

PRIORITIZING HEALTH EQUITY & FOOD SECURITY

Spotlight on Child Health and Nutrition



Feeding America is proud to collaborate with Alliance for Healthier Generation to raise awareness about the intersection of child hunger, health and nutrition. Together, we can support families facing hunger get the extra help they need to foster positive social, emotional, and physical health for children.

Diet and food security status are essential components of overall child health and well-being. In 2022, 1 out of 5 children in the United States were living in food-insecure households—uncertain where their next meal would come from.¹ Children who are food insecure are more likely to experience poor diet quality and unhealthy weight gain. Additionally, they are at higher risk for chronic disease, poor mental health, poor academic performance, impaired growth and development, and unfavorable health behaviors in adulthood.²

Inadequate access to healthy food, clean drinking water, and quality health care have contributed to higher rates of food insecurity and increased prevalence of chronic health conditions among Black, Latino, and Native American individuals, and a subset of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) children. Structural racism and systemic inequities are often the driving forces behind these health disparities, which have only worsened since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.³

To overcome these inequities, new opportunities must emerge to ensure that every child has access to:

- culturally appropriate healthy food
- living environments that foster the development of positive social-emotional health
- essential resources that improve overall health and well-being
- unbiased health care

Feeding America is focusing on solutions and supports that inform models of community health, free from injustices and inequities. This brief includes “real life” stories of progress.

Kid's Healthy Eating Plate



FRUITS AND VEGETABLES	1/2 PLATE
WHOLE GRAINS	1/4 PLATE
FISH AND OTHER LEAN PROTEINS	1/4 PLATE
LOW FAT OR FAT-FREE DAIRY	3 CUPS

- Food low in saturated and trans fats
- Low sodium options
- Low sugar options

Diet and nutrition

Healthy dietary patterns at early ages shape lifelong food preferences and health outcomes.⁸ A healthy, well-balanced dietary pattern supports healthy physical, cognitive, and emotional growth and development for children, and has the potential to prevent the onset of chronic diet-related health conditions.

Community stakeholders, including food banks, food pantries, non-profits, public health and health care organizations, schools, and out-of-school-time programs can support children to develop a healthy, well-balanced diet and a healthy relationship with food from a young age.

FAST STATS

- In 2021, Black, Latino, Native American, and AAPI children were more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity compared to white children.⁴
- Diabetes rates among children have been increasing over the past several decades. From 2002 to 2015, there was an average 5% increase in diabetes rates among youth less than 20 years old with the largest increases in American Indian/Alaskan Native, Latino, and non-Hispanic Black children.⁷
- Nearly half of all public school students rely on free or reduced-price meals to meet their daily nutritional needs.⁹

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Stories from the Field

Alliance for a Healthier Generation works to ensure that all young people live healthier lives. Its work has reached more than 30 million children and meaningfully improved the environments that support their physical, social, and emotional health. As part of its approach, Healthier Generation works collaboratively with organizations to co-create solutions that center the unique health needs of a community. Currently, Healthier Generation staff serve on the Kitsap County (WA) Healthy Eating Active Living Coalition that seeks to increase equitable access to healthy foods and opportunities for active living. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition learned that many community members experiencing food insecurity for the first time were unsure of where and how to access food resources. The coalition created a digital food access map as well as a promotion kit for community members to spread the word about the resources available. Jess Sappington, Kitsap Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Coalition Coordinator, noted that since the map went live in April 2021, over 2,000 community members have utilized the resource with many expressing excitement about having a comprehensive list that supports navigating the challenging landscape during the pandemic.



TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY TOGETHER



“For over a decade, we worked alongside schools and local organizations to create a culture of health that puts the well-being of community members including youth, families, and educators front and center—because a healthy, safe, supported community has lasting impact on the health and life outcomes for all.”

Laurie Stradley,
Chief Program Officer, Healthier Generation

Take Action! Address child health and hunger.



CONVENE health care, food/hospitality, education, social service, and other community partners to identify and develop solutions to hunger and health barriers within the community.



PRIORITIZE increasing access to affordable food, health care and medication; addressing the social determinants of health; eliminating health disparities; and amplifying community voice.



BUILD TRUST through positive interactions and communication with the community and engage in developing strategies to address the unique and complex needs of people facing hunger, while eliminating bias, recognizing we are all in this together.

Alliance for Healthier Generation & No Kid Hungry. Fostering Strong Partnerships to Expand Access to Meals



DESIGN culturally appropriate diet, nutrition, and health resources and make them available in local clinics, grocery stores, food banks and pantries, community centers, schools and places of worship.



ADVOCATE for policy, systems and environmental change approaches that support increased healthy food access and improved health and well-being for community members in greatest need. **Kaiser Permanente. Planning for the Next Normal at School Playbook**

¹Rabbitt, M.P., Hales, L.J., Burke, M.P., & Coleman-Jensen, A. (2023). Household Food Security in the United States in 2022 (Report No. ERR-325). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

²Micha R, Peñalvo JL, Cudhea F, Imamura F, Rehm CD, Mozaffarian D. Association Between Dietary Factors and Mortality From Heart Disease, Stroke, and Type 2 Diabetes in the United States. *JAMA*. 2017;317(9):912-924. doi:10.1001/jama.2017.0947

³Churchwell K, Elkind MSV, Benjamin RM, et al. Call to Action: Structural Racism as a Fundamental Driver of Health Disparities: A Presidential Advisory From the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2020;142(24):e454-e468. doi:10.1161/CIR.0000000000000936

⁴Asian American Federation. 2014. The State of Asian American Children. New York, NY. www.aafederation.org/doc/AAF_StateofAsianAmericanChildren.pdf

⁵Becerra, Monideepa B., Salome Kapella Mshigeni, and Benjamin J. Becerra. 2018. The Overlooked Burden of Food Insecurity among Asian Americans: Results from the California Health Interview Survey. *International Journal Environmental Research and Public Health* 15(8): 1684. doi:10.3390/ijerph15081684

⁶Feeding America. 2021. The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Security in 2020 & 2021. www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National_Projections_Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf

⁷Divers J. Trends in Incidence of Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes Among Youths — Selected Counties and Indian Reservations, United States, 2002–2015. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2020;69. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6906a3

⁸Digest of Education Statistics, 2022. Accessed April 2, 2024. www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_204.10.asp

⁹Scaglioni S, De Cosmi V, Ciappolino V, Parazzini F, Brambilla P, Agostoni C. Factors Influencing Children’s Eating Behaviours. *Nutrients*. 2018;10(6):706. doi:10.3390/nu10060706



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