

Food insecurity affects approximately **360,210** of Georgia's children under the age of 18.¹ When given access to adequate nutrition, the impact is clear: children are healthier and perform better in school.² On the other hand, children who are not provided with adequate, healthy food often perform poorly in school, are more likely to experience mental health problems, and are at greater risks for health issues later in life.³

The federal government funds seven food and nutrition programs which support children and adults within academic settings, afterschool programs, care facilities, and at home. Such programs have proven to support child health and development, all while addressing long-standing inequities (e.g., food insecurity, disparate chronic health outcomes).^{4, 5}

What Should Children and Youth Be Eating?

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025* is published by the United States Department of Agriculture. The guidelines provide advice on what to eat and drink to meet nutrient needs, promote health, and prevent chronic disease, and are broken down by life stage:^{12*}

| AGES | VEGETABLE (CUP/DAY) | FRUIT (CUP/DAY) | GRAINS (CUP/DAY) | PROTEIN (CUP/DAY) | DAIRY (CUP/DAY) |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 2 to 8 years old | 1 to 2.5 | 1 to 2 | 3 to 6 | 2 to 5.5 | 2 to 2.5 |
| 9 to 13 years old | 1 to 2.5 | 1.5 to 2 | 5 to 9 | 4 to 6.5 | 3 |
| 14 to 18 years old | 2.5 to 4 | 1.5 to 2.5 | 6 to 10 | 5 to 7 | 3 |

*Servings vary on each child and their individual caloric intake.

Nutritious Foods Support



Immune system responses⁶



Eyesight⁷



Cognitive Development⁸



Bone health⁹

Nutritious Foods Protect Against¹³



Dental cavities



Heart disease



Chronic illness
(e.g., type 2 diabetes,
obesity)



Iron deficiency

Benefits of Nutrition Education^{10, 11}



Nurturing eating habits and behaviors



Empowering individuals by increasing nutrition and health knowledge



Supporting individuals in informed decision-making about food and beverage consumption

Nutritious Food for Households

Two federally-funded feeding programs provide food purchasing benefits as well as nutrition education to participating households.

| PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT CHILD NUTRITION | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Program and Participant Eligibility Criteria | Food Benefits | Health & Nutrition Resources | Enrollment in Georgia |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) <i>Georgia</i> ¹⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resident of the state of Georgia <i>Non-citizen Individuals</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lived in the United States for at least 5 years, or Receives disability-related assistance or benefits, or Children under 18 <i>Income</i> ¹⁵ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lives at or below 130% of federal poverty income guidelines, depending on household status and deduction calculations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly benefits to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and frozen, canned, and shelf stable items¹⁶ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutrition education¹⁷ | 301,000 households with children ¹⁸ |
| Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) <i>Women, Infants, and Children</i> ¹⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women Infants and children up to age five <i>Income</i> ²⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living at or below 185% of the federal poverty income guidelines Participating in another assistance program may make an applicant automatically income-eligible for WIC (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid) <i>Nutrition Risk</i> ²¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants must be determined to be at "nutrition risk" by a health professional or a trained health official | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutritionally balanced food packages²² WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers²³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breastfeeding supports²⁴ Healthcare referrals²⁵ Nutrition education²⁶ Immunization screenings²⁷ | 202,200 total participants ²⁸ This accounts for roughly 49% of those who are eligible for WIC |

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT SNAP AND WIC

State Only:

- Strategically engage community organizations and benefit enrollment staff to understand and eliminate barriers to SNAP and WIC
- Ensure state agencies are fully leveraging data to ease enrollment for all eligible households (e.g., Adjunctive Eligibility - using Medicaid or SNAP data to facilitate WIC enrollment)
- Explore and enact opportunities to leverage virtual tools to support physicians in WIC program operations (e.g., electronic prescription, referral systems, electronic health data contracts)
- Explore an extension of the WIC FMNP farmers' market season

State and Federal:

- Increase culturally and linguistically inclusive resources within SNAP and WIC

Federal Only:

- Leverage technology to increase access to, utilization of, the WIC FMNP for farmers and WIC participants (e.g, remote trainings, electronic WIC FMNP benefits)
- Increase culturally inclusive foods within WIC food packages

Nutritious Food for Early Education, School, & Afterschool

Five federally-funded feeding programs provide nutritionally balanced meals and snacks to children within early care and education programs, schools, and afterschool programs. Eligibility for participation is based on income, from 130% of the federal poverty line (free) to 185% of the federal poverty line (reduced priced).

| PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT HEALTHY AND ADEQUATE CHILD NUTRITION | |
|--|--|
| Program and Description | Enrollment in Georgia |
| Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Reimburses for nutritious meals. Child care programs, afterschool care programs, child care homes, emergency shelters, and adult care centers can be CACFP eligible. ³⁸ | 108,420 average daily attendance ³⁷ |
| National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Provides nutritionally balanced, free or reduced-cost (based on a sliding scale) free lunches to children in public and nonprofit private schools, and residential child care institutions. ³⁶ | 694,147 total participation ³⁵ |
| School Breakfast Program (SBP) Provides cash subsidies to public or non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions to provide meals that meet federal nutrition requirements. Meals are provided to eligible children for free or at a reduced cost. ³⁴ | 481,991 total participation ³³ |
| Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Provides the same meal service that is available during the regular school year to hungry kids in the community during the summer. This program is provided through either the NSLP or SBP. ³² | 112,495 average daily participation ³¹ |
| Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Reimburses for healthy meals and snacks served to children from low-income areas during summer months when school is not in session. ³⁰ | 56,900 average daily attendance ²⁹ |
| <i>Pandemic-related USDA waivers, which provide increase program flexibility and reduce barriers, may be a factor in the decreased participation compared to previous years (e.g., required applications, universal meals)</i> | |

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

State Only:

- Ensure state agencies are fully leveraging data to ease enrollment for eligible students (e.g., Direct Certification - using Medicaid data to facilitate NSLP enrollment)
- Leverage available data to strategically recruit CACFP-eligible programs (e.g., low-income, low food access areas)

State and Federal:

- Provide funding for transportation grants to fund innovative approaches and mobile meal trucks to increase summer meal access
- Promote local food procurement by connecting food systems to child care programs and simplifying procurement processes for CACFP operators

Federal Only:

- Increase food access by changing the area eligibility requirement from 50 percent to 40 percent of the children eligible for free or reduced-price meals
- Streamline CACFP program requirements, reduce paperwork, and maximize technology to improve program access (e.g., streamline CACFP and SFSP applications, virtual monitoring)
- Allow all CACFP participant programs to be reimbursed for an additional meal (typically a snack or supper), as was previously allowed
- Increase nutritious food access for family child care homes and afterschool programs by allowing them to receive a higher reimbursement rate (regardless of location)

Sources for Federal Child Food Programs

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