

Cost-Savings Potential by Streamlining Federal Child Nutrition Programs in the Reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

In the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization, Congress has an opportunity to improve access to quality, nutritious meals for millions of low-income children in child care (the Child and Adult Care Food Program- CACFP), in school (breakfast, lunch, and farm-to-school programs), during out-of-school time (afterschool, on weekends and during the summer), and at home (WIC).

The successful, cost-effective U.S. federal nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children in low-income families achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, educational and enrichment activities while improving their overall health, development, and school achievement.

The Arizona Child Nutrition Coalition, comprised of 17 organizations statewide that collectively represent 65,000 children & families and served more than 165 million meals at nearly 2,700 sites last school year, is sharing our expertise and commitment on key priorities, including streamlining regulations for school and community-based providers.

As child nutrition advocates, we support these child nutrition programs as a critical safeguard against hunger, but know they are only effective when they reach the children who need help. As community-based organizations like schools, child care centers, food banks, and other nonprofits that operate child nutrition programs, we are committed to maintaining the integrity of the programs while encouraging the elimination of duplicative administrative processes, and aligning inconsistent program requirements would allow nonprofits to focus on hungry kids, not pushing paperwork.

By simplifying child nutrition programs and easing administrative burdens, barriers to better serve children would be lifted and the potential for cost savings heightened.

Potential Short-Term Cost Savings

Currently, community-based organizations operate multiple and different child nutrition programs during the school year and during the summer, even though they are serving the same kids, often at the same sites. Allowing providers to operate programs year round eliminates duplicative administrative processes and aligns inconsistent program requirements that would allow providers to focus on hungry kids, not pushing paperwork. Specific cost savings could be achieved through:

- Reduced program administration all levels of government
- Reduced staff time conducting duplicative regulation requirements
- Technological and database unification to reduce improper payments

Potential Long-Term Cost Savings

While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly harmful for children, for whom the repercussions of poor nutrition and hunger are more severe. The personal and financial consequences of child hunger have broad and long-lasting. Food insecure children are more likely to experience:

- Learning and academic difficulties, reduced concentration, and lower test scores
- School absenteeism and tardiness, making them 1.4 times more likely to repeat a grade
- Poorer general health and one-third greater likelihood of a history of hospitalization

Child nutrition programs also provide economic development and job opportunities to producers (i.e. farmers and ranchers) and laborers, distributors, processors, cooks and food service staff, as well as others who support the local food system.

The Arizona Child Nutrition Coalition encourages Arizona's Congressional Delegation to support the implementation and/or piloting of efforts to streamline federal child nutrition programs in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. For more information on specific cost-savings potential, contact David Martinez III at dxmartinez@firstfoodbank.org.