

THE ENDOCANNABINOID SYSTEM BELONGS IN NUTRITION EDUCATION

THE BURDEN OF CHRONIC DISEASE IN THE UNITED STATES

Chronic diseases are the leading causes of illness, disability, and death in the United States and are the primary drivers of healthcare spending. Conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, arthritis, and other chronic inflammatory and metabolic disorders affect millions of Americans and frequently occur together.

CHRONIC & MENTAL
HEALTH CONDITIONS
ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR

90% OF THE
\$5.3 TRILLION
SPENT ANNUALLY
ON U.S. HEALTHCARE

3 IN 4
U.S. ADULTS

HAVE AT LEAST ONE
CHRONIC CONDITION

AND MORE THAN HALF
HAVE TWO OR MORE.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ACCORDING TO HHS:

DIET-RELATED
CHRONIC DISEASES
ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR NEARLY

60% AND **1 MILLION**
AMERICANS DIE EACH YEAR
FROM DIET-RELATED CHRONIC DISEASES.

HHS has identified limited nutrition education among medical professionals as a gap in the nation's capacity to prevent and manage chronic disease.

75%

OF U.S. MEDICAL
SCHOOLS HAVE
NO REQUIRED
CLINICAL NUTRITION COURSEWORK

HHS IS RESPONDING WITH A NATIONAL NUTRITION EDUCATION INITIATIVE

On March 5, 2026, HHS and the U.S. Department of Education announced Advancing Nutrition Education Across the Medical Continuum after identifying limited nutrition education among medical professionals as a gap in the nation's capacity to address chronic disease.

76
COMMITTED
INSTITUTIONS
ACROSS **36** STATES

40 HOURS
OF NUTRITION
EDUCATION
ACROSS FOUR YEARS OF
UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

MORE THAN
52,000
MEDICAL
STUDENTS
REACHED ACROSS
PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

THE PHYSIOLOGY GAP.

The Medical Education Nutrition Competency Framework developed by HHS as a voluntary tool for medical schools does not include the endocannabinoid system (ECS). The ECS helps connect nutrition with metabolism, inflammation, appetite, energy balance, stress, gut function, and chronic disease. Unfortunately, the ECS is a component of nutrition-related physiology that is absent from medical schools and most nutrition curricula, despite its relevance to metabolism, appetite regulation, lipid signaling, inflammation, and energy balance.

Most clinicians receive little or no formal education about this physiological system, in part due to ECS science's association with cannabis research. Incorporating ECS education into nutrition curricula would improve scientific literacy, capture advances in the field, and strengthen clinicians' understanding of the physiological relationships among nutrition, metabolism, and chronic disease.



