

2014-15 Federal Priorities: Child Nutrition

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For more than 20 years, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has initiated and incubated evidence-based policies to improve the health and wellbeing of low-income Californians. CFPA has a long history of advancing policy solutions that optimize the federal nutrition programs. We recognize the potential of these programs to address the immense scope and scale of challenges associated with poor nutrition across our state. CFPA's 2014-15 Federal Priorities for Child Nutrition seek to maximize the reach and benefits of the child nutrition programs in order to effectively address the nutritional needs of California's children.

The Current State of Health and Hunger for Children in California

Hunger and Poverty Hurt our Children and Families

Over 23% of children in California live in poverty with an additional 24% living between 100% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL).¹ This means that nearly half of all children in California live in families that struggle to meet their most basic needs. Across our state, at least two million families with children are food insecure – meaning they are unable to consistently afford enough food.²

Children Suffer from Overweight, Obesity, and Poor Nutrition

Recent reports indicate that the rate of obesity among two to five year olds may be on the decline. While this trend is promising, there is more work to be done for children of all ages. Now is the time to reinforce our efforts to ensure that every child benefits from optimal health and well-being throughout the course of their lives.

- ▶ More than 1 in 3 California children, 2 to 5 years of age, are overweight or obese.³
- ▶ By the time they are 11 years old, more than 45% of children in California are overweight or obese.⁴
- ▶ Most U.S. children do not get enough fruits and vegetables. Only 7% of children eat the recommended amount of vegetables, while less than 40% of children eat enough fruit.⁵

Nutrition Programs Do Not Reach All Eligible Children

Research and common sense tell us that hungry children struggle to reach their full potential. The federal child nutrition programs could – and should – do more to address health and childhood hunger in California. Across our state, we fail to provide millions of eligible kids with these important resources:

- ▶ School lunch reaches only 70% of low-income, public school students (2.4 million kids).⁶
- ▶ More than half of the low-income kids who participate in school lunch do not benefit from school breakfast.⁷
- ▶ Only 1 in 6 low-income kids who participate in school lunch is reached by a summer meal program.⁸
- ▶ Only 1 in 3 kids in licensed child care receive meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).⁹

[1] US Census, 2013; [2] California Health Interview Survey, 2011-12; [3-4] PedNSS, 2010; [5] CDC Vital Signs, 2014; [6-9] CFPA analysis of California Department of Education data, 2012-13.

What Can Federal Leaders Do?

By working with California's Congressional delegation and the federal government, CFPA will advocate for the federal nutrition programs. The following opportunities reflect CFPA's federal policy priorities for child nutrition, which take into account the pressing needs of California's children, the anticipated effects of the proposed policy changes, and the current political climate.

Protect the Benefits of the Federal Nutrition Programs

The federal nutrition programs are critical resources for households struggling to make ends meet. The benefits from these programs help protect children from food insecurity. Protecting, at a minimum, the current reach and benefits of the child nutrition programs is of the utmost importance.

Maximize the Impact of the Federal Nutrition Programs

Bringing the federal nutrition programs to more children is an effective strategy to decrease hunger, improve nutrition, and positively impact long-term health outcomes. Economies of scale allow these programs to operate at their highest level of efficiency. Expanding access is a win-win for children, administrators, and entire communities.

- ➔ **Reach more children in need by eliminating the reduced-price category for school meals**
- ➔ **Decrease summer hunger by extending and expanding the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) for Children demonstration project**
- ➔ **Enroll more eligible children by identifying them through Medicaid Direct Certification**

Support Science-Based Nutrition Standards

For many children, especially those struggling with hunger and food insecurity, meals served at school and in child care settings are a critical resource—oftentimes the *only* nutritious meals they receive all day. The nutrition standards for the federal child nutrition programs should be grounded in science, not driven by politics.

- ➔ **Extend and strengthen the commitment to science-based nutrition standards for all federal child nutrition programs**

Increase Programs' Capacity to Support Our Children's Health

Many school districts and child care providers feel challenged to serve high-quality, fresh and nutritious foods within limited budgets. Increasing resources for the provision of healthy, high-quality meals is a wise and necessary investment in the health of our children and the viability of our nutrition programs.

- ➔ **Establish a USDA Foods entitlement for the School Breakfast Program**
- ➔ **Invest in the modernization of school food service infrastructure and equipment**
- ➔ **Modernize CACFP reimbursement by setting it at a rate that supports the service of healthy foods and by providing a reimbursement when a third meal is served**

Make Sure Meals Are Served When & Where Kids Can Eat

Students in California—and across the nation—report skipping lunch or throwing away parts of their meals because they do not have enough time to eat during the school day. Many students are not able to eat school breakfast when it is only served early in the morning before the first bell rings. Giving students enough time to eat maximizes the impact of school nutrition resources; food becomes fuel instead of trash and well-nourished students stand ready to learn.

- ➔ **Ensure students have adequate time to eat the meals served at school**
- ➔ **Incentivize effective models for serving meals through the School Breakfast Program (e.g., after-the-bell)**

Learn more about CFPA's federal advocacy efforts: <http://cfpa.net/federal-advocacy>