



February 27, 2025

The Honorable Members of the Oklahoma Senate
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

RE: SB 806 The Food is Medicine Act

Dear Senators:

The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) is pleased to offer strong support for SB 806, legislation that would improve access to important nutrition services for Medicaid beneficiaries and incentivize improvements in their health. This legislation would add Oklahoma to a growing list of pioneering states that are exploring new ways to achieve better health and control healthcare costs through 1115 waivers. NACDS and our member pharmacies look forward to participating in the future success of the proposed Food is Medicine Initiative in Oklahoma, and other efforts to reverse harm from chronic diseases, to achieve healthier communities across the state.

Poor nutrition is fueling worsening health across the United States and driving sharp increases in deadly and costly chronic diseases. In Oklahoma, approximately 405,800 adults, or 12.1% of the adult population, currently have diabetes, and an estimated 26,000 adults in Oklahoma are diagnosed with diabetes each year, which costs the state an estimated \$5 billion annually.¹ The Oklahoma State Department of Health reports that heart disease is the number one cause of death in Oklahoma, accounting for 1 out of every 4 deaths each year.² Nationally, four in 10 adults have obesity, and people living in rural communities tend to have some of the highest rates of obesity.³

Improving access to nutrition and related services through SB 806 would provide the state with new opportunities to better manage chronic diseases, while also incentivizing better health outcomes for Medicaid beneficiaries. Other states that have implemented nutrition-related work for Medicaid beneficiaries through 1115 waivers have observed meaningful improvements in health, lower per member per month costs, and lower hospitalizations.⁴ Research from the Food is Medicine Institute at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University indicates that Food is Medicine interventions save lives and improve health, while also helping to prevent millions of unnecessary hospitalizations and saving billions of healthcare dollars a year.⁵

The value of leveraging pharmacies in addressing chronic diseases and promoting nutrition is clear to people in Oklahoma. Polling data indicates that 78% of adults in Oklahoma support the role of pharmacists in helping people understand their nutrition, and 74% support the role of pharmacists in helping people prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.⁶ NACDS pharmacies are eager to participate in and support the future Food is

¹ American Diabetes Association. (2025, February). The burden of diabetes in Oklahoma. https://diabetes.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/adv_2024_state_fact_sheets_2_3_25_final_ok_2.pdf

² Oklahoma State Department of Health. (n.d.). *Heart disease & stroke*. <https://oklahoma.gov/health/health-education/chronic-disease-prevention/heart-disease-and-stroke.html>

³ Trust for America's Health. (2024, September 12). *State of Obesity 2024: Better Policies for a Healthier America*. <https://www.tfah.org/report-details/state-of-obesity-2024/>

⁴ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2024, May 21). *Significant cost savings realized as Healthy Opportunities Pilots reach two-year anniversary*. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/blog/2024/05/21/significant-cost-savings-realized-healthy-opportunities-pilots-reach-two-year-anniversary>

⁵ Wang, L., Lauren, B. N., Hager, K., Zhang, F. F., Wong, J. B., Kim, D. D., & Mozaffarian, D. (2023). Health and economic impacts of implementing produce prescription programs for diabetes in the United States: A microsimulation study. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 12(3).

⁶ National Association of Chain Drug Stores. (2023, October). *Adults in Oklahoma support pharmacists conducting tests and providing treatment for common illnesses*.

Medicine Initiative in Oklahoma. They are incredibly well-positioned to help implement and promote uptake of the Initiative considering their scale, reach, and trust across the state. Pharmacists are local and trusted experts in chronic disease - close to where people live, work, and grocery shop.

Pharmacies have remained committed to championing efforts to curb chronic diseases nationwide through preventive screenings, diabetes and blood pressure programs, Food is Medicine efforts, and more. Many pharmacies include food as part of their broader retail offerings, and some employ dietitians who work hand-in-hand with pharmacists to take care of their patients. In September 2023, NACDS unveiled a new campaign called "Nourish My Health," a collaboration between NACDS and a robust group of national partners aimed at helping Americans embrace the protective health benefits of nutritious food and the role of nutrition in reducing the risk of certain chronic conditions.

NACDS and our pharmacy members operating in Oklahoma greatly appreciate the leadership of Senator Pugh on this important issue. We urge for your support of SB 806 and ask the state to leverage the expertise, reach, and proximity to people in Oklahoma that pharmacies uniquely offer as key partners and allies in promoting nutrition and reducing chronic disease. For questions or further discussion, please contact NACDS' Mary Staples, Director of State Government Affairs, at mstaples@nacds.org.

Sincerely,



Steven C. Anderson, FASAE, CAE, IOM
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Chain Drug Stores

###

NACDS represents traditional drug stores, supermarkets and mass merchants with pharmacies. Chains operate over 40,000 pharmacies, and NACDS' member companies include regional chains, with a minimum of four stores, and national companies. Chains employ nearly 3 million individuals, including 155,000 pharmacists. They fill over 3 billion prescriptions yearly, and help patients use medicines correctly and safely, while offering innovative services that improve patient health and healthcare affordability. NACDS members also include more than 900 supplier partners and over 70 international members representing 21 countries. Please visit [NACDS.org](https://www.nacds.org).