

2016 Federal Priorities: Child Nutrition & SNAP

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The following opportunities reflect CFPA's federal policy priorities for child nutrition and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Our priorities take into account the pressing needs of millions of low-income Californians, the anticipated effects of the proposed policy changes, and the current political climate.

Child Nutrition Federal Priorities

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—possibly 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**
- ➔ **Update 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)**

SNAP Federal Priorities

Between 2007 and 2013, SNAP caseloads grew significantly in response to the recession. The Congressional Budget Office confirmed the primary reason for the increase was the deep recession and the slow recovery. There were no significant legislative expansions of eligibility during this time. SNAP responded as intended; providing low-income families with resources to avoid hunger and food insecurity during hard times. Now, as the economy improves, albeit slowly for some, caseloads have started falling and are projected to fall further. SNAP spending will subsequently decrease.

California's Congressional delegation should take action to protect, if not strengthen SNAP so that it may continue to be the nation's number one defense against hunger and food insecurity.

Preserve and Protect Benefits

It is fundamentally important that Congress take action to preserve and protect the very features of SNAP that make it the most effective tool for providing individuals and families with resources for food.

- ➔ **Oppose any action to cut SNAP benefits or limit eligibility**
- ➔ **Oppose efforts to convert SNAP into block grants to states, which would largely end SNAP's ability to respond to rising need**
- ➔ **Maintain state flexibility to use the categorical eligibility policy option**
- ➔ **Maintain state flexibility to implement a Heat and Eat program**

Mitigate Impact of 3-Month Time Limits for Childless Non-Disabled Adults

As part of 1996 welfare reform, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) were restricted to three months of SNAP benefits. Because this provision denies basic food assistance to people who want to work and will accept any job or work program slot offered, it is effectively a severe time limit rather than a work requirement. With the economy improving, waivers available during the economic downturn are now expiring, making this a crucial time for lawmakers to take action to reduce impact.

- ➔ **Increase time limit from three to six months**
- ➔ **Increase state flexibility by allowing job search to count toward the work requirement**
- ➔ **Allow states to offer exemptions to the time limit if they are unable to provide workfare**

Promote Policies that Improve Benefit Adequacy

Over time, pay for America's workers has remained stagnant while the cost of living has continued to rise. As a result, the current SNAP benefit formula does not necessarily reflect the true food purchasing abilities of low-income households.

- ➔ **Increase SNAP allotments by updating the Thrifty Food Plan to accurately reflect inflation and household food expenditures**
- ➔ **Increase SNAP allotments by shifting from the Thrifty Food Plan to Low Cost Food Plan**
- ➔ **Continue Investing in SNAP Nutrition Incentive Programs**

Increase the Purchasing Power of Low Income Households

Nationally, 31% of SNAP households have income from earnings. Increased wages will help hardworking families avoid food insecurity and reduce poverty.

- ➔ **Raise the federal minimum wage**

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