

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Background

Ideally, the United States Congress reauthorizes existing child nutrition programs every five years. These child nutrition programs include the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, Special Milk Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, and Farm to School Grant Program. The last reauthorization, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, was passed in 2010. Consequently, these programs have not been updated in nearly a decade. Congress has the opportunity to strengthen and expand the reach of these child nutrition programs that provide an integrated system of nutrition support and are a critical line of defense against food insecurity for millions of America's children.

Why is Child Nutrition Reauthorization Important to Academy Members?

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, represents more than 100,000 credentialed practitioners - registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered and advanced-degree nutritionists - many of whom are providers working in the child nutrition programs. Whether it is a practitioner providing counseling services through WIC, planning menus for school lunch and breakfast, conducting research on child health, or working with local farmers, Academy members are significantly impacted by policy related to the child nutrition programs.

Main Message

Problem: The diets of most children continue to fall far short of recommendations for good health.

- Currently, more than 15 percent of households with children under the age of 18 are food insecure.¹
- At the same time, obesity rates that began rising in the 1990s have led to one in five children in the U.S. being overweight or obese.²
- Obesity is even higher in children from racial, ethnic and low-income groups that also experience high rates of nutrition-related chronic disease.³

Solution: Child Nutrition Programs

- Child nutrition programs provide an infrastructure that can be mobilized to improve children's diets and health on a nationwide scale while also improving school attendance, test scores and educational attainment.
- Services are provided through nearly 96,000 of America's public, private and parochial schools, 42,000 community food sites, 65,000 childcare centers, 103,000 home day care sites and 10,000 WIC clinic sites in community settings.⁴
- There is evidence of social and economic benefits of the child nutrition programs that extend into local communities, including improvements in the diet of other family members, healthier options in the general food marketplace, economic stimulus to communities, stable customers for American agriculture, job creation and poverty reduction.⁵

Messaging for Child Nutrition Programs

Nutrition Education and Promotion

- **Nutrition education and promotion complement policy, systems, and environmental changes to support healthy, lifelong habits.**

Nutrition education continues to be important to schools and to students, but, with competing educational priorities, the unfunded requirements of the local wellness policy, and the consistent underfunding of current national nutrition education and promotion efforts, nutrition education has not been given adequate prioritization.

The Ask: Support and provide adequate funds to ensure that strong, comprehensive and culturally appropriate nutrition education and promotion is included in the reauthorization and then provided for all child nutrition programs.

National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

- **Strong nutrition standards work! Standards improved the dietary quality of school meals.**

Since HHS changes were implemented, the school meal nutrition standards significantly increased the dietary quality of both the lunch and breakfast program offerings, while Healthy Eating Index scores for lunch and breakfast increased by 41 percent and 44 percent respectively.⁶

The Ask: As we continue to align school meal recommendations and standards with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the Academy calls on Congress to support school meal programs by providing enough funding to procure, prepare and serve healthy, quality meals and beverages while providing technical assistance, improved infrastructure, and industry engagement.

- **Healthy students are better learners.**

Evidence shows that the health of students is linked to their academic achievement, so by working together, we can ensure that young people are healthy and ready to learn.⁷

The Ask: Data shows that dietary quality of school meals is better than students' overall dietary quality.⁸ The Academy calls on Congress to support equal and equitable access to school meals for all children by expanding and strengthening provisions that support universal school meals and the Community Eligibility Provision so that all children are ready to learn.

- **Children need more time to eat.**

The Meal Cost Study from USDA suggests that food waste is still a concern for the school meal program. The CDC suggests that children need *at least* 10 minutes to eat breakfast and 20 minutes to eat lunch.

The Ask: Urge USDA and the U.S. Department of Education to develop best practices and guidance to ensure school schedules provide students adequate time to eat healthy school meals.

Summer Meal Programs

- **Children need good nutrition year-round.**

During July 2017, the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option served three million children nationally, which is approximately only 14 percent of children who participated in the National School Lunch Program during SY2016-2017 school year.

The Ask: Support innovative approaches and partnerships to expand access to summer meal programs for kids.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

- **The Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program works.**

The Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program is an evidence-based program that has proven a direct correlation between the presence of breast-feeding peer counselors and the increase in breast-feeding initiation, duration and the subsequent health benefits from breast-feeding among women and infants. Current funding supports Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Programs in only 69 percent of local WIC agencies.⁹

The Ask: Support expansion of funding for breast-feeding peer counseling services.

- **Good nutrition is important for maternal and child health outcomes.**

This reauthorization provides opportunities to improve access to the WIC program by investing in technology and expanding participant eligibility.

The Ask: Support programmatic changes that will improve maternal and child health outcomes.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

- **Children need good nutrition in childcare settings.**

Meals and snacks provided by child care centers and family day care homes participating in the food program were nutritionally superior to those provided by non-participating centers.¹⁰ The food provided by participating family care homes and childcare centers were more nutrient-dense and supplied a higher proportion of children's daily needs for most nutrients. Many children spend on average 32 hours a week in childcare.

The Ask: Support expansion to a third meal for children in Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Farm to School Grant Program

- **Farm to School Programs are a win-win. A win for the students and a win for the local economy.**

Farm to School is in high demand serving 5,254 districts and more than 40,000 schools while also investing \$789 million in local communities. This translates into more than 17,000 salad bars being offered and more than 7,000 school gardens. Lastly, over 1,000 summer and 1,500 early care sites are offering farm to school activities.¹¹

The Ask: Provide funding and support to build upon the success of and growing demand for the Farm to School Grant Program, including continued expansion to early care and education settings, summer, after school and tribal communities.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

- **The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program helps support healthy eating habits for students.**

The FFVP is funded through the Farm Bill and authorized by the Child Nutrition Act. Keeping the program criteria of fresh is particularly important given the participants in the program often lack consistent access to fresh produce. Increasing low-income children's fruit and vegetable consumption provides the greatest public health benefit and demonstrates good stewardship of public funding because without this program these children have the lowest intake of fruits and vegetables and are at the greatest risk of poor health outcomes.¹²

The Ask: Strengthen and expand the reach of the successful Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for elementary students from predominantly economically disadvantaged families to support a reduction in chronic disease through improved dietary quality and support the current criteria for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program by requiring that all fruits and vegetables provided must be fresh.

¹Economic Research Service (2018). Food Security Key Statistics and Graphs. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>. Accessed on June 4, 2019.

²<https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>. Accessed June 4, 2019.

³Consequence of Obesity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/causes.html> Accessed June 7, 2019.

⁴Congressional Research Service (2019). School Meals Programs and Other USDA Child Nutrition Programs: A Primer. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43783> Accessed June 4, 2019.

⁵IOM (Institute of Medicine). (2012). Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

⁶USDA. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_Summary-Findings.pdf. Accessed on June 8, 2019.

⁷CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf. Accessed July 2, 2019.

⁸USDA. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_Summary-Findings.pdf. Accessed on June 8, 2019.

⁹National Advisory Council on Maternal Infant and Fetal Nutrition Recommendations, 2017.

¹⁰Fox, MK, Hamilton W, Lin B (Eds.), Effects of food assistance and nutrition programs on nutrition and health: Volume 3, literature review (Food Assistance and Nutrition Research).

¹¹USDA. Farm to School Census. <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/> Accessed June 9, 2019.

¹²USDA. Final Evaluation of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/FFVP.pdf> Accessed June 9, 2019.