

Investing in Our Children
for the 21st Century
2009 Child Nutrition and
WIC Reauthorization Act



THE CALIFORNIA PERSPECTIVE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2009

California's Perspective

Programs supported through the Child Nutrition and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Reauthorization Act represent far more than school lunches and infant formula, and their presence has far greater impact than merely child nutrition. Certainly, the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Child and Adult Care Food (CACFP), and Summer Food Service (SFSP) Programs provide much needed nutrition and an essential safety net to hungry children and seniors in California and throughout the nation. In addition, the WIC Program supports our most vulnerable citizens through breastfeeding support, infant formula, and supplemental foods. Beyond these benefits, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act has the potential to:

- Support **healthy communities and prevent obesity** by making wellness a fundamental component of schools and communities.
- Improve **infant, child, and student health** by increasing offerings of healthy foods and opportunities for regular physical activity.
- **Reduce health inequities** by providing all children with equal access to fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods and healthy school environments.
- Support **student achievement** and life-long healthy behaviors, as well-fed, physically active students perform better in school and are more likely to succeed academically.



- Bring millions of additional federal dollars into California through increased program participation, providing an **economic stimulus** that increases employment opportunities, improves facilities, and supports local and regional agriculture.

Unfortunately, in California today, as many as two million children live in homes that may be experiencing food insecurity. For many of these children, school meals and snacks may be the only food they consume each day. In fact, school meal program participation increased dramatically in 2007-2008. This clearly stemmed from the downward turn in the economy and increased food and energy costs—which resulted in many more families turning to school meals as a way to stretch their household budgets and ensure that their children are fed nutritious and appealing meals. As a result, California schools served a historic 28 million more meals in 2007-2008 than they did in 2006-2007, over four times the customary annual increase. California schools are serving even more meals during 2008-2009, about ten percent more than in 2007-2008.

To enhance the nation's Child Nutrition and WIC programs, the State of California recommends a number of improvements to the 2009 Reauthorization.

Strengthen Program Management and Improve Nutrition Services

Federally funded nutrition and physical activity programs help all children, especially our most vulnerable populations, to maintain a healthy diet and enjoy regular physical activity, both of which are fundamental to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and reducing the risk of many chronic diseases. The Food and Nutrition programs, including the Child Nutrition, WIC, and the Food Stamp Programs, are most effective when they work together seamlessly at the national, state, and local levels to improve the health, nutrition, and fitness of our most vulnerable communities. To accomplish these goals, the State of California recommends that Congress and the President:

Child Nutrition

- Establish a set of strong national standards for all competitive foods and beverages sold or served outside the federal school meal programs that are based upon recommendations from the Institute of Medicine and allow the Secretary to grant exemptions for more restrictive state standards.
- Strengthen local school wellness policies (LSWP) by establishing requirements and providing funds for implementation, monitoring, compliance, evaluation, and reporting. Districts should be required to complete regular assessments of implementation progress (e.g. every three years) and widely distribute their findings along with a plan to update their LSWP.
- Authorize a School Meal Program Seamless Child Care Option pilot in California in which public schools can provide meals and snacks to students who are in a day care setting without having to participate in the CACFP.

- Require at least three (3) offerings of fruits and/or vegetables in the lunch program and two (2) at breakfast, commensurate with increasing the reimbursement rate to cover the additional costs associated with serving the extra fruits and vegetables.
- Increase funding for the Department of Defense distribution systems (DoD Fresh Program) or a comparable USDA or private sector produce delivery program to increase the delivery of fresh fruit and vegetables to schools.
- Expand the after school snack to include three (3) components, one of which is a fruit or vegetable, and increase the snack reimbursement rate to equal that of breakfast.
- Reinstatement of the Food Service Equipment Assistance program to support schools in serving more fruit and vegetables through non-food assistance grants.
- Encourage children's connection with agriculture, nutrition, and the environment by reducing barriers and providing incentives and funding for school gardens, farm to school, farmers' markets, and salad bar programs.
- Provide the School Breakfast Program with a commodity entitlement rate equal to that of the School Lunch Program.
- Re-establish the Nutrition Education and Training (NET) funding on a formula basis to support movement towards healthy school and childcare environments.
- Fund an Institute of Medicine study to simplify and standardize the School Meals Initiative.
- Modify the Food Safety Inspection requirement for school food authorities in CFR (Code of Federal Regula-



tions) 210.13(b) to require one inspection annually, with a second inspection only for those agencies having food safety compliance findings. Additionally, provide funding to either districts or local health departments to cover the cost of the required food safety inspections.

