

April 3, 2025

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Make America Healthy Again Commission  
The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services  
Vince Haley, Director of Domestic Policy Council  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Mr. Haley:

On behalf of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), I am writing to convey the importance of sleep to the health of the nation and goals of the Make American Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission. The AASM is the professional society for the medical subspecialty of sleep medicine, representing nearly 12,000 sleep medicine professionals and accredited sleep centers.

In creating the MAHA Commission, President Trump has made clear the importance of improving the overall health of Americans by addressing chronic disease in both adults and children. Sleep is essential to health, and it is as important as nutrition and physical activity.<sup>1,2</sup> Sleep provides natural and vital support for healthy weight and sugar control; heart, brain, and mental health; and chronic disease prevention.<sup>3</sup> Sleep is also essential for healthy growth and development in children and teens.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

Long-term insufficient sleep and untreated sleep disorders increase the risk for chronic health conditions such as heart disease and stroke,<sup>7,8,9</sup> and poor sleep health is a risk factor for developing obesity and type 2 diabetes.<sup>10</sup> Evidence also shows that sleep disturbance contributes to cognitive decline and is a risk factor for dementia and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>11,12</sup> Therefore, by prioritizing sleep health, we can address the most prevalent chronic diseases plaguing a large percentage of the U.S. population.

Sleep quality is also an important predictor of mental health and well-being.<sup>13</sup> Sleep deficiency has been linked to increased risks of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation,<sup>14</sup> and sleep impacts the ability to make sound decisions, control emotions and deal with change. This connection between sleep and mental health is especially important during adolescence, as healthy sleep supports mood regulation and brain function, improves learning and problem-solving, and leads to better decision-making.<sup>15,16</sup>

Healthy sleep is fundamental to helping children and teens succeed in school, sports, and extra-curricular activities.<sup>17</sup> The Healthy People 2030 initiative of the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion is one example of how the federal government is already emphasizing the importance of sleep for health, productivity, well-being, quality of life, and safety. Its sleep health objectives include increasing the proportion of children and high school students who get enough sleep.<sup>18</sup>

However, early middle school and high school start times contribute to chronic sleep loss during adolescence. The AASM recommends that middle school and high school start times should be 8:30 a.m. or later to support an adequate opportunity for adolescents to obtain sufficient sleep on school nights.<sup>19</sup> Yet data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that more than 80% of middle schools and high schools start before 8:30 a.m.<sup>20</sup> As a result, less than 23% of high school students get sufficient sleep on an average school night.<sup>21</sup>

Prioritizing healthy sleep will also help to address other goals of the commission. For example, the AASM recommends limiting the use of electronic devices as bedtime approaches (particularly in the hour before going to sleep) and keeping electronic devices out of a child's bedroom.<sup>22</sup> Addressing healthy sleep habits and ensuring that children and teens have an opportunity to get sufficient sleep on a regular basis will set them on the path to maintaining these habits in adulthood, helping them to be more productive, less stressed, and healthier citizens.

As the federal government prioritizes gold standard research on root causes of chronic disease in Americans, it is important to recognize the transformative potential of sleep and circadian research for improving the health of the American people,<sup>23</sup> especially implementation research translating evidence-based interventions for sleep and circadian disorders into practice strategies that benefit population health and patient outcomes.<sup>24</sup> The development of novel, personalized, preventative and therapeutic sleep strategies can reduce the prevalence and severity of multiple chronic diseases, particularly in children. For example, adolescents who sleep less than 7.7 hours per night are nearly three times more likely to have elevated blood pressure.<sup>25</sup> Sleep disorders and insufficient sleep are also associated with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other mental health conditions that are often treated with prescription selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers and stimulants. Promoting healthy sleep and treating sleep disorders has the potential to reduce dependence on these medications in children and adolescents.<sup>26</sup>

Coordination of sleep and circadian research funded by the federal government will be critical in addressing children's sleep health at a national level. The National Center on Sleep Disorders Research (NCSDR) was established by Congress through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Revitalization Act of 1993.<sup>27</sup> Located within the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and assisted by the Sleep Disorders Research Advisory Board (SDRAB), the center coordinates sleep and circadian biology research throughout NIH and other federal agencies. NCSDR plays a key role in advancing the NIH Sleep Research Plan,<sup>28</sup> ensuring that grants are awarded to high-priority research projects that will have the greatest impact on health outcomes.

In accordance with the mandate of the MAHA Commission, promotion of the importance of sleep and treatment of sleep disorders will help to combat chronic disease among both children and adults. We urge the commission to make sleep health a critical component of its strategy to improve the health of our nation.

As the leader in the sleep field, the AASM would welcome the opportunity to provide expert insight on the importance of sleep for health and well-being at any commission meetings, public hearings, or roundtables. Please contact Eric Albrecht, senior advocacy program manager, at [ealbrecht@aasm.org](mailto:ealbrecht@aasm.org) for additional information or assistance.

I thank you for your consideration of this information.

Sincerely,

Eric Olson, MD  
President

Cc:

Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Agriculture  
Scott Turner, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development  
Linda McMahon, Secretary of Education  
Doug Collins, Secretary of Veteran Affairs  
Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator  
Russ Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget  
Stephen Miller, Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy  
Kevin Hassett, National Economic Council Director  
Stephen Miran, Council of Economic Advisers Chairman  
Michael Kratsios, Office of Science and Technology Policy Director  
Sara Brenner, Food and Drug Administration Acting Commissioner

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