Child Care Nutrition

Because habits develop early, child care is a key area for improving nutrition. The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides reimbursement for meals and snacks served in child care settings.

CALIFORNIA
FOOD POLICY
ADVOCATES

Basic Information

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides federal reimbursements for meals and snacks served to children in child care facilities, after-school programs, and emergency shelters, seniors and disabled adults in day care facilities, and disabled adults in emergency shelters. CACFP is a federal entitlement program funded and regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In California the state Department of Education (CDE) administers CACFP. Because the scope and landscape of child and adult care in California is so diverse, CDE grants permission to qualified local nonprofit organizations or public entities (sponsors) to directly oversee family day care homes, adult care homes, and occasionally child care centers.

- Nearly 2 million children across California regularly attend child care, and over 33 percent of children enrolled in child care live in households with an income less than 200 percent FPL.[1]

Eligibility

CACFP operates in a range of settings, from child care facilities to emergency care centers. Below is a short summary of eligibility requirements for CACFP in different settings:

Child care centers that participate in CACFP are reimbursed for meals and snacks serving children that are from households with income below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), receive CalFresh, CalWORKS, or the Federal Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or for serving children who are homeless, foster youth, or participating in a Head Start/Even Start program. Students with household income below 185 percent FPL are eligible for reduced-price meals.

Family day care homes that participate in CACFP are reimbursed on a home-by-home basis (versus child-by-child, as is the case for centers.) Homes located in low income areas, defined as neighborhoods where 50 percent or more of children at the local elementary school receive free or reduced price meals, or family day care home providers whose incomes are at or below 185 percent FPL, are reimbursed at a higher rate. All other participating family day care homes are reimbursed at a lower rate. Current reimbursement rates in California can be found on CDE's website ([link](#)).

Public or private nonprofit emergency centers participating in CACFP may provide up to three free meals a day to residents with disabilities and children in the facility. Public or private adult day care centers serving functionally impaired adults age 60 and older can supply meals and snacks on a daily basis through CACFP. To receive free meals, adults must have incomes below 130 percent FPL, or below 185 percent FPL to receive reduced-priced meals. Additionally, adults receiving CalFresh, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or FDPIR are categorically eligible for free meals.

Benefits

- CACFP plays a critical role in ensuring that quality child care is affordable for low-income households.
- Meals and snacks served through CACFP provide nutritious foods that meet federal guidelines and help establish healthy eating habits throughout the day.
- Nutritious meals bolster participation in a variety of day care and child care facilities.

Food and Beverages in CACFP

Meals and snacks served through CACFP must meet federal meal pattern guidelines. In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act required that USDA establish a proposed rule for new CACFP meal patterns, which will be based on recommendations by the Institute Of Medicine. A final meal pattern rule is expected from USDA in the fall of 2013. Adult day care centers must serve meals that meet adult meal pattern rules. National legislation also requires that CACFP providers (excluding adult day care centers) make drinking water available to children throughout the day, including meal times.

---

[1] California Health Interview Survey data, 2005. http://www.chis.ucla.edu/