



# Childhood Hunger in California



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The last several years have been difficult for our country and millions of children are still growing up facing hunger, especially those within historically marginalized communities. Hunger takes a profound toll on children's health, happiness, and their ability to build successful futures and break the cycle of poverty.

**In California, 1 in 7 kids faces hunger.**

**Childhood hunger is, however, a solvable problem. As an elected leader, you have the power to help and, together, we can ensure that all children get the nutrition they need to grow up healthy, educated and strong.**

With your leadership, we can:

- develop, share and implement a replicable “blueprint” for ending childhood hunger;
- enact bold strategies that provide better access to meal programs;
- promote innovative solutions to remove barriers so that children in families with low-income can access nutrition programs, and;
- advocate for critical policy changes to ensure that children in need are receiving healthy meals every day.

You and your team are on the front lines of this crisis and can transform an issue into a movement. You can use your role to raise awareness about childhood hunger, advance proven solutions and institute policies that bring about lasting changes to increase access to child nutrition programs and end childhood hunger.

We look forward to being your partner throughout this journey,



Lisa Davis  
Senior Vice President, No Kid Hungry Campaign  
Share Our Strength

## In Their Own Words



Together, we can reach more kids with the food they need to grow up healthy, educated and strong. No Kid Hungry is proud of the work we have done with **elected officials, educators, chefs and community leaders** to build public support and provide leadership around policies to end childhood hunger in the United States.



“It is unthinkable that any child in America goes to bed hungry – but the fact is, they do. Addressing hunger in our state has been a priority of this administration from day one, and while we’ve seen meaningful progress, there is more work to do. **New Mexico – and every other state in the nation – needs to fundamentally change the way our food system works to get more food to the people that need it the most, lifting children and families out of poverty in the process.**”

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM**  
GOVERNOR OF NEW MEXICO



"Hunger is often an invisible problem that requires partnerships to cast a spotlight that brings all of the right people to the table. Wyoming is committed to preventing food insecurity by increasing awareness and support for the work of local anti-hunger organizations statewide and by advocating for a future where no child faces the school day on an empty stomach. **If you want to eliminate hunger, everyone has to be involved.**"

**JENNIE GORDON**  
FIRST LADY OF WYOMING



“**No child should have to go to school hungry, let alone be expected to learn, participate in class and earn good marks on an empty stomach. Yet this has been the reality for many kids across the country.** That’s why I was proud to work with my colleagues in the Maine Legislature to make school meals available to all students, free of charge. Now, Maine kids can focus on learning to read, playing with their friends, and just being a kid – not where their next meal will come from. I hope other states will follow our lead.”

**TROY JACKSON**  
MAINE SENATE PRESIDENT (ALLAGASH)



“There’s no excuse for even one child going hungry – in San Antonio, or anywhere else for that matter. This is a solvable issue. This is a bi-partisan issue. **This is an investment in our next generation. Let us act now to prioritize the solutions we know work.**”

**RON NIRENBERG**  
MAYOR OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS  
MEMBER OF MAYORS ALLIANCE TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER

## The Problem: Childhood Hunger in California



Food insecurity looks different in every household. For some families, the pantry is completely empty. In others, parents skip dinner a few nights a week so their kids can have something to eat in the evening. No matter how food insecurity manifests, a lot is at stake for these children, families and the communities where they live. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need each day throughout the year, it's harder for them to grow up healthy, educated and strong. Consistent access to nutrition is linked to cognitive and physical development, better long-term health, higher test scores and better education outcomes.

Unfortunately, because policies and practices entrenched in our laws and society leave millions of children behind, especially in rural areas, tribal lands and among communities of color, the promise of opportunity remains unfairly out of reach for far too many children. The pandemic, the economic fallout and inflation have exacerbated these existing deep-rooted disparities, increasing the severity of a myriad health and economic crises, pushing millions more families into poverty and hunger throughout the country. **Keep in mind, 1 in 7 kids in California faces hunger.**<sup>1</sup>

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### Impact on Child Food Insecurity



14%

of children face hunger  
in California<sup>1</sup>

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# The Solution: Strengthening Nutrition Programs



Our nation's federal nutrition programs work together to connect children to the food they need. Many of these programs, however, are underutilized or can be difficult to access. Eliminating barriers and maximizing participation in these programs will help combat rising child food insecurity in California. While strengthening these programs often requires federal action, state level policy changes and innovations can play a major role. This section describes the various nutrition programs followed by an action list on how California can help these programs operate more effectively and reach more children facing economic insecurity.

## School Meals

For many children, school meals are their only source of consistent nutrition. Prior to the pandemic, children had access to school breakfast and lunch in a more predictable manner which led to calmer, more focused classrooms where students are better able to learn.

