

In 2022, the country started to “return to normal,” while still grappling with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of households were struggling to make ends meet and to afford the food that they and their families need. The Food Research & Action Center’s (FRAC) report on [hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (January 2021–October 2022) confirmed that food insufficiency (sometimes or often not having enough to eat) increased, and rates remained higher than at almost any other time during the pandemic (with the exception of October through December 2020). Twice as many Black and Latino households reported food insufficiency than White adults. Without the federal nutrition programs, hunger prior and during the pandemic would have been far worse. The pandemic offered critical lessons on how to effectively address hunger. Leveraging those lessons learned and ensuring that key pandemic provisions were not taken away in order to prevent a nationwide hunger cliff was a major component of FRAC’s 2022 advocacy.

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

FRAC received a [\\$20 million-dollar WIC grant](#) in October from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). WIC is a critical early intervention in preventing hunger — improving

participants’ health, dietary intake, and birth and health outcomes with nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and health care referrals for nutritionally at-risk infants, children up to 5 years old, and pregnant and postpartum individuals from households with low incomes. Through the WIC Community Innovation and Outreach Program, FRAC will partner with UnidosUS, the Native American Agriculture Fund, and the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition to support community-based organizations, WIC state and local agencies, and other nonprofits in developing and implementing outreach strategies to increase WIC participation and retention, with a focus on underserved populations. This news was on the heels of FRAC’s [WIC report](#), which found that, while more families with young children are taking part in the program, too many eligible families are still missing out.

Healthy School Meals for All

[FRAC and 32 national organizations signed a letter](#) in October urging Congress to expand community eligibility, which allows high-need schools to offer school meals to all students at no charge in the upcoming Senate version of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. When the pandemic began, schools had been able to offer free meals to all of their students after Congressional action that gave USDA the authority to issue child nutrition waivers to support access to the child nutrition programs. Although the USDA waiver

authority offering free meals to all students that expired in June was not extended for the new school year, support and [momentum](#) are building for free school meals around the country, with the Biden administration including Healthy School Meals for All in its recently announced [National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#). Additionally, according to a FRAC poll, 63 percent of voters believe that free school meals for all students nationwide should be made permanent.



We know that healthy school meals offered through the [School Breakfast](#), [National School Lunch](#), and other child nutrition programs reduce food insecurity, improve health, and help children succeed in the classroom. Free school meals for all also reduces the stigma associated with eating school meals and the shame of school meal debt for students, as well as eases the administrative burden of applications and debt collections for schools. FRAC, along with other anti-hunger advocates around the country, continue to [raise our hands](#) in support of Healthy School Meals for All.

Part of our work to secure healthy meals for all children at schools is highlighting the importance of school nutrition programs and the support schools need to run successful school nutrition operations. FRAC's [Large School District Report: Operating School Nutrition Programs During the Pandemic](#) did just that. FRAC surveyed large school districts to learn more about their school meals programs. The report focused on 62 school districts, which included a total of 9,188 schools and 5,334,085 students. These school districts noted the impact of offering free school meals to all students in the following order: reduced childhood hunger, easier for parents and children, eliminates stigma, eases administrative work, supports academic achievement, eliminates school meal debt, increases consumption of fruits, vegetables, and milk, improves student behavior, and advances racial equity.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

In 2022, FRAC worked steadfastly to bolster SNAP during COVID-19 and beyond. Temporary [boosts in SNAP benefit amounts](#) and greater access have promoted food security for millions of people, lowered poverty rates, and generated economic activity across our nation. Nonetheless, a “hunger cliff” lies ahead for millions of SNAP households when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration](#) ends, and with it, authority for the temporary SNAP improvements. On average, millions of SNAP participants will lose \$82 a person a month in SNAP benefits. FRAC's “Strengthen SNAP Agenda” would help address the hunger cliff and permanently improve SNAP benefit adequacy and equitable program access. Our agenda would raise SNAP benefits overall and eliminate the [“cap” on the SNAP shelter](#)



