



Transforming Summer Hunger for Kids Across America

Summertime should be carefree and fun for kids, but for millions of children across the United States, summer isn't just a break from the classroom—it's a break from the meal programs that many of them participate in.

Historically, 87% of kids who received free or reduced-price school meals haven't had them during the summer. For families living on low incomes in rural communities, the need is especially acute. Children may be far away from free meals served at schools, libraries and community centers, or parents may be at work and unable to bring them to the distribution sites.

New Opportunities to Expand Summer Meals

Closing the summer meals gap for kids is essential for ending childhood hunger in America. The national summer meals program alleviates some of the worries that families often face at the end of the academic year. However, it also comes with barriers for schools and communities like transportation challenges.

Thanks to game-changing bipartisan legislation, more families can now access food when school is out over the summer. **Together, two new programs could help as many as 31 million children in the U.S.**

Families Are Struggling

Today, **1 in 5 kids in America** live with hunger. Parents and caregivers face financial hardships that force them to choose between buying groceries or paying their bills.

Research from the No Kid Hungry campaign shows that families especially struggle to feed their kids during the summer. It's even harder for kids from families living on low incomes in rural communities.

- **82% of rural families** living on low incomes spend more on groceries during the summer—an average of \$168 more per month.
- **74% of rural families** living on low incomes said they ran out of food before they had money to buy more.

Grocery Benefit

Summer EBT, or SUN Bucks, is a grocery benefit program states can choose to operate that enables income-eligible families to receive an extra \$120 per child for groceries during the summer.

During summer 2024, 37 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories and two Native American nations operated Summer EBT. Preliminary data from USDA suggests that **Summer EBT benefits were distributed to more than 18 million kids nationwide**—a huge accomplishment for the first year of the program.

Relieving Stretched Food Budgets

Joelanis Kercado-Martes, a single mother of three who works as a housekeeper and summer camp staff member in Jamestown, New York, shared how the additional support of summer meals and Summer EBT have been a lifesaver, as she sometimes struggles to balance work, finances and providing for her children, especially with rising food costs.

“Summer EBT is a blessing,” said Kercado-Martes. “The world is becoming more expensive, and I just can’t afford it. **If it wasn’t for this program—these Summer EBT benefits that are being distributed to our family—we probably would’ve never made it**, so I’m grateful from the bottom of my heart.”

“

[The summer EBT program] was really helpful. It came at a time when we had to think about back-to-school clothes and things like that. So, when that money came in, it was able to provide meals, so I could use the money that we did have towards getting [my kids] school clothes to be able to start school.”

– MARLENA HANSON, PARENT
FOSSTON, MN



Here's What We're Doing Now

- We're deeply investing in data, technology, outreach and communications solutions to address challenges standing in the way of families accessing Summer EBT in a number of states.
- We're advocating for additional states to participate in Summer EBT by engaging grassroots supporters, members of the Mayors Alliance to End Childhood Hunger, and the National Governors Association.
- We're working with our longtime partners—Code for America and the American Public Health Services Association—to support state agencies with implementation, develop resources, and share best practices across states.

Free Meals in Rural Communities

In addition to the grocery benefit, flexible, free meals in rural communities are available through SUN Meals To-Go. Schools and local nonprofits can now offer meal delivery and grab-and-go services, instead of requiring children to eat their meals at the distribution site.

No Kid Hungry provided grants to support rural expansion of SUN Meals To-Go during summer 2024. We also provided no-cost webinars, resources and toolkits, and one-on-one guidance to assist SUN Meals To-Go meal sponsors implement new program requirements.

Game-Changing Flexibilities

Before these new programs were offered, the Fish Community Food Bank in Kittitas County, Washington served 11,000 meals to kids during the summer. By 2024, they were serving kids 36,000 meals.

“We were able to serve more kids by eliminating the need for families to drive to a centralized site,” said Gary Bye, the director of special programs who runs the summer meals program. “It wasn’t just a logistical win—it was a victory for families who needed this support more than anyone else.”

Child Nutrition Director Candy Biehle, who started a grab-and-go summer meals program in Smithville, Texas, shared that the increase in meals served has been exponential due to the flexibility.

“In past years, we’d serve 10 to 25 kids at a congregate site [where kids are required to stay and eat] and end up closing because it wasn’t feasible,” Biehle explained. “But last summer, we were serving over 200 meals on the last day of distribution. That’s the power of grab-and-go.”



Here's What We're Doing Now

- We're providing grants to meal providers to help them launch programs in new states, with a special focus on enhancing technology and data solutions, as well as outreach and communications. We're also improving the reach of these programs in existing states.
- We're elevating successful innovations that help children get healthy summer meals, such as improving mobile or home delivery meal models.
- We're helping meal providers and program administrators understand how to comply with new regulations and use the best service models for their communities.

Traditional Summer Meals Sites

Many children still get free summer meals served at community sites in neighborhoods across the country, from schools to parks to libraries.

No Kid Hungry continues to support these local efforts in addition to our investments in Summer EBT and SUN Meals To-Go. Families can find available resources during the summer months by visiting

NoKidHungry.org/Help.



Your Support Is Making a Big Difference

In 2024, your support helped us:

- **successfully advocate** for state funding and rollout of Summer EBT in 37 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories and two Native American nations.
- **invest \$3.5 million in Summer EBT grant funds** to support 13 projects—overcoming barriers to connect kids with benefits—across 10 states, DC, and Cherokee Nation.
- **grant more than \$3.8 million** to support flexible meal operations in rural communities. This included grant funding to 221 school districts and community organizations in 33 states, Puerto Rico and Chickasaw Nation. Grantees reported serving more than 10.9 million easy-access summer meals.
- **convene nearly 400 hunger champions** during our first Summer Nutrition Summit and 500 during our second to explore effective strategies for implementing flexible summer meals service and Summer EBT.



If there's any thought of people not giving to No Kid Hungry, I would ask them to come here and see our operation and see how many children they are putting smiles on. These kids are excited that they get a bag of food to take home. It's theirs. They take ownership of it. So, if you're thinking about it, we certainly appreciate it."

– GRACE SCHEID
SECRETARY AND SUPERVISOR
AT MANZANITA OUTREACH
COTTONWOOD, AZ



Your support matters.
Learn how you can help at NoKidHungry.org.