

#FundFoodWithCare: The Impact on Children



Our child care providers watch kids leave for the weekend knowing they won't get food until they come back to child care on Monday.

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The Opportunity

For decades, California supplemented the federal reimbursement for serving healthy meals to low-income children in child care through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Similar to school meals, but targeted at our youngest learners, CACFP offers financial support to help family child care providers and child care centers feed the low-income children in their care.

Studies have long documented the link between proper nutrition and early child development. Young children need food to grow and to be healthy, but one in eight low-income families in California do not have access to enough food. For households that struggle to put food on the table, the meals offered in child care may provide a child's only guaranteed meal in a day, and are often the healthiest.

Although the CACFP plays an important role in helping low-income children reach their full potential, California cut the supplemental meal reimbursement for child care meals at the height of the recession. As a result, program participation has dwindled and many children who could benefit are not being reached. Today, only 1/2 of the state's child care providers and 1/3 of child care centers participate in the program.

The Ask



Allocate \$16.6 million for serving healthy meals to children in child care in the 2019-2020 state budget. With this funding, California can help provide over 72 million meals annually to over 200,000 low-income children.

FAQ: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is an important, but often unrecognized, component of child care. At its core, it is a federally-funded nutrition program that provides funding for serving healthy food to low-income children in child care. Similar to school meals, providers of the meal program are required to meet nutrition guidelines for the food served and are reimbursed per meal and per snack.

Why are children losing access to healthy meals in child care?

Child care providers want to do all that they can to help our youngest children, but stagnant wages and the high cost of living in California make it hard to put fresh, healthy food on the table. Since 2010, child care in California has suffered devastating cuts and the state has failed to adequately update reimbursement rates for providers who serve low-income children. Today, annual funding for child care remains low and 70% of the child care workforce earns less than \$14 or \$15 an hour.

For over 35 years, California helped providers with the high cost of serving healthy meals by offering a supplemental meal reimbursement for CACFP. But in 2012, as the state faced a major budget crisis, the funding was cut. Without support from the state, many child care providers could not keep up with the cost of providing healthy meals that met the nutrition standards of the meal program day in and day out; because of this, hundreds of family child care providers across California stopped providing meals through CACFP.

I know children in child care who get healthy meals every day, how would this funding make things any different?

There are many different forms of child care in California and some, but not all, make healthy meals available to children in need. Child care providers want to feed the children in their care, and many would prefer for that food to be healthy. However, the reality is that family child care providers have tight budgets and are often low-income themselves. Therefore, when they don't have adequate funding for food, child care providers are likely to cut back on what they provide or pull from other parts of their already limited budgets to put healthy meals on the table. [Research has found](#) that a modest state supplement to the federal reimbursement for meals served in CACFP can improve the nutrition and health of young children.

Why is this funding important?

The CACFP primarily serves low-income children, which means an investment in the program primarily benefits the children most likely to go hungry. These children are already set up at a societal disadvantage and hunger only exacerbates the issue. Students who show up to school hungry for a lack of food at home, struggle to pay attention in class and quickly fall behind their peers. Hunger can disadvantage a child early, even before they have entered grade school; therefore, it makes sense to prevent hunger while children are young and rapidly developing.