

# Childhood Hunger in South Carolina



No child should go hungry. Yet in South Carolina, **1 in 6 kids** lives in a household that struggles to put enough food on the table.

For families, this often means impossible choices — paying rent or buying groceries, filling a prescription or stocking the fridge. Having enough nutritious food every day is essential for healthy pregnancies, early brain development, physical growth and stronger educational outcomes. When families get the support they need at every stage, communities invest not only in children's immediate well-being, but in a healthier, more prosperous future for Georgia.

**Childhood hunger is a crisis, but it's one we know how to solve.** Nutrition programs give children the support they need to grow, thrive and succeed.



**1 in 6**

children face hunger in South Carolina<sup>1</sup>

In U.S. households with children

**31%**

of Black households face hunger<sup>2</sup>

In U.S. households with children

**24%**

of Latino households face hunger<sup>2</sup>

## PROVEN PROGRAMS THAT WORK

In 2023,

**86%**

of eligible infants and

**50%**

of eligible children (ages 1-4) were participating in South Carolina's WIC program<sup>3</sup>

In FY19,

**84%**

of SNAP eligible children in South Carolina were participating in the program<sup>4</sup>

**80%**

The percentage of South Carolina students participating in free and reduced-price school meals in SY23-24<sup>6</sup>

**\$114 Million**

The amount of money in federal benefits SUN Bucks could bring into South Carolina's local economy<sup>5</sup>

**633,000**

The number of South Carolina students eligible for SUN Bucks<sup>5</sup>

### WIC: Supporting Healthy Starts

The earliest opportunities to prevent childhood hunger come during pregnancy and early childhood. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) helps pregnant women, new mothers, babies and young children up to age five access healthy foods, nutrition guidance and referrals to healthcare services. It's one of the most effective tools we have for supporting healthy pregnancies and early childhood development. Making WIC easier to access means more families can benefit from it.

### SNAP: Helping Families Afford Groceries

As children grow older, keeping enough food on the table increasingly depends on a family's ability to afford groceries week after week. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides families with a monthly benefit they can use to buy food at most grocery stores, helping ensure children have consistent access to nutritious food. It's one of the most effective programs for reducing hunger, improving children's health and supporting their success in school. As federal policy changes threaten to make it harder for families to maintain SNAP benefits, strong state support for the program will be critical.

### School Meals: Feeding Kids Every Day

School breakfast and lunch programs ensure that millions of students receive the nutritious food that supports their health, learning and overall well-being, helping them thrive both in and out of the classroom. While some schools and states provide free meals to all students, many families must apply to qualify for free or reduced-price meals. These programs operate under significant pressure, including staffing shortages, supply disruptions and tight budgets, and they depend on student participation to remain strong, as schools are reimbursed by the federal government for each meal served. Supporting school nutrition professionals and helping families understand their options are critical to keeping these programs sustainable and able to meet students' needs.

### Summer Meals: Keeping Kids Nourished When School is Out

When school is out, many of the nutrition supports families use during the school year temporarily disappear, making summer one of the hungriest times of year for kids. Communities use a combination of tools to help close this gap, each serving a distinct purpose. **Traditional summer meals sites (also called congregate meals)** provide in-person meals and enrichment activities at schools, parks, libraries and community centers, while **non-congregate summer meals options such as grab-and-go meals** help reach families facing transportation, work or scheduling barriers. Most critically, **SUN Bucks** provides families with grocery benefits when school meals are unavailable, putting food purchasing power directly into their hands so they can buy foods that work for their children, schedules and cultural preferences. If South Carolina were to adopt SUN Bucks, it would be a win-win for families and the state economy, helping families afford groceries when school meals aren't available while bringing an estimated \$114 million in federal funding into local economies.

# DEEP DIVE: CHILDREN FACING HUNGER IN SOUTH CAROLINA BY COUNTY<sup>1</sup>

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Abbeville	19%
Aiken	17%
Allendale	28%
Anderson	16%
Bamberg	26%
Barnwell	33%
Beaufort	15%
Berkeley	13%
Calhoun	20%
Charleston	13%
Cherokee	22%
Chester	22%
Chesterfield	23%
Clarendon	24%
Colleton	23%
Darlington	26%
Dillon	31%
Dorchester	15%
Edgefield	17%
Fairfield	27%
Florence	21%
Georgetown	21%
Greenville	12%
Greenwood	21%

County	Child food insecurity rate - %
Hampton	27%
Horry	18%
Jasper	21%
Kershaw	16%
Lancaster	13%
Laurens	20%
Lee	32%
Lexington	13%
McCormick	29%
Marion	33%
Marlboro	30%
Newberry	20%
Oconee	17%
Orangeburg	30%
Pickens	13%
Richland	22%
Saluda	18%
Spartanburg	16%
Sumter	22%
Union	28%
Williamsburg	28%
York	10%
<b>State Total</b>	<b>17%</b>

## A HUNGER-FREE FUTURE IS POSSIBLE

Ensuring children have enough food on the table every day takes more than just programs that work on paper. It also requires that families know about them, can access them and that they work well in practice.

No Kid Hungry, a national campaign of Share Our Strength, works to strengthen access to essential nutrition programs for children and families. In South Carolina, this includes:

- Grants to schools and community organizations
- Hands-on support to improve meal programs
- Advocacy to strengthen nutrition policies
- Public awareness to help families learn about available resources

In 2025, No Kid Hungry invested more than \$383,000 in 20 South Carolina organizations connecting kids and families to the food they need. By supporting these efforts, we ensure that programs like WIC, SNAP, school meals and summer nutrition initiatives are not only available, but accessible, effective, and responsive to the needs of South Carolina families.

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- <sup>1</sup> Dewey, A., Hilvers, J., Dawes, S., Harris, V., Hake, M., and Engelhard, E. (2025). [Map the Meal Gap: A Report of Local Food Insecurity and Food Costs in the United States in 2023](#). Feeding America National Organization.
  - <sup>2</sup> Household Food Security in the United States in 2024, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, <https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/laserfiche/publications/113623/ERR-358.pdf?v=88107>
  - <sup>3</sup> National- and State-Level Estimates of WIC Eligibility and Program Reach in 2023, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-eer2023-report.pdf>
  - <sup>4</sup> Mathematica Inc. Analysis for No Kid Hungry, “State Estimates of Children’s Eligibility for and Participation in SNAP, FY2019”
  - <sup>5</sup> Canning, Patrick and Brian Stacy. [The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier, ERR-265](#), U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, July 2019.
  - <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture National Data Bank v8.2 for the month of October 2023 ([No Kid Hungry FR Enrollments Data Brief](#))

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