

Is California Ready for the New Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Pattern?

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On any given day in CA **200,000 children** receive a free or reduced price meal in child care because of CACFP.²



All **11,230 licensed child care centers** in CA are also required to follow CACFP's meal pattern.



Now, children in child care may receive **healthier meals** because the program's meal pattern has been strengthened.³

Serving healthy meals in child care is essential to support the health and development of California's youngest learners

Nearly a quarter of California's young children live in poverty, and many parents struggle to meet their basic needs, including feeding their families.¹ To build a stronger future, low-income parents need access to affordable, high-quality child care that keeps their children healthy and well-nourished while they work towards financial stability.

A new federal requirement may provide parents with greater confidence that their children have access to healthy meals

On any given day in California, 200,000 children receive a free or reduced price meal in child care because of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).² Now, young children in licensed child care centers and family child care homes that participate in CACFP are expected to receive even healthier meals, because the meal pattern has been updated for the first time in decades.³

A study was launched to assess California's readiness for the new Child and Adult Care Food Program meal pattern

Researchers at the University of California Nutrition Policy Institute, the Sarah Samuels Center, and California Food Policy Advocates evaluated compliance with the new CACFP meal pattern prior to implementation (October 2018) to identify the biggest barriers and challenges in implementing the new pattern, using:

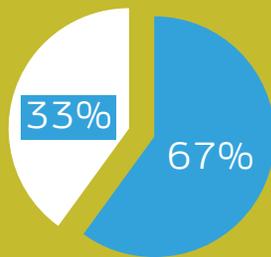


A survey of 680 randomly selected licensed family child care homes and child care centers.

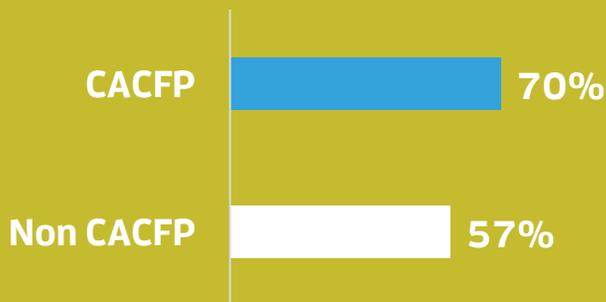


In-depth interviews and an in-person convening with child care experts.

Research Findings



Most child care settings are ready for the new meal pattern, but prior to implementation one-third of child care settings were not meeting six out of eight of the new meal pattern requirements.



Compliance with six out of eight of the new meal pattern requirements was higher among child care settings participating in CACFP.



Stakeholders reported that *"Providers with limited resources will have trouble affording certain foods."*

For more research findings visit:
<http://npi.ucanr.edu/files/282067.pdf>

Policy Recommendations

The survey, interview, and convening findings have policy relevance. Policy makers can support the nutritional needs of low-income children and their healthy development by prioritizing the following:

- 1 Enable more licensed child care centers and family child care homes to serve healthy meals by supplementing the federal reimbursement for serving breakfast and lunch through CACFP.
- 2 Better prepare the child care workforce to follow the new meal pattern by providing dedicated technical assistance and financial support to licensed child care centers and family child care homes participating in CACFP.
- 3 Explore the feasibility of requiring all licensed child care centers and family child care homes to follow the new meal pattern. Policy considerations should include providing ample time for implementation, adequate training, and sufficient financial support.
- 4 Reduce the potential for overly burdensome paperwork that can come from new program requirements by implementing USDA's *Reducing Paperwork in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* recommendations.
- 5 Increase access to online learning options that focus on creative and culturally sensitive ways to implement the new meal pattern. Provide trainings on specific areas identified as needing support: serving only yogurt low in sugar, whole grains, and grain-based desserts. Provide all licensed child care centers and family child care homes with access to the trainings, even if they don't participate in CACFP.

References:

1. State and County Nutrition Profiles. California Food Policy Advocates. Available at: <https://cfpa.net/county-profiles>
2. Early Access to Healthy Foods. California Food Policy Advocates. Available at: https://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/ChildNutrition_CFPAPublications/CFPA-CACFPTrends-2017.pdf
3. It's Finally Here! USDA Releases Final CACFP Meal Pattern. California Food Policy Advocates. Available at: <https://cfpa.net/archives/4508>

