



Building Public and Political Will to End Hunger in America: A Summary of FRAC's Transition Priorities

Urgent Actions Needed to Address Food Insecurity and Hunger During COVID-19

Prior to the pandemic, tens of millions of people lived in households struggling against hunger. The dual economic and health crisis being driven by COVID-19 has ushered in unprecedented levels of food insecurity and widened the pre-existing disproportionate rates among Black, Latinx, and Native American communities.

Ramping up access to the federal nutrition programs — such as SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), WIC (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), and in-school and out-of-school child nutrition programs — is an essential and smart pandemic response. These nutrition programs not only reach tens of millions of people with desperately needed nutrition, they also reduce negative health outcomes, such as obesity and other diet-related diseases that could potentially put people at greater risk of COVID-19 complications.

These immediate actions build on the down payment Congress has made to help families put food on the table and limit the depth and duration of the economic crisis:

- boosting SNAP maximum and minimum benefits;
- rescinding all SNAP rule changes that would time limit, terminate, or weaken benefits; and
- making investments in additional human needs programs to support individuals and families.

Long-Term Investments to Solve Hunger in America

There is a clear path for eliminating hunger in this country and for creating a healthier, more prosperous, and more equitable society where all people and communities are able to thrive. The federal nutrition programs are among our nation's most important, proven, and cost-effective public interventions, and they must be bolstered if our nation is to eliminate hunger. The programs alone are not enough to eliminate hunger. Ultimately, food insecurity is driven by poverty, joblessness, low wages, insufficient support for people with disabilities, inadequate public income programs, structural racism, lack of affordable housing, and other factors.

FRAC supports policies and strategies that strengthen the federal nutrition programs, address the root causes of hunger, and promote equity.

Strengthen the Federal Nutrition Programs

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's most important direct defense against hunger. This critical program improves nutrition, health, and well-being while helping families use mainstream systems of commercial food outlets that stimulate the economy. Despite all of its positive attributes, SNAP can and should do more. Key priorities are to

- increase benefit levels via an adequate food plan and other pathways; and
- make legislative and regulatory changes to improve access.

Child Nutrition Programs

The child nutrition programs are essential to ending childhood hunger and supporting children's health, learning, and development. These programs are among our nation's most important and cost-effective public interventions and should be expanded and improved to better meet children's nutritional needs.

School Nutrition Programs

- Allow schools to offer school breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students to ensure that all children have the nutrition they need to focus and learn at school. This also allows schools to focus on providing nutritious and appealing meals instead of processing paperwork and eliminates unpaid school meal fees.
- Ensure low-income children's access to free school meals, such as by expanding direct certification to Medicaid.
- Support innovative school breakfast programs, like breakfast in the classroom, which have been proven to increase the reach of this underutilized program.
- Restore the healthy school meal nutrition standards that were rolled back.

Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs

- Allow schools and community-based organizations to provide meals year-round through a single child nutrition program to support access and reduce duplicative and burdensome administrative requirements. Schools should be able to serve meals in addition to snacks after school through the National School Lunch Program; and community-based organizations should be able to feed children year-round through the Summer Food Service Program.
- Reduce the area eligibility requirement for afterschool and summer meal sites. The current threshold that requires 50 percent of children in the area to be low-income misses too many children, particularly in rural and suburban areas. The waiving of this requirement during the pandemic has been critical to ensuring low-income children continue to have access to nutritious meals in all communities, and it should continue as the economy recovers.
- Allow children to receive three meals a day through the Summer Food Service Program, instead of the two meals that can be provided at most sites.
- Expand the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program so that all states can provide benefits to low-income children who miss out on school meals when their schools close for summer vacation.
- Increasing investments in the afterschool and summer programs that provide the platform to serve meals after school and during the summer will increase the reach of these meals.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

- Streamline program requirements, reduce paperwork, and maximize technology to improve program access (including eliminating the use of enrollment forms for meal claiming, increasing the use of CACFP direct certification, and adjusting the carryover rules for fiscal year 2021).
- Provide emergency funding to CACFP sponsors and child care programs to help cover operating-cost deficits created by shutdowns and a shift in services during COVID-19.
- Allow child care centers and homes the option of serving an additional meal service (typically this would be a snack or supper), as was previously allowed.
- Allow annual rather than monthly eligibility determinations for proprietary (for-profit) child care centers.
- Reduce the CACFP area eligibility test from 50 percent to 40 percent to streamline access to healthy meals for young children in child care to reach more low-income families in rural and suburban areas.

- Create a community eligibility provision (CEP) for child care centers participating in CACFP.

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

It is time to modernize and streamline the WIC program to enhance the WIC experience and improve access to services. These actions will maintain and build upon the critical gains and lessons learned from the success of flexibilities offered during COVID-19.

- Make permanent the flexibilities allowing remote enrollment, services and benefits issuance, and the facilitation of online ordering.
- Mandate comprehensive WIC coordination and outreach on the state and local level, including required matching of Medicaid and SNAP lists to reach the many newly eligible families.
- Extend WIC certification periods to two years and enrollment for children until their sixth birthday.
- Update the WIC food package to be consistent with the 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and maintain the scientific integrity of the WIC food package process.

Older Adult Programs

Increase funding for the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs.

Address Root Causes of Hunger

As powerful and effective as the federal nutrition programs are in lifting people out of poverty, stimulating the economy, and improving nutrition, health, and well-being, the programs alone cannot end hunger. Investments to address the root causes of hunger must be made, including

- creating jobs with better wages for low-income workers;
- improving and expanding refundable tax credits for low-income families;
- protecting and improving Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and pensions for low-income older adults and people with disabilities; and
- improving other income supports, including affordable housing, health care, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and others.

Promote Equity

Successfully addressing hunger in the U.S. includes ensuring that anti-hunger priorities and strategies focus on populations struggling the most, including children, women, people with disabilities, immigrants, older adults, LGBTQ people, struggling veterans, returning citizens, people experiencing homelessness, and people residing in rural areas. Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander households have faced a long history of structural racism that has contributed to disproportionate rates of food insecurity that must be addressed head-on through equitable policies if we are to end hunger in America. Some key actions include

- centering federal nutrition work on policies and strategies that most effectively support the groups that are at the highest risk of food insecurity;
- providing immigrants nutrition program benefits and other basic needs supports;
- improving data collection protocols to capture food insecurity and nutrition program participation rates for people at disproportionate risk; and
- ensuring that the nutrition programs provide opportunities for greatest impact and justice for Native American communities.

With political will, we can end hunger in America.