[deduction](#), which currently exacerbates challenges families with children face in paying for both food and housing. The “Strengthen SNAP Agenda” also would allow equitable SNAP access to more [college students](#), [unemployed and underemployed adults](#), [immigrants](#), and [residents of Puerto Rico](#), American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Together, our, and our partners’, advocacy efforts to enact these changes are gaining traction. Key [legislative proposals](#) have growing numbers of congressional cosponsors, and opinion research shows [public support](#) for many agenda items. For example, in response to a Purdue University survey in August, 82 percent of liberals, 69 percent of moderates, and nearly one in every two conservatives (48 percent) favored SNAP expansion policies.

Broadening and deepening public awareness of SNAP’s positive impacts remains an important part of the ending hunger agenda. Our new [SNAP Feeds Our Community campaign](#) aims to build that awareness in the Southern states in the near and longer terms. The campaign includes a microsite offering program information and a video where present and former program participants shared their experiences and the role of SNAP in feeding them and their families.

This work to ensure all individuals and families in all parts of the U.S. can access the food they need has made progress with the Biden administration’s issuance of a new final [public charge rule](#). The new final rule unequivocally states that applying for or receiving SNAP will not be considered when an immigrant seeks to get or renew a green card. This rule is an essential step in addressing one fear that deters eligible immigrant families from accessing benefits, and FRAC joined

partners, including Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition, to help secure and then spread the word about this important new rule.

Root Causes of Hunger

Addressing the root causes of hunger — the economic and social factors that fuel hunger such as poverty; lack of adequate wages, health care, housing, and child care; and racial inequities — is critical to ending hunger. Key to this work is leveraging the anti-hunger voice to drive policy and action that support economic security, thriving communities, and a robust safety net in times of need. That's why FRAC actively partners with coalitions and organizations addressing root cause issues, and mobilizes anti-hunger partners to bring the sector's unique and powerful perspective to efforts such as advocating for the reinstatement of the 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These expansions made a profound difference for millions of families and reduced hunger among households with children by 19 percent. With the expiration of these expansions, FRAC has ramped up work for their reinstatement. Of note, FRAC garnered more than 550 signatories from organizations working to end hunger on a [letter](#) urging Congress to reinstate the expanded CTC and EITC in any end of the year tax package.

White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

As FRAC continues to amplify the issue of hunger in the U.S., the organization is committed to meaningfully engaging with people with lived experience — providing opportunities and platforms for individuals to share their recommendations for policy change, and their own story in their own words. Affirming the need for a people-centered approach in FRAC's advocacy efforts, FRAC worked with the White House to ensure people with lived experience spoke and participated in all of the regional sessions hosted by the White House, and featured them in a [special blog series](#). Some of FRAC's key recommendations to the Biden administration, including advancing free school meals for all, modernizing and expanding the Summer EBT program, and providing access to SNAP for the formerly incarcerated and for college students, were reflected in the [national](#)



[strategy](#) released at the conference held in September. The administration's strategy also aligned with FRAC's priorities beyond the federal nutrition programs to address root causes of hunger in its commitment to work with Congress to expand the Child Tax Credit, keeping millions of children out of poverty and helping to ensure more households have the means to buy enough to eat.

Strategic Plan

Based on our experience over the past 50 years leading on policy solutions to end poverty-related hunger in the U.S., and listening to and working with our network of advocates and partners, state and local agencies, and those with lived experience, FRAC released a [Strategic Plan](#) that identifies five bold steps to a nation free from hunger:

- strengthen federal nutrition programs to ensure they provide sufficient and dignified access to nutrition to individuals living in low-income households in the U.S.;
- create a national commitment in support of just and effective anti-hunger policies;
- address the racial hunger gap by embedding equity in the Federal Nutrition Assistance Program;
- support policies and programs that reduce poverty and other root causes of hunger; and
- support our national network of advocates to guarantee program implementation at the federal, state, and local level maximizes available benefits.

