



**California Child Care Nutrition
Research Update and Policy
Convening Proceedings**



*October 27, 2017
Sacramento, CA*



Convening Goals

Reflect on results from two recently completed studies, which examined the foods and beverages served in licensed child care settings, and identify policy implications of the research.

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California Food Policy Advocates, the Nutrition Policy Institute, and the Sarah Samuels Center for Public Health Evaluation and Research

convened a group of child care experts to review and reflect on the results of two recently completed studies that examined the foods and beverages served in licensed child care settings and asked attendees to explore potential strategies for increasing access to child care with high-quality nutrition environments.

Further research, advocacy for administrative changes, and policy change were identified as strategies that should be pursued to help more young children gain access to healthy, affordable food while in child care. This document details the background and lessons learned from the convening.

BACKGROUND

Early childhood is a critical time in human development: it is during a child's earliest years that the foundation for lifelong health is formed, including nutritional habits and preferences. Many California child care settings have integrated nutritious food into their programs to support the healthy development of the children in their care. To better understand the challenges that child care settings face when trying to meet all the nutritional needs of young children, two research studies were launched:

The first study examined how child care settings are complying with the new CACFP nutrition standards prior to implementation.

In 2016, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the release of new, healthier nutrition standards for foods and beverages served through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – the first major update to the nutrition standards since the program's inception in 1968. CACFP is a federally-funded nutrition program similar to school meals: child care centers and family child care providers are reimbursed for serving specific foods to children. To inform a strong roll out of the new standards, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Healthy Eating Research funded the Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) to conduct a survey of over 600 child care facilities and The Sarah Samuels Center conducted 16 in-depth interviews with child care experts. Their findings – which examined potential challenges to increasing compliance – were shared with attendees during the convening.

The second study examined the impact and feasibility of implementing nutrition standards in licensed family child care.

California law requires licensed child care centers to follow CACFP nutrition standards even if they do not formally participate in the program. In contrast, licensed family child care homes are not expected to meet any nutrition standards for foods served, unless they participate in the CACFP. While the CACFP makes a meaningful contribution to the nutritional quality of foods served, approximately half of all family child care providers do not participate in the program. In 2012, CFPA sponsored legislation that would have required all licensed family child care homes to follow the nutrition standards of the CACFP. Despite broad support from advocates and the Legislature, Governor Brown vetoed the legislation, expressing reluctance to impose a potentially confusing mandate on a vulnerable workforce. To inform future policy efforts, the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA,) NPI, and the California Childcare Health Program at the University of California San Francisco developed a study to understand family child care home providers' capacity to implement nutrition standards. The results of the study were shared with attendees during the convening. The pilot was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, First 5 Santa Clara County, the Sunlight Giving Foundation, Price Charities, and the Moxie Foundation.

PRESENTATION RECAP



ELYSE HOMEL-VITALE, Senior Nutrition Policy

Advocate at the California Food Policy Advocates shared the policy milestones from 2008-2017 that have helped build support for and access to high quality nutrition environments in child care. The milestones included among others, the USDA's 2016 update to CACFP nutrition standards and the passage of the 2010 Healthy Beverages in Childcare Act.



LORRENE RITCHIE, Director of the Nutrition Policy

Institute presented findings from a survey of 680 child care sites. Results showed varying compliance with several of the new CACFP nutrition standards and provided insight into which of the standards will be most difficult to implement. Dr. Ritchie also shared findings suggesting California's 2010 Healthy Beverages in Childcare Act increased access to healthy beverages in child care.



SALLIE YOSHIDA, Executive Director at the Sarah

Samuels Center presented findings from 16 in-depth interviews with child care experts. Results highlighted potential challenges to implementation of the new CACFP nutrition standards and the factors most likely to influence compliance, and yielded suggestions for boosting compliance.



DANIELLE LEE, Policy Analyst at the Nutrition Policy

Institute summarized findings from a study that examined the impact of nutrition standards on the foods and beverages served in licensed family child care homes. The study resulted in statistically significant increases in average compliance with nutrition standards after providers participated in a 2-hour in-person training. The study also examined the costs and changes in provider time associated with following nutrition standards. To view a summary of the findings visit: <http://npi.ucanr.edu/files/277994.pdf>

To view a recording of the presentation please visit: <https://bluejeans.com/s/JJHRY/>

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

Following the presentations, Melissa Cannon from CFPA engaged attendees in identifying the policy implications of the research. Attendees were asked to identify challenges for increasing access to affordable, high-quality nutrition environments in child care and for successful implementation of the new CACFP nutrition standards.

