



## 2024 Federal Agenda

**Bold actions for the California Congressional Delegation and the Federal Administration to strengthen the safety net and protect the nutrition programs that help Californians thrive.**

We envision a California where everyone thrives and has equitable access to food, resources, and opportunity.

California has the [highest rate](#) of poverty in the nation when accounting for expenses, such as cost of living, and safety net benefits. Across our state, 23 percent of households, including over one million households with children, are affected by food insecurity. As Californians continue to struggle with food insecurity, it is crucial to address the loss of pandemic supports, the 25% increase in [food prices](#), and the projected \$73 billion state budget [deficit](#) that can severely impact critical services FY 2024-25. These hardships disproportionately [impact](#) households with low income, families with children, immigrants, and the Black and Latino [communities](#).

The California Congressional Delegation must strengthen the safety net, build on improvements tested during the pandemic, increase federal funding for the state, and protect the nutrition programs that support the well-being of all Californians.

All Californians deserve access to nutritious food and other basic needs.

Our team at Nourish California is working with the federal legislature, the Biden administration, partners, and community members to secure bold actions that tackle the alarming, persistent rates of hunger and hardship across our state.

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## Pass an equitable Farm Bill that removes barriers and boosts nutrition benefits

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or CalFresh as it's known in California, helps prevent poverty and food insecurity for nearly five million children, adults, and those 60 and older in California. The expiration of COVID-19 CalFresh/SNAP emergency allotments in March 2023 drastically cut nutrition assistance for Californians struggling to put food on the table. CalFresh households lost \$95 in benefits each month, with some participants seeing their benefits [reduced](#) from \$281 per month to only \$23. This benefits cliff and other proposed cuts to the program threaten the well-being and food security of millions of people across our state.

The 2024 Farm Bill must address Californians' true level of need by protecting and improving benefits levels and helping connect [more](#) Californians with basic food resources.

### Congress should:

- Remove the punitive, ineffective three-month CalFresh/SNAP time limit for adults without dependents seeking full-time work.
- Eliminate the work-time requirements that keep college students from accessing CalFresh to help meet their basic needs.
- Eliminate discriminatory barriers, including the five-year restriction, that prevent lawfully present immigrants from access to federal programs such as CalFresh/SNAP.
- Increase the monthly minimum CalFresh/SNAP benefit level.
- Calculate benefits based on the Low-Cost Meal Plan, not the still inadequate Thrifty Food Plan.
- Increase or eliminate the \$586 ceiling on the CalFresh/SNAP shelter deduction to realistically account for housing costs.
- Remove the unjust, lifelong restriction that prevents individuals with past drug-related felonies from participating in CalFresh/SNAP.
- Reduce [food insecurity](#) and support successful transitions by allowing individuals who are incarcerated to apply for CalFresh/SNAP within 30 days of their release.





## Invest in school meals and Summer EBT (SUN Bucks)

All children deserve to be well nourished and thrive. Every student attending a California public school K-12 can now access breakfast and lunch [free of charge](#) each school day. Our state stepped up to invest in this historic change. Congress should commit to strengthening and sustaining nutrition programs for children in school and beyond. Children need consistent, year-round access to nutritious meals. SUN Bucks is a critical, effective step toward meeting those needs. California should effectively and timely implement the permanent SUN Bucks program to ensure all eligible children have access to the benefits in 2024.

### Congress should:

- Expand and sustain the universal free meals program by increasing the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) multiplier, making Medicaid/Medi-Cal direct certification permanent, and allowing a CEP state-wide grouping program.
- Expand year-round access to nutritious, affordable food by supporting the implementation of Summer EBT through increased federal funding for state administration of the program, increased benefit amounts for children, and extending eligibility to additional families currently excluded from the program.

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## Ensure families with infants and young children have access to the nutrition they need

Infants, young children, and women have critical nutritional needs for health and development. WIC reaches nearly [one million](#) infants, young children, and women in California with nutritious foods, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) plays a vital role in supporting childcare and older adult nutrition. Yet meals and snacks remain out of reach for too many, as only [38%](#) of childcare programs participate in CACFP and [69%](#) in WIC. Changes instituted since the onset of the pandemic have increased the positive impact of WIC and childcare meals. With smart, timely changes to childcare nutrition programs, we can do more to reach our youngest learners with the food they need to thrive in early care and early learning settings.

### Congress should:

- Ensure WIC is fully funded in 2024 and beyond.
- Extend postpartum eligibility to two years and child eligibility up to age six.
- Permanent options for remote WIC enrollment and remote benefit delivery.
- Modernize WIC by allowing online ordering, shopping, and home delivery.
- Permanently increase the WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefit and incorporate a variety of nutritious foods in the WIC food package that improve participant dignity and choice, as well as cultural foods.
- Allow an additional meal for children in full-day childcare.
- Improve meal reimbursement rate for childcare home providers.
- Modernize and eliminate burdensome and outdated paperwork for childcare centers.
- Reduce the area eligibility threshold from 50% to 40% percent for family child care and create a Community Eligibility Provision pilot program for centers.
- Include young children in Summer EBT.





## Ensure infants have prompt and appropriate access to safe, affordable, and nutritious first foods

The nationwide formula [shortage](#) left California families without ready access to the nutrition they needed for their infants. The formula shortage was devastating for [families with](#) low income who rely on WIC benefits. Other emergencies and disasters, such as

wildfires, floods, earthquakes, and high heat, impact families' ability to feed their infants and young children. In order to safeguard and improve the nutrition, health, and well-being of all California children, we need effective and inclusive disaster planning and strategies for emergencies that address the unique needs of families with infants and young children, regardless of their feeding method.

Congress should:

- Guarantee families can access safe, affordable formula and safe drinking water to prepare formula with.
- Ensure parents have the necessary supplies and support from healthcare providers and the workplace to meet their breastfeeding goals.
- Improve access to donor human milk for infants who are health compromised.
- Support online purchases of formula with WIC benefits.
- Ensure that every woman who needs breastfeeding support can access it.

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## Support older adults' access to food

A growing number of older Californians, especially Black and Latino elders, have inadequate or inconsistent access to nourishing food. As the number of food-insecure older Californians grows, investments in nutrition programs must adjust to help meet the real needs and alleviate the benefits cliff and the sharp increase in food prices. The rising cost of food [hurts older adults](#) with fixed and low incomes. Only [32%](#) of eligible adults 60 and over receive CalFresh benefits in California; By removing barriers to participation in this program and increasing the minimum benefit, Congress can help reduce food insecurity in this population.

Congress should:

- Increase access and boost funding for nutrition programs that serve older adults (e.g., SNAP/CalFresh, the Older Americans Act nutrition programs, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program).
- Establish a pilot program to address hunger among older individuals and adults with disabilities.