FRAC's 50th Anniversary

As FRAC looks to the future, we are also taking a look back on [our last 50 years](#) — the steps it took to get us where we are today and what it will take to end hunger in America.

The organization officially turned 50 two years ago, but in early December, FRAC hosted a 50th anniversary celebration benefiting the [Campaign to End Childhood Hunger](#), and celebrated the anti-hunger advocacy community's accomplishments. We took a moment to acknowledge the momentous gains in the fight against hunger and FRAC's present and past leadership and advocacy in some of the most important initiatives, legislation, and programs, including Food Stamps (now, SNAP), WIC, and School Breakfast Program expansion in the 1970s, that, over the years, have ensured that millions do not go hungry. FRAC's top advocacy priorities at the start of 2023 will provide the necessary groundwork to build on (and improve on) the past, as well as this year's wins, and to strengthen and expand federal nutrition programs so that no one needs to go hungry. Hungry people can't wait.

Advocacy Priorities in 2023

■ Farm Bill

FRAC is promoting a "Strengthen SNAP Agenda" for enactment in the [2023 Farm Bill](#). Our agenda would [raise SNAP benefits](#) overall and eliminate the ["cap" on the SNAP shelter deduction](#), which currently exacerbates challenges families with children face in paying for both food and housing. The "Strengthen SNAP Agenda" also would allow equitable SNAP access to more [college students, unemployed and underemployed adults, immigrants, and residents of Puerto Rico](#), American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. ["Strengthen SNAP Agenda" proposals](#) have growing numbers of congressional cosponsors, and opinion research shows [public support](#) for many of the agenda items.

■ Healthy School Meals for All

Healthy School Meals for All means offering a [free breakfast and lunch to all](#) students at school, regardless of their household income. Serving school meals to all students at no cost on a permanent basis would be a game changer for students, families, and schools. This helps ensure that all students have the nutrition they need to learn and thrive; lowers the stigma associated with eating school meals; reduces administrative burdens for schools; eliminates unpaid school meal fees; and allows school nutrition staff to

focus on providing healthy and appealing meals to students instead of processing paperwork. Across the U.S., parents, teachers, students, school nutrition staff, policymakers, and many others are showing their support of Healthy School Meals for All. California, Colorado, and Maine have made Healthy School Meals for All permanent for the children in their state. Nevada, Massachusetts, and Vermont made free meals available to all students for the 2022–2023 school year. Building off of successful Healthy School Meals state campaigns in 2022, many other states have active Healthy School Meals for All campaigns in place for 2023 or are considering starting one. FRAC is working with its network of advocates around the country to build on the momentum for Healthy School Meals for All so that all children have access to nutritious meals year-round as we recover from the pandemic and beyond.

■ Summer EBT

School meals are critical to student health and learning, especially for students from households with low incomes. When schools close for summer break, millions of children lose access to school meals. Summer EBT was created to fill this gap and operate as a complement to the Summer Food Service Program, which meals support important summer programming for children in low-income communities. Summer EBT has been funded as a demonstration project and been found to reduce summer food insecurity. Pandemic EBT, modeled after the success of Summer EBT, provided benefits to children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals when schools closed in response to the pandemic. FRAC's report [Pandemic EBT: Recommendations for a Permanent Nationwide Summer EBT Program](#) showed the effectiveness of providing Pandemic EBT benefits during the summer.

[Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act \(H.R. 8450\)](#) would create a permanent nationwide Summer EBT Program. FRAC has outlined policy options that, if applied, would support the program's widespread implementation, reduce the administrative burden on states and school districts, and support better access to benefits so that Summer EBT can ease the financial burden on struggling families and keep hungry children fed during the summer months.

Join us in the fight against hunger, visit [FRAC.org](#).