



Nutrition for Children in The President's 2018 Budget

On May 23rd, President Trump presented his budget request for fiscal year 2018 (FY18) to Congress, outlining his spending priorities for the coming year.

The FY18 budget request calls for \$4.1 trillion to fund government operations in the next fiscal year. This would set funding at \$69 billion in discretionary budget authority, down from \$84.1 billion in FY17. The office of Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for administering nutrition assistance programs and the FY18 budget proposes level funding for FNS at \$149 billion.

However, the devastating cuts proposed to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other anti-poverty programs would have the overall impact of significantly increasing child hunger and poverty in the U.S.

This fact sheet will look in greater detail at policy proposals in the budget that impact child hunger and nutrition. Notable policy changes for particular programs are indicated below.

SNAP

SNAP gets a devastating cut of \$193 billion over 10 years. This program currently serves 20 million children and is one of the most critical government programs to the health and well-being of children. With nearly half of every SNAP dollar going to children, this program combats hunger for the 1 in 5 children living in food insecure households in America. It remains one of the most effective ways to fight child poverty. In addition, SNAP is also credited with boosting academic performance in kids and laying a foundation for economic self-sufficiency.¹

The budget proposes structural changes that would severely weaken SNAP's effectiveness in reducing child hunger and poverty. These include:

- Requiring states to pay a percentage towards their SNAP caseload, eventually as much as 25 percent by 2023. This would severely hamper SNAP's ability to respond to increased need during times of economic downturns.
- Eliminating the state option, often referred to as "heat and eat," of linking the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and SNAP by considering utility costs when determining a household's SNAP benefit levels. The budget proposes to eliminate LIHEAP.
- Limiting categorical eligibility, which promotes efficiency by aligning eligibility for SNAP with other anti-poverty programs for determining eligibility. This change would be detrimental to helping children enroll in child nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.
- Capping benefits for larger households, which disproportionately affects children.

Child Nutrition

The FY18 budget proposes \$24.3 billion for Child Nutrition programs, which provide reimbursements to State agencies for cash and commodity meal subsidies through the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program. More than 53 million children get much of their daily nutrition (half of their daily calories for many kids) at school. Funding for these programs increase children's access to healthy meals and snacks in schools, in afterschool settings, and in child care.

The budget proposes:

- \$13.1 billion for the **National School Lunch Program** (an increase of \$659 million)
- \$4.8 billion for the **National School Breakfast Program** (an increase of \$287 million)
- \$3.9 billion for the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** (an increase of \$261 million). The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides funding for monthly reimbursements, training and technical assistance, nutrition education, and food safety information to child care centers, Head Start Programs, family child care homes, homeless shelters and afterschool programs for snacks and meals served to children.
- \$640 million for the **Summer Food Service Program** (an increase of \$50 million). The Summer Food Service program provides nutrition assistance to low income children when school is not in session during the summer months.

Other programs include:

- \$297 million for the **Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Program** (an increase of \$168 million). This program gