

# What You Should Know About Child Nutrition Programs



Realizing that children are our most vulnerable population and are often at the mercy of their household situation, the federal government created several nutrition programs for them. These programs are designed to address child food insecurity at many intersection points, both inside and outside the school day.

## History of Child Nutrition Programs

The first national child nutrition program was the National School Lunch Program in 1946, following a series of piecemeal attempts across the country to ensure that children were adequately nourished for school. The School Breakfast Program was created 20 years later. The Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Nutrition Programs were also created in the late 1960's to attempt to address child nutritional needs during out-of-school time and in child care centers. The Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was created in 1972. Other smaller programs are the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Special Milk Program.

## How are Child Nutrition Programs authorized and funded?

Congress is scheduled to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Programs every five years in a large piece of legislation. However, this doesn't always happen on schedule. The last reauthorization of the programs was in 2010 with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. If the legislation doesn't happen on schedule, the programs still continue. However, legislation not passing represents a lost opportunity for advocates to make program improvements.

The programs are funded through Congress' annual appropriations process, and are considered mandatory funding. Funding comes from the federal government to states based on the need, also known as entitlement programs. Participating entities such as schools, child care centers, and nonprofits administer these programs at the local level and are reimbursed for each meal they serve. Children may receive free or reduced-priced meals based on their household's income. Each meal served must meet federal nutrition guidelines.

WIC is administered and funded a little differently. States receive a set amount of money each year, depending on what Congress appropriates. It is discretionary and not funded based on need.

## Why does the Food Bank care about Child Nutrition Programs?

Many of the children served by the federal child nutrition programs are low-income and come from the same families the Food Bank serves. Children from lower income households are more likely to be food insecure, so many more of them depend on these programs to help meet their daily nutritional needs. Without these programs in place, these children face the chances of greater hunger, worse health issues, lower academic performance, and more behavioral issues.

Additionally, the Food Bank administers the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program at sites around our service territory. It is important that the programs are adequately funded as well as efficiently administered so that we can reach as many eligible children as possible.