Below are a few of the challenges raised during the convening:

- 1) Many child care providers are operating with tight budgets and state and federal reimbursements offer limited relief.
- 2) Many child care providers struggle to afford healthy foods to provide to the children in their care.
- 3) Reimbursement rates for participation in CACFP are too low and present a barrier to participating in the program.
- 4) Child care providers would like to receive more training and assistance in how to serve healthy foods to the children in their care.
- 5) Outside of the CACFP program, training opportunities on nutrition are sparse and existing trainings often lack variety in method delivery.
- 6) Lack of parental involvement, engagement, and buy-in is a consistent challenge for child care providers in serving healthier food in child care.
- 7) Family child care providers lack access to farm-to-child care programs and other affordable local food sourcing opportunities.
- 8) The paperwork that must be completed for the CACFP program is challenging for many child care settings.

SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED

Attendees participated in a discussion of potential solutions to address existing challenges. Below are most of the solutions identified for increasing access to affordable, high-quality nutrition environments in child care and for successful implementation of the new CACFP nutrition standards.

Increase financial support for child care.



When the state doesn't adequately invest in child care, low-income working families are hit the hardest: their children lose out on opportunities to learn and grow, including access to healthy meals and snacks through CACFP. California's state policymakers should adequately fund the subsidized child care system.

Increase CACFP reimbursement rates.



In 2012, as a deficit reduction measure, Governor Brown eliminated the state supplemental meal reimbursement for CACFP. Following its removal, thousands of children lost access to healthy meals through the program. For just a few pennies per meal, California can draw down additional federal dollars and restore access for vulnerable children.

Increase training support for child care on nutrition.



California's child care workforce represents a diverse population with varied learning needs and multiple competing work demands. In order to ensure providers, centers, and sponsors have access to effective trainings that cater to their schedules and needs, trainings should be conducted more frequently, and through a greater variety of training delivery methods. Online and other forms of remote learning may be particularly helpful for providers in rural areas and for family child care home providers.

Incorporate Nutrition into QRIS.



Quality Rating and Information Systems (QRIS) help parents and communities bring children into high quality child care programs. California's QRIS focuses on three areas: child development and readiness for school; teachers and teaching; and program and environment quality. High-quality nutrition environments are not currently reflected in our state QRIS, but should be considered as a component given the variability of nutrition quality in across California's child care settings.

Support child care settings in talking to parents about nutrition.



Child care centers and family child care providers continue to struggle to align with parents on nutrition practices and to communicate to parents about these practices. Increasing support for child care providers and centers on how to educate and support parents should be explored. Sharing dual strategies that help providers meet the requests of parents and meet the nutritional needs of children may be needed.

Address challenges in distribution and access to healthy food and beverages.



There is a growing movement to support the provision of healthy, California grown food. Unfortunately, many family child care providers are challenged in qualifying for, participating in, and affording farm-to-child care programs and other local food distribution services. Opportunities to support more direct links between child care providers and healthy, local food (and water) distributors should be explored.

Reduce overly burdensome paperwork for CACFP.



Child care settings face challenges in meeting the CACFP paperwork requirements. As the new nutrition standards are rolled out, no additional paperwork requirements should be added. The California Department of Education can support providers by proactively working with USDA and the Child Care Food Program Roundtable to implement existing flexibilities, as described in USDA's recent report to Congress: Reducing Paperwork in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (available at: https://fnsprod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cacfp/CACFP_Paperwork_Report.pdf).

Couple nutrition standards with training, financial support, and time.



Implementing high impact nutrition standards that are aligned with CACFP is feasible and supported by a variety of child care stakeholders when the standards are coupled with additional resources like ample time for implementation, adequate training, and additional financial support.

WHAT IS NEXT FOR THIS WORK

Thanks to the generous support of the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, CFPA will be able to further explore some of these policy and advocacy opportunities. We commit to staying in touch and sharing further developments for this work. To sign up for future alerts related to child care nutrition visit: www.cfpa.net.