

CHILD HUNGER AND NUTRITION

1 in 9

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES WHO LIVED IN HOUSEHOLDS WHERE CHILDREN WERE FOOD INSECURE.

With record numbers of poor children and families struggling to recover from the recession, federal nutrition programs are a critical support to ensure children's daily nutritional needs are met. Children's physical health and brain development depend on their being well fed, particularly in the earliest years of life. Hunger and malnutrition have devastating consequences for children. Children continue to suffer from hunger in the country with the largest GDP:

- In 2012, more than 1 in 9 children lived in households where children were food insecure, meaning they lacked consistent access to adequate food.¹ While slightly lower than in 2011, food insecurity among children remained 23 percent higher than before the recession.
- More than 1 in 5 children in the United States — 15.9 million — lived in households where either children or adults or both were food insecure (*see Table E-1*).
- Black and Hispanic households with children were more than twice as likely as White households to have food insecure children, but White households comprised the largest group of households (43 percent) with food insecure children.¹
- In 2010 and 2011, three-quarters of households with food-insecure children had one or more working adult, 80 percent of whom worked full-time.²

Poor and food-insecure children are especially vulnerable to obesity due to the many risk factors associated with poverty, including limited access to healthy and affordable foods and opportunities for physical activity. States with higher child food insecurity in 2011 had higher rates of overweight and obese children (*see Table E-1*).

Federal nutrition programs work: they put food on children's plates, help build healthy minds and bodies, and help lift families out of poverty. A recent study found that needy children who received food assistance before the age of 5 were in better health as adults. Girls who received food assistance were more likely to complete more schooling, earn more money, and not rely on safety net programs as adults.³ These programs are particularly crucial for younger children, as they are more likely to already be in poor health, experience developmental delays, and be food insecure when their families' food benefits are reduced or terminated.⁴ According to the most recent data, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) continue to be key supports for poor families:

- Nearly three-quarters of SNAP households are families with children.⁵
- In FY2012, SNAP provided benefits to over 46 million Americans on average every month, including more than 22 million children — more than 1 in 4 children in America.⁶
- Due to the jobless recovery, SNAP participation in FY2012 remained 77 percent higher than in FY2007.
- SNAP food assistance lifted 2.2 million children out of poverty in 2012.⁷
- In FY2012, WIC provided supplemental food to nearly 9 million low-income pregnant women, infants, and children under age 4 during a critical period of brain development.⁸ Nationally one-third of children under age 5 benefited from WIC in FY2012 (*See Table E-2*).

There were some times where, you know, we wouldn't have that much food, and I would tell my mom, 'I'm not hungry, don't worry about it,' and I lost a lot of weight. I remember I used to be a size five, and I went from a size five to a size zero.

So, you know, I try not to eat too much. I try to eat in school. They give me free lunch in school.

— Jane, age 17

The school and summer feeding programs, which provide meals to children in school and during the summer, play a vital role in ensuring children are fed and able to succeed in the classroom. In one study, children who were food insecure in kindergarten saw a 13 percent drop in their reading and math test scores by third grade compared to their food-secure peers.⁹

- In FY2012, more than 21 million children received free or reduced-price lunch through the National School Lunch Program and nearly 11 million children received free and reduced price breakfast (*See Table E-3*).
- Only 1 in 10 of the children who received free or reduced-price lunch during the school year was enrolled in the Summer Food Service Program, despite the fact that there is no summer vacation for hunger (*See Table E-3*).

Find state data in Child Hunger and Nutrition tables in Appendix.

SNAP lifted 2.2 million children out of poverty in 2012.



For every 6 poor children, there is another child who isn't poor thanks to SNAP.

Source: CDF calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau 2012 Supplemental Poverty Measure.