

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization

What's at stake for California?

Renewal of the child nutrition programs comes at a time when California families are facing tough economic times, with hardship unseen for a generation. Many new faces have joined the ranks of the perennially hungry; their health suffers and, for children, performance in school suffers, too. Many of these families must too often rely on the wrong food: cheap, full of empty calories, and short on nutrition. Empty family wallets are causing this two-part malnutrition: hunger and obesity.

- Ten million Californians, many of them children, live in households **struggling to put food on the table**.
- Food banks and other emergency food providers are swamped – they are seeing **40 percent more needy families** than at this same time last year.
- Over 30 percent of California's 7th graders are overweight, with **higher rates in children from low-income families** than in children from affluent families.

The child nutrition programs should be the answer for many of these needs. Unfortunately, they are not... yet.

- **School lunch** serves 3 million children in California, but does not serve another 3 million – and only 7 percent of the meals meet all the nutrition standards.
- More than 2 million low-income children miss out on **school breakfast**.
- Federal nutrition standards for the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** have not been revised in decades to respond to the obesity epidemic, while nearly 20 percent of our preschoolers become obese **before** kindergarten.
- Empty calories in processed foods top many experts' lists of contributors to obesity, yet USDA commodities and most vending machines are unregulated for nutritional quality.

Reauthorization can improve these numbers.

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What should Congress do?

Key themes:

- Increase funding for the reauthorization.
- Expand participation and access.
- Link higher nutritional standards to higher meal reimbursements.
- Provide funding for technical assistance, training, and equipment to allow schools to manage and prepare fresh produce and healthy foods.

Increase Enrollment and Participation in School Nutrition Programs

- Use Medicaid as a source of direct certification.
- Modernize methods for allowing schools to serve everyone without charge.
- Provide strong incentives to provide breakfast in every school, particularly severe-need schools.
- Expand breakfast participation dramatically by offering incentives to prioritize serving breakfast after the bell using classroom breakfast and second chance breakfast models.

Increase Nutritional Quality in School Nutrition

- Provide higher reimbursement in order to implement the IOM recommendations quickly and thoroughly.
- Eliminate competitive foods. Promote water access and consumption. Require nutritional oversight of commodity processing.
- Require districts to set paid meal prices no lower than the federal and state reimbursement rate for students entitled to free meals.

Increase Nutrition Quality in Community Programs

- Align child care nutrition standards, messages, and training with the new WIC guidelines and forthcoming IOM recommendations.
- Update summer and afterschool meal patterns, nutrition requirements and training and monitoring to emphasize DGAs.

Increase Participation in Community Programs

- Ease eligibility requirements to serve children in more neighborhoods.
- Reduce recordkeeping and monitoring requirements.
- Provide funding to reimburse afterschool meals.

More detailed recommendations are available at: <http://www.cfpa.net>