

2016 State Legislative Agenda: Achieving Equity in Nutrition and Health

For over two decades, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has incubated and advanced innovative policy solutions that increase low-income Californians' access to nutritious, affordable food. We envision a healthy and food-secure California for all residents.

Opportunity: While California's economy rebounds, many people are being left behind. Nearly one in every five Californians lives in poverty. California's child poverty rate is the worst in the nation. The drought has intensified the economic inequalities and health disparities that persist throughout our state. Social safety net programs, including the federal nutrition programs, reduce the negative impacts of poverty on health, child development, and learning.

"Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice."

-Governor Jerry Brown

Nutrition resources, such as school meals and CalFresh, are necessary to equitably address the needs of low-income California families. Efforts to direct state and federal nutrition resources where they are most needed will improve health, reduce hunger, support student success, and strengthen the state economy.

2016 Legislative Priorities

- Invest in effective, after-the-bell school breakfast programs to improve the health and academic achievement of students in California's highest-need schools.
- Ensure that a lack of safe drinking water does not increase food insecurity among low-income Californians without potable water in their homes.
- Reduce food insecurity and support healthy eating by making Summer EBT for Children a reality in California.
- Require charter schools to address the need for free and reduced-price school meals to meet the basic needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

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Budget Advocacy: Invest in After-the-Bell School Breakfast

More than three million California public school students are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price school breakfast. Unfortunately, 65 percent of these vulnerable students regularly miss out on the health and academic benefits of school breakfast, making it even harder for them to succeed.

The reach of the federal School Breakfast Program chronically falls short, largely because breakfast isn't served when kids are able to eat. Children in high-poverty schools deserve improved access to resources that are essential for health and learning. When schools serve breakfast after the first bell rings, they reach more students in need and make better use of existing federal dollars.

Action: Increase funding for school breakfast meal reimbursements and start-up grants, and optimize this investment by requiring the highest-need schools to offer breakfast after the bell.

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For more than 20 years, CFPA has been the state's trusted food policy advocacy organization dedicated to increasing low-income Californians' access to healthy food at home, at school, and throughout entire communities. CFPA's advocacy agenda draws on the anti-hunger, nutrition, and health movements. Working as both a policy leader and supportive policy ally, CFPA continues to build on its long history of success.

AB 2099 (Stone) Safe Drinking Water for Food Insecure Families

As the drought reaches its fourth year, California is entrenched in the complexities of pursuing solutions to our water crisis. In many cases, the drought has exacerbated pre-existing water quality issues that disproportionately impact Californians living in poverty. Residents in Central Valley and Sierra Foothills communities, facing both job losses and drinking water shortages, continue to go without the resources necessary to live healthy, productive lives.

Thousands of disadvantaged households are struggling with water contamination and limited access to potable water. By having to purchase potable water, low-income Californians without adequate access to safe drinking water face an additional strain on their limited food budgets. Families in poverty cannot afford to wait for long-term solutions to California's water crisis.

Action: Establish a supplemental EBT benefit for low-income Californians whose food security is threatened by lack of access to potable water.

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AB 2054 (Thurmond) Reduce Child Hunger by Bringing Summer EBT to California

In 2014, nearly two million of California's most vulnerable kids fell into the summer nutrition gap. That is, over 80 percent of the state's low-income children and youth who benefited from free or reduced-price school lunches during the academic year missed out on similar meals in the summer. What's worse, 42% of low-income California households with children are considered food insecure (unable to consistently afford enough food). Children need year-round access to nutritious meals to prevent chronic hunger and to support optimal health, learning, and development.

Summer EBT offers nutrition assistance to low-income children during the summer by providing their families with benefits to purchase groceries. Summer EBT is a well-tested, effective investment in children's health, but is not currently available in California. There is federal authority for Summer EBT demonstration projects -- and Congressional efforts are likely to expand the authority and reach of this program. California should seize all opportunities to make Summer EBT a reality in our state.

Action: Direct the State to develop the framework of a Summer EBT program in California and leverage all available federal funding and authority to operate the program.

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Consider School Meals in Charter School Design

As public schools of choice, charter schools have a commitment to serve all students, regardless of socioeconomic status. However, unlike traditional public schools, California charter schools are exempt from the state requirement to make free and reduced-price meals available to income-eligible students. School meals are critical resources that help children learn, grow, and achieve at their fullest potential, reducing health disparities and mitigating the achievement gap. Charter school petitions should address the provision of school meals, particularly free and reduced-price meals.

California has the nation's highest concentration of charters with more than 1,200 schools that collectively enroll nearly 600,000 students. Charter school growth is predicted to continue. Communities should be informed about how -- and if -- charter schools in their neighborhoods will meet the nutritional needs of their students.

Action: Require public charter petitions to address the provision of free or reduced price school meals for low-income students.

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