

**NATIONAL
CACFP
ASSOCIATION**



FY25 Advocacy Agenda



Support for the Nation's Most Vulnerable

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal nutrition program through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) designed to provide “nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children, and the health and wellness of older adults and chronically impaired disabled persons.” The National CACFP Association (NCA) recognizes that eating habits are developed early in life and that the CACFP contributes to healthy lifelong eating habits not only through introducing children to nutritious foods at a young age, but also through nutrition education and physical activity. The CACFP also safeguards the health and wellness of over 4.5 million children and adults across the United States and is a vital intervention for our nation's youngest and most vulnerable populations.

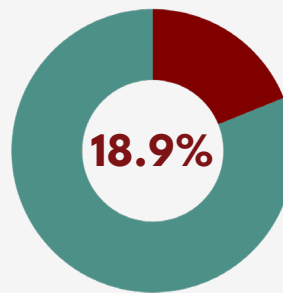


**Every child and adult in America
should be nutrition secure.**

[Research](#) shows that access to healthy meals during the first five years of life supports positive long-term health and learning outcomes.ⁱⁱ Good nutrition early in life is linked to proper cognitive, emotional, and social development, physical health, and life-long well-being. Children who have adequate nutrition during early childhood are more likely to have a healthy Body Mass Index and have a reduced risk of obesity and diet-related diseases. Nutrition in early childhood is also connected to brain development and those who receive proper nutrients are more likely to perform well in school, have better cognitive abilities, and be more skilled at problem-solving. Early childhood nutrition has also been linked to better mental health outcomes and supports the emotional well-being of children as they grow and develop.

“Sadly, most children we serve are from homes that are unable to provide them with the nutrition their growing bodies need. We serve children that, when they leave our care for the weekend, do not have a nutritious meal until they return to us the next week.”

Nutrition security starts with food security – if there is no meal on the table then there is no nutritious food for a child to eat. [In 2023](#), 13.8 million children lived in food-insecure households, about 7.2 million of those children (9.9 percent of children in the United States) lived in households where at least one child was food insecureⁱⁱⁱ, and 841,000 children (1.2 percent of children) lived in households with very low food security^{iv} among children.^v The CACFP ensures food and nutrition security for children from birth up to the age of 18. Child care programs participating in the CACFP, compared to non-participating programs, are [more likely](#) to be located in low-income, diverse neighborhoods and more frequently serve children experiencing food insecurity.^{vi} [Research](#) has found that the CACFP does lower the odds of food insecurity, poor health, and admittance to hospitals for young children.^{vii} These outcomes are a result of the service of [more nutritious foods and beverages](#) by CACFP-participating programs.^{viii}



Percent of Children in United States Living in Food-Insecure Households





39% of eligible child care centers and 33% of eligible family child care homes do not participate in the CACFP.

Declining Participation Despite Benefits

Despite its positive effect on child and adult health and well-being, [the CACFP is underutilized](#).^{ix} A report from USDA shows that there is a clear gap in participation as only 61% of eligible child care centers and 67% of eligible family child care homes participate in the CACFP.^x There are many documented barriers to participation mostly due to the administrative burden and the insufficient funding of the program. There has also been a [continuous downward trend](#) in the number of sponsoring organizations and providers participating in the CACFP and that trend has accelerated since the end of key flexibilities in June of 2023.^{xi}

Based on a [survey](#) conducted by the National CACFP Association, factors associated with the decrease in program participation include insufficient reimbursement rates, administrative burden, program difficulty, and lack of flexibility.^{xii} These factors have discouraged participation and limited the recruitment of providers to the program. A lack of program improvements has also caused the CACFP to fall behind on modernization efforts compared to other child nutrition programs, resulting in more difficult and costly operations.



Recommendations

Many program issues could be addressed through Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), yet Congress has not taken action in 15 years. To ensure the sustainability of this critical child nutrition program, the National CACFP Association calls for:



Fair and equitable funding.



A reduction of the paperwork burden.



An expansion of eligibility.



State-level action to supplement federal efforts and to address community needs.



Support of the child care infrastructure to ensure access to quality care for working families and fair compensation for providers.

A collective effort must be made by Congress, USDA, State agencies, sponsoring organizations, program operators, and partners to push forward key program improvements.

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End Notes:

- ⁱ Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, Section 17 Child and Adult Care Food Program (a)(1)(A)(ii).
- ⁱⁱ Caroline C. The impact of early childhood nutrition on long-term health outcomes. *J Child Adolescent Health*. 2023; 7(4): 161
- ⁱⁱⁱ Food insecure means the ability to acquire adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.
- ^{iv} Very low food security is defined as the more severe range of food insecurity where one or more household members experience reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns at times during the year because of limited money or other resources for food.
- ^v Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., & Burke, M.P. (2024). Household food security in the United States in 2023 (Report No. ERR-337). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- ^{vi} Schochet, O., Franckle, R., Boyle, M., Navarro, S., Childcare and Meal Provision Data Analysis Team (2024). Childcare and Meal Provision: Data Analysis Report. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
- ^{vii} Ettinger de Cuba, S., Bovell-Ammon, A., Ahmad, N., Bruce, C., Poblacion, A., Rateau, L. J., Coleman, S. M., Black, M. M., Frank, D. A., Lê-Scherban, F., Henchy, G., Ochoa, E., Sandel, M., & Cutts, D. B. (2023, June 6). Child care feeding programs associated with food security and health for young children from families with low incomes. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.
- ^{viii} Gurzo, K., Louhrine Lee, D., Ritchie, K., Yoshida, S., Homel Vitale, E., Hecht, K., Davis Ritchie, L. (2020, July). Child Care Sites Participating in the Federal Child and Adult Care Food Program Provide More Nutritious Food and Beverages. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.
- ^{ix} Andreyeva, T., Moore, T.E., da Cunha Godoy, L., Kenney, E.L. (2023). Federal Nutrition Assistance for Young Children: Underutilized and Unequally Accessed. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*.
- ^x Schochet et al. Childcare and Meal Provision.
- ^{xi} U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Financial Management, Budget Division, Program Data Branch (2024, June). Program Information Report (KEYDATA), U.S. Summary, FY 2023 – FY 2024.
- ^{xii} National CACFP Association (2024). The State of the Child and Adult Care Food Program.