

2009 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization

What's at stake for California?

This year's reauthorization comes at a time when California families are facing tough economic times, with hardship unseen for a generation. Many new faces have joined the perennially hungry ranks; their health suffers and, for children, performance in school suffers, too. Many of these families must too often rely on the wrong food – cheap, full of empty calories, and short on nutrition. Empty family wallets are causing this two-part malnutrition: hunger and obesity.

- Ten million Californians, many of them children, live in households **struggling to put food on the table**.
- Food banks and other emergency food providers are swamped – they are seeing **30 percent more needy families** than at this same time last year.
- Over 30 percent of California's 7th graders are overweight, with **twice as much obesity in children from low-income families** than in children from affluent families.

The child nutrition programs should be the answer for many of these needs. Unfortunately, they are not - yet.

- **School lunch** serves 3 million children in California, but doesn't serve another 3 million – and only 7 percent of the meals meet all the nutrition standards.
- More than 2 million low-income children miss out on **school breakfast**.
- Federal nutrition standards for the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** have not been revised in decades to respond to the obesity epidemic, while nearly 20 percent of our preschoolers become obese **before** kindergarten.
- Empty calories in processed foods top many experts' lists of contributors to obesity, yet USDA commodities are unregulated for nutritional quality.

Reauthorization can improve these numbers. Key themes for Congressional action are:

- Improve access to the programs.
- Modernize enrollment and administration.
- Improve nutritional quality.

More detailed recommendations are available at: <http://www.cfpa.net>

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What should Congress do?

- All programs need higher reimbursement.
- All programs need speedy alignment with the nutritional principles in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- The programs should be streamlined and made more accessible by combining them into two programs: school-based and community-based.

Increase Participation in School Nutrition Programs

- Use Medicaid as a source of direct certification.
- Modernize methods for allowing schools to serve everyone without charge.
- Provide strong incentives to provide breakfast in every school, particularly severe-need schools.
- Expand breakfast participation dramatically by offering incentives to prioritize serving breakfast after the bell using classroom breakfast and second chance breakfast models.

Increase Nutritional Quality in School Nutrition

- Provide strong incentives to increase servings of fresh fruit in breakfast.
- Establish a commodity entitlement credit based on breakfast participation.
- Eliminate competitive foods. Low-income children don't need and can't afford sweetened beverages and high-calorie snacks.
- Require nutritional oversight of commodity processing.
- Examine statutory requirements for calories, "variety" of milks, age-appropriate portion sizes.

Increase Nutrition Quality in Community Programs

- Align child care nutrition standards, messages, and training with the new WIC guidelines.
- Update summer and afterschool meal patterns, nutrition requirements and training and monitoring to emphasize DGAs.

Increase Participation in Community Programs

- Expand eligibility requirements to serve children in more neighborhoods.
- Reduce recordkeeping and monitoring requirements.
- Offer grants for start-up and expansion expenses.
- Expand use of direct certification and area eligibility.

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