program is our country's first line of defense against hunger and malnutrition. At the end of 2003, more than 21 million low income Americans relied on the program to meet their nutritional needs. And, as stated in federal regulations, the purpose of the food stamp program is to “promote the general welfare and to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's population by raising the levels of nutrition among low-income households.” (CFR Title 7, Part 271.1)

Dietary supplements provide health benefits to millions of Americans

- Nutritional supplements can serve as an effective bridge between what Americans should eat and what they actually consume. Repeated studies have shown that the poor and elderly are more likely than others to have insufficient and nutritionally inadequate diets. In fact, studies done by the USDA show that a very high proportion of women and children in lower income households fail to consume the recommended daily allowances of vitamins and minerals.
- Vitamin and mineral supplements can help protect against heart disease and stroke and help reduce the risk of some cancers. The federal government itself encourages women of childbearing age to take folic acid to reduce the risk of birth defects. Calcium supplements have been shown to build bone mass in children and reduce bone loss in the elderly.

Food Stamp policy should facilitate the efforts of the nation's poor to obtain proper nutrition and health benefits.