The California Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom recognized the critical need to ensure healthy meals for all California pupils and enacted the Free School Meals for All Act of 2021 so all pupils will continue to have access to free school meals, including breakfast, beginning in the 2022–23 school year. As California transitions into the new normal, school meals will continue to play an important role which is why policies like School Meals for All are so important for ensuring kids across California have the nutrition they need to succeed. Access to nutritious meals at school is essential to students' social, emotional and academic health, and ensuring adequate support for these essential programs will be critical to promoting an equitable recovery.

**3,927,173**  
The number of California students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals in 2019<sup>2</sup>

## Summer Meals

Summer is the hungriest time of year for many kids from families facing economic hardship because school breakfast and lunch are unavailable. Summer meal programs—which are operated by schools and community organizations and have traditionally provided free meals at congregate sites to children 18 and under—can help kids get the nutrition they need during these difficult months. But, transportation challenges, bureaucratic hurdles, area eligibility rules, the congregate requirement, and even extreme weather can become barriers to participation.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 is a recent step to address these challenges for rural areas, where these difficulties are often more acute. It authorizes a permanent non-congregate option for rural communities without congregate sites, including for eligible children in areas that do not meet usual area eligibility rules. It also authorized a permanent, nationwide Summer EBT program to start in 2024, which will provide all kids eligible for free or reduced-price school meals with a grocery benefit over the summer break.

These new policies will help many of the approximately **738,902** kids affected by the loss of pandemic waivers for summer meals.<sup>3</sup>

## Afterschool Meals

Too many kids don't get enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the next morning. Afterschool meals help kids get the nutrition they need once the school day ends. Having these meals reimbursed by the USDA also helps schools and community organizations save money and redirect funds into additional programming or staffing. **In FY 2019, the number of afterschool meals and snacks served in California was just 21.24% of free or reduced-price school lunches.**<sup>4</sup>

# The Solution: Addressing Hunger



## CalFresh

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California, is a powerful tool for ending childhood hunger in the United States. SNAP provides eligible households with a grocery store benefit, that allows families to purchase healthy food and ingredients. It helps decrease food insecurity, lifts kids out of poverty and is linked to better physical health and stronger academic success in children.

In California, more than **66%** of SNAP participants are in families with children<sup>5</sup>

Now, as many families struggle with inflation, the program is more important than ever. In FY 2021, SNAP reached 4,327,100 California residents.<sup>5</sup> Over the last couple of years, program flexibilities have been allowed to ensure those most in need have better access to needed food and nutrition through SNAP. These include flexibilities related to benefit application, processing and recertification, and the availability of the maximum benefit level for current program participants. SNAP is also one of the most effective ways to boost the local economy, money spent at grocery stores and markets leads to more jobs, wages and local economic activity in the community. In fact, every SNAP dollar that households spend expands the local economy by about \$1.50 to \$1.80.

## WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) assists low-income pregnant and post-partum women, infants and children up to age five with food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and health care referrals. Evidence suggests that women who participate in WIC have improved pregnancy outcomes, resulting in healthier babies and reduced medical costs.

Over the last couple of years, USDA maximized the use of existing program flexibilities and benefits including: WIC online ordering improvements and waiver authorities provided by Congress to ensure children and families who need it can participate in WIC. However, despite these benefits, many women, infants, and children are not participating in the program due to the administrative burden and barriers to access & eligibility. In addition, WIC retention has become a challenge as many women leave the program after their child turns one.

In 2019, **100%** of eligible infants and **58.5%** of eligible children (ages 1-4) were participating in WIC in California<sup>6</sup>

## Pandemic EBT

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) was initially authorized by Congress in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in March 2020. P-EBT provides grocery assistance directly to households with K-12 students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals when schools are closed, have a hybrid attendance schedule, or students experience COVID absences. The amount of assistance a family receives is equal to the value of school breakfasts, lunches, and snacks that are missed. In January 2021, children under the age of 6 who are in households that receive SNAP and live in or attend child care in an area where one or more schools or child care facilities are closed or operate with reduced attendance became eligible to receive P-EBT. P-EBT is extended for the 2022-2023 school year and during summer 2023 for eligible K-12 students and children under the age of 6 while there is a federal public health emergency declaration.

Approximately **4,800,000** children were eligible for P-EBT in summer 2022<sup>7</sup>

# The No Kid Hungry Strategy



Share Our Strength created the No Kid Hungry campaign to make sure every child in the United States gets three meals a day. As part of this mission, No Kid Hungry is focused on making sure more children have access to essential nutrition programs like school meals, summer meals, SNAP, and WIC.

Through a combination of emergency grants, strategic assistance, advocacy, and awareness, No Kid Hungry is helping kids, families, and communities get the resources they need.

