



## Child Nutrition Reauthorization

March 2020

**C**ongress has an important opportunity in 2020 to improve the health of millions of our nation's children by passing a strong reauthorization that protects and strengthens the child nutrition programs. These successful, cost-effective federal nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children in low-income families achieve access to child care, educational, and enrichment activities while improving overall nutrition, health, development, and academic achievement.

Congress must enact a child nutrition reauthorization bill that strengthens program access and supports participation by underserved children; ensures nutrition quality; and simplifies program administration and operation. The reauthorization also should protect the critical access and nutritional gains made in the last reauthorization.

### Out-of-School Time Programs

The afterschool and summer nutrition programs provide meals and snacks at schools, parks, recreation centers, nonprofit organizations, and other sites in low-income communities or that serve primarily low-income children, often combining meals with enrichment, recreational, and educational activities. Currently, only 14 low-income children receive summer lunch for every 100 low-income children who rely on school lunch during the school year. The upcoming reauthorization should prioritize increasing access to summer nutrition. The bill should make investments to do the following:

- increase the reach of and the benefits provided through the summer meal programs;
- streamline program operations to reduce unnecessary red tape;
- improve area eligibility;

- expand the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program; and
- provide the opportunity to reach children through alternative delivery models in areas with very limited access to summer meals.

### Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

CACFP provides healthy meals and snacks that support good nutrition, helps children fully develop, and prepares them to be ready to learn at school. CACFP also provides high-quality, affordable child care that supports parents' ability to work. Unfortunately, under the current system, CACFP meals and snacks are out of reach for millions of young children in child care, but the reauthorization bill has the potential to accomplish the following key things:

- expand access to CACFP by allowing the option of an additional meal service (typically a snack or supper);
- allow annual eligibility for proprietary centers;
- increase CACFP reimbursements;
- improve the area eligibility test (establishing a 40 percent standard);
- reduce paperwork;
- maximize technology to improve program access (including increasing the use of CACFP direct certification and creating community eligibility options);
- enhance program reimbursements for CACFP sponsors; and
- continue funding for USDA's CACFP nutrition education and program efforts.

## National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs

The National School Lunch Program and the National School Breakfast Program provide nutritious meals to millions of children across the country and play an important role in reducing hunger, improving nutrition, and supporting learning. Still, many eligible children do not participate in the programs, especially school breakfast which serves just over half of the low-income children who participate in school lunch. The reauthorization should take a number of steps, including what's listed below, to ensure access and strengthen the programs:

- protect eligible children's access to school meals by leveraging additional opportunities to directly certify low-income children for free school meals, such as allowing children impacted by the opioid and drug crisis to receive free school meals and increasing the number of states using Medicaid data;
- ensure that any changes to the process of verifying eligibility do not cause eligible children to lose school meal benefits and limit any increase in administrative work for schools that could negatively impact children's access to school meals;
- protect community eligibility which provides an important, efficient, and accurate path to free meals for children in high-poverty schools; and

- take steps both to ensure that the school cafeteria is a positive environment for all students, and to reduce the accumulation of unpaid school meal debt.

## The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WIC provides low-income at-risk pregnant and postpartum mothers, infants, and young children nutritious foods and nutrition education. The bill could increase access to WIC by

- extending certification periods to two years for infants and postpartum women and enrollment for children until their sixth birthday;
- supporting efforts to streamline and modernize WIC services through technology, including achieving the congressional mandate for all states to achieve WIC EBT by 2020;
- expanding WIC research in underserved communities; and
- maintaining the scientific integrity of the WIC food package process as USDA undertakes the congressionally mandated 10-year cycle revision.