- Fully fund the implementation of the Child and Adult Care Food Program integrity requirements at both the state and local levels.
- Remove the State Administrative Expense (SAE) formula from law to allow USDA to work with states to revise the SAE allocation formula to more equitably address state differences in costs.
- Modify the Social Security Number requirement on eligibility applications to maintain the security of identifying information

WIC

- Instruct USDA to evaluate WIC's current biochemical screening requirements and their continued relevance, similar to the evaluations of WIC nutrition risks, dietary assessment and food packages conducted by USDA over the past decade, given the reduction in levels of iron-deficiency anemia and the dramatic rise in childhood obesity in the WIC population.
- Allow WIC State Agencies the option to increase the certification period from six months to one year for children age one through five years, consistent with the current option for a one-year certification period for infants and breastfeeding women, and thus allowing

local programs to focus staff resources and participant appointment time on nutrition education.

Cross-Cutting Collaboration

- Require that meals offered through federally-funded Child Nutrition programs are consistent with current dietary guidance by re-evaluating meal requirements not less frequently than every ten years, and within 18 months of the issuance of each updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- As recommended by the Institutes of Medicine, expand guidelines for all federally-funded nutrition education programs to include the implementation of evidence-based public health strategies that combine education with policy, systems, and environmental efforts.

Ensure That All Eligible Persons Have Access to Program Benefits

The State of California envisions that all children will have access to an adequate supply of healthy foods. Hunger exacts a serious toll on children, and is associated with poor health, developmental problems, and lower educational achievement. Yet, in California more than two million children struggle with hunger every day and the number is growing during these difficult economic times. Child Nutrition programs are working hard to meet the dramatic rise in participation, but are ill-equipped to address this need given that reimbursement rates and eligibility requirements do not reflect the current cost of living. The State of California recommends that Congress and the President:



According to the Department of Agriculture, in 2006, 430,000 children in the United States experienced hunger. Further, 1 in 8 Americans and 1 in 6 children live in a household that is food insecure.



Child Nutrition

- Adjust the meal reimbursement rates for all child nutrition programs to reflect the widely differing cost-of-living that exists across the country.
- Revise income eligibility requirements for all child nutrition programs to reflect the widely differing cost-of-living that exists throughout the country.
- Implement universal School Breakfast Programs in low-income schools to support student health and academic achievement.
- Eliminate the reduced-price category from the School Nutrition Program (SNP) and provide free meals to all children with family incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- Expand the national Summer Food Service After School Snack Pilot (SFSASSP) from California to other states.
- Expand the At-Risk Supper pilot to California.
- Use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamp) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) categorical eligibility to qualify all school-aged children in families for free meals, not just individual students.
- Allow categorical eligibility (and direct certification) for children on Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (up to 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level), and amend Medicaid law to allow identifying information to be shared for this purpose.
- Allow area eligibility certification for public and non-

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profit centers that participate in the CACFP, similar to that allowed in the Child and Adult Care Food At-Risk Snack Program and Summer Food Service Program.

- Eliminate the current tiered system in CACFP reimbursements in order to encourage greater participation by family daycare homes.
- Establish a pilot in California that would evaluate methods of funding administrative costs for day care home sponsors that might serve as an alternative to funding based on the number of homes administered by the sponsor.

WIC

- Increase annual funding for WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Programs.

Cross-Cutting Collaboration

- Revise all Child Nutrition and WIC program eligibility rules to exclude special combat pay as income for military families when determining income eligibility.
- Remove categorical barriers that impede cross-program coordination and collaboration, preventing programs from providing education and outreach assistance to potential participants of other nutrition assistance programs for which they are eligible.

Advance Technology and Innovation

Government management information systems (MIS) are decaying across the nation and, in many states, limiting the ability of Child Nutrition and WIC programs to provide cost effective services to program participants. Advances in technology offer numerous opportunities to streamline program operations while strengthening program accountability and integrity. However, states lack sufficient funding to maintain current systems, let alone implement innovative technology improvements. Adequate MIS funding will:

- Improve access to timely and accurate fiscal data for management of program resources.
- Provide timely payments to schools, child care providers, and retail food vendors.
- Improve program access to our nation's most vulnerable populations.

Funds allocated to MIS must remain earmarked for MIS to avoid costly development and implementation costs. Unless unrestricted, targeted funds are designated, current systems will continue to deteriorate and become outdated while replacement costs will continue to rise. To advance technology and innovation in the Child Nutrition and WIC programs, the State of California recommends:

WIC

- Provide sufficient funding for both one-time costs and on-going operating costs for any mandate or strategic goal to implement a WIC food delivery system via electronic benefit transfer (EBT).
- Provide adequate funding to update health outcomes research and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the WIC program.

Cross-Cutting Collaboration

- Provide sufficient funding for MIS development and on-going maintenance costs.
- Conduct a study that assesses the economic stimulus impact of food and nutrition programs, specifically the WIC Program and school meal programs.

Expanding food stamps is the most effective way to prime the economy's pump. Increasing food stamp payments by \$1 boosts GDP by \$1.73. According to UC researchers, WIC and School Meal Programs create similar stimulus results. People who receive these benefits will spend any financial aid they receive within a few weeks.



Analyzing the Nation's Investment in Food and Nutrition Programs

Economic Stimulus, Cost of Living Variances, Obama Administration Pledges

Though health may not initially come to mind as part of a stimulus package, health and the economy are interrelated. In fact, health expenditures are a key engine of the economy. Approximately 1 in 6 dollars of the Gross Domestic Product is spent on health care, and the percentage is rising. Health is a cornerstone of a thriving and productive nation and rebuilding the economy requires a healthy workforce. By investing in community-level prevention the U.S. can actually save money, a vital goal in the current fiscal situation (Source: Policy Institute, Trust for America's Health, The California Endowment, Prevention Institute [October 2008], Prevention for a Healthier California: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities).



Did you know . . .

- In October 2008, the Obama campaign released the platform, *Obama and Biden: Tackling Domestic Hunger*, which committed to ending childhood hunger in the U.S. by 2015. The plan called for further improvements in school meals access, summer food and other child nutrition programs, SNAP/Food Stamps, and nutrition support for seniors. Strengthening the federal nutrition programs is essential not only to President Obama's proposed anti-hunger effort, but also to many of his other domestic priorities.
- The School Nutrition Association (SNA) found that the estimated average cost to prepare a school meal for the 2008-2009 school year is \$2.90. The current federal reimbursement for school meals is \$2.57, \$0.33 less than the average cost to prepare a meal. (Source: SNA's Heats On: School Meals Under Financial Pressure)
- After reviewing 17 cost benefit studies, the U.S. General Accounting Office found that WIC saved \$3.50 in health care costs for every \$1 spent. They conservatively estimated an overall annual savings of \$51 million in federal and state health care funds if WIC served all eligible pregnant women. For example, it costs \$544 a year for a pregnant woman to participate in WIC. By contrast, it costs the tax payers \$22,000 per pound to nurture a low birth weight baby (less than 5.5 pounds) to the normal weight of 7 pounds in a neonatal intensive care unit. (Source: Prevention Institute: *Toward a Healthy America: Prevention as Part of the Stimulus*).

Cost of Living Variances in Major US Cities

CITY	PERCENT NATIONAL AVERAGE
Baton Rouge	104.1
Cheyenne	107.7
Chicago	128.6
Cleveland	102.7
Eugene	109.5
Honolulu	162.4
Juneau	131.6
Las Vegas	109.8
Los Angeles	153.1
New York	212.1
Philadelphia	119.0
San Diego	141.0
San Francisco	177.0
Seattle	118.6

Source: Cost of Living Index for Selected U.S. Cities, 2005;
<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0883960.html>