## BUILD CAPACITY THROUGH TARGETED INVESTMENTS



Since 2010, the No Kid Hungry campaign **has invested millions of dollars in schools, nonprofits, and community organizations in all 50 states** - including over \$100 million in grants to 2,300+ local organizations during the worst of the pandemic. These organizations have used these investments on the essential kitchen equipment, transportation, staffing, food and materials that allowed them to serve billions of meals to children who needed them. **Most importantly since March 2020, No Kid Hungry has invested \$18,000,000 dollars for solutions that work in California.**



## CREATE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry works with corporate and philanthropic supporters like **Citi, Arby's Foundation, Warner Bros. Discovery, and Walmart Foundation** and strong local partners to build relationships with schools and community leaders to provide better access to the programs that feed kids.



## DEVELOP NONPARTISAN PARTNERSHIPS

No Kid Hungry builds **strong, bipartisan support** among elected leaders around streamlined data collection, pragmatic policy actions and collaboration to strengthen child nutrition programs.



## BRING RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

No Kid Hungry provides **expertise, best practices, collaborative planning** and **bold strategies** to maximize meal accessibility.



## MAXIMIZE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIES

No Kid Hungry ensures families facing economic hardship have information about the programs that can help them have better food access through our meal finder map, texting line and outreach campaigns. Lastly, No Kid Hungry enhances public awareness of childhood hunger, creating new momentum by celebrating champions, building support for solutions and celebrating successes.

# Deep Dive: Children facing hunger in California by County<sup>1</sup>



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Alameda	9%
Alpine	11%
Amador	11%
Butte	15%
Calaveras	16%
Colusa	18%
Contra Costa	10%
Del Norte	19%
El Dorado	9%
Fresno	19%
Glenn	14%
Humboldt	16%
Imperial	25%
Inyo	12%
Kern	18%
Kings	18%
Lake	18%
Lassen	14%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Los Angeles	16%
Madera	18%
Marin	4%
Mariposa	18%
Mendocino	17%
Merced	20%
Modoc	20%
Mono	11%
Monterey	14%
Napa	10%
Nevada	10%
Orange	9%
Placer	6%
Plumas	16%
Riverside	12%
Sacramento	14%
San Benito	10%
San Bernardino	15%



# Deep Dive: Children facing hunger in California by County<sup>1</sup>



County	Child food insecurity rate - %
San Diego	11%
San Francisco	7%
San Joaquin	16%
San Luis Obispo	10%
San Mateo	4%
Santa Barbara	12%
Santa Clara	5%
Santa Cruz	10%
Shasta	16%
Sierra	9%
Siskiyou	18%
Solano	13%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Sonoma	9%
Stanislaus	15%
Sutter	15%
Tehama	18%
Trinity	20%
Tulare	19%
Tuolumne	13%
Ventura	10%
Yolo	10%
Yuba	16%
<b>State Total</b>	<b>14%</b>

## About No Kid Hungry California

For nearly 40 years, Share Our Strength has been a nonprofit leader, creating innovative, sustainable ways to help people out of poverty. In 2010, we launched No Kid Hungry, a national campaign to end childhood hunger in America by changing the way that schools, communities and entire cities ensure hungry children have the food they need.

As many as 1,182,720 kids face hunger in California.<sup>1</sup> But this is a solvable problem. Investments in nutrition programs protect many families from hunger and helped stave off greater rates of child food insecurity. This is complicated work, but we know what strategies have been successful and today, we have the momentum and opportunity to make real progress. No Kid Hungry is working to ensure that policies and nutrition programs are adapting to meet the needs of families and that schools and communities have the funding, flexibility, guidance and strategies to support children's access to three healthy meals a day—now and in the future.



## CONTACTS

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<sup>1</sup> Gundersen, C., Strayer, M., Dewey, A., Hake, M., & Engelhard, E. (2023). [Map the Meal Gap 2023](https://map.feedingamerica.org/): An Analysis of County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2021. Feeding America, <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

<sup>2</sup> [Child Nutrition Tables](https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables) (2019), Data & Research, U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

<sup>3</sup> [Summer Hunger in the United States: The challenges and solutions for Summer 2022 Microreport](https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Summer_Meals_Waivers_Micro_Report_.pdf) (2022), No Kid Hungry, [https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Summer\\_Meals\\_Waivers\\_Micro\\_Report\\_.pdf](https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Summer_Meals_Waivers_Micro_Report_.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [Celebrating Ten Years Of Afterschool Meals: Looking Back And Looking Ahead](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Celebrating_10_Years_of_Afterschool_Meals_Full_Report.pdf) (FY 2019), No Kid Hungry, [http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Celebrating\\_10\\_Years\\_of\\_Afterschool\\_Meals\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Celebrating_10_Years_of_Afterschool_Meals_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Maryland) (FY 2021), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Maryland>

<sup>6</sup> [WIC Coverage Rates by State 2019](https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/national-state-level-estimates-eligibility-program-reach-2019) (2019), United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/national-state-level-estimates-eligibility-program-reach-2019>

<sup>7</sup> [Pandemic EBT – Summer 2022](https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt) (2022), United State Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt>