

2022 Nutrition and Dietetics Advocacy Summit

Why are Child Nutrition Priorities Important to Academy Members?

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, represents more than 112,000 registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition and dietetics technicians, and advanced-degree nutritionists - many of whom are providers working in the child nutrition programs. Whether it is a practitioner providing counseling services through WIC, planning menus for school lunch and breakfast, conducting research on child health, or working with local farmers, Academy members are significantly impacted by policy related to the child nutrition programs.

Main Message

Problem: The diets of most children continue to fall far short of recommendations for good health.

- 13 million children are estimated to experience food insecurity in 2021.¹
- At the same time, obesity rates that began rising in the 1990s have led to one in five children in the U.S. having overweight or obesity.²
- Children from racial, ethnic and low-income groups disproportionately experience high rates of food insecurity and nutrition-related chronic disease.³
- The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected people with diet-related chronic disease, which are more prevalent in communities of color. Communities of color have historically faced chronic disease health disparities due to systemic inequalities that have manifested in reduced access to health care, healthy food and safe places to be active. It is more important now than ever to invest in the establishment of healthy eating habits throughout the life cycle.
- Nutrition education continues to be important to schools and to students, but, with competing educational priorities, the unfunded requirements of the local wellness policy, and the consistent underfunding of current national nutrition education and promotion efforts, nutrition education has not been given adequate prioritization.

Solution: Expand access to and support for healthy meals for children

- Strong nutrition standards work. Since HHFKA changes were implemented, the school meal nutrition standards significantly increased the dietary quality of both the lunch and breakfast program offerings, while Healthy Eating Index scores for lunch and breakfast increased by 41% and 44% respectively.⁴
- Schools are the healthiest place in the U.S. to eat, according to a recent Tufts study. After analyzing 16 years of American diets, researchers found that meals eaten at schools had higher dietary value than meals eaten anywhere else.
- School meals have proven crucial in alleviating childhood food insecurity amid the pandemic, in no small part because of waivers allowing schools to serve meals free of charge to all students regardless of their income level. In addition to being a key support in alleviating childhood food insecurity among Black students, school meals can also help reduce racial disparities in health and education. School meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance and behavior.

¹ https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf

² <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>. Accessed June 4, 2019.

³ IOM (Institute of Medicine). (2012). Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

⁴ Congressional Research Service (2019). School Meals Programs and Other USDA Child Nutrition Programs: A Primer. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43783> Accessed June 4, 2019.

- Farm to School Programs are a win-win. A win for the students and a win for the local economy. Increasing low-income children's fruit and vegetable consumption provides the greatest public health benefit and demonstrates good stewardship of public funding because without this program these children have the lowest intake of fruits and vegetables and are at the greatest risk of poor health outcomes.
- WIC works! A study from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation examined the impact the change in the WIC food package had on a child's diet and found that not only was there a significant decrease in overall obesity rates for children age zero to four, but there also was an increase in breastfeeding rates, which lead to healthier mothers and babies. WIC establishes life-long health benefits.

The Ask

- 1. Support equal and equitable access to healthy meals year-round for all children by expanding the Community Eligible Program and Summer EBT Program.**
- 2. Support school meal programs by providing funding for technical assistance, improved infrastructure and nutrition education.**
- 3. Strengthen and expand the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Program.**