

POLICY AT A GLANCE:

Child Nutrition



The American Heart Association's Position

National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs (NSLP and SBP)

- Protect and strengthen evidence-based school nutrition standards to ensure the health and wellbeing for all children and the success of the programs.
- Strengthen the sodium standards in the school nutrition standards to align with the most current version of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and 2019 sodium Dietary Reference Intake.
- Make Healthy School Meals for All (HSMFA) permanent.
- Increase investments in kitchen equipment and infrastructure that can help schools serve healthier meals.
- Increase training and technical assistance funding.
- Increase investments in Farm-to-School programs.
- Increase the commodities allowance for school breakfast.
- Report on the technical assistance being provided to schools for sodium reduction.
- Release information on implementation of the sodium and added sugars standards.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- Address a crucial gap in nutrition assistance for young children by extending WIC eligibility through age six.
- Permit states the option to certify infants for two years instead of one year, eliminating duplicative paperwork and encouraging families to continue to connect their children with WIC's nutrition supports.
- Extend eligibility for postpartum women to two years, building upon the program's nutrition support and efforts to improve diets.
- Support fully funding WIC in each appropriations cycle to provide benefits for current and projected eligible participants.
- Protect the integrity of WIC's evidence-based food packages.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

- Continue to support implementation of the updated standards/meal pattern.
- Support more technical assistance through targeted CACFP funding.
- Invest in CACFP to increase participation.
- Support critical program improvements in CACFP.

Summer Food Service Program

- Update nutrition standards to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

- Maintain the integrity of the FFVP by only allowing only fresh fruits and vegetables to be offered.

Fast Facts

1

Since schools began implementing updated nutrition standards, lunches have become more than 40% healthier and breakfasts have become 44% healthier¹

2

More than 90% of school-age children consume too much sodium, a risk factor for high blood pressure and many other health problems.² Children who eat school meals consume 26% of their sodium from cafeteria foods.³

3

Programs that provide healthy school meals for all help students learn better, improve attendance, and increase diet quality.⁴

4

WIC served about 6.6 million participants per month in 2023, including nearly 40% of infants born in the United States.⁵

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For more information and resources from the American Heart Association's policy research department, please visit www.heart.org/policyresearch

References

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture; Food and Nutrition Services. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. April 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-and-mealcost-study>. Accessed February 2025.
- ² Appel et al. (2015). Reducing Sodium Intake in Children: A Public Health Investment. *Journal of Clinical Hypertension*. 17:9; 657-662. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5034752/pdf/JCH-17-657.pdf>
- ³ Cogswell M, et al. (2014). Vital signs: sodium intake among U.S. school-aged children – 2009-2010. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 63(36):789-797. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6336a3.htm>
- ⁴ Cohen JF, Hect AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: a systematic review. *Nutrients*. 2021; 13:911. doi: 10.3390/nu13030911.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2025). WIC Program. Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/wic-program/>. Accessed February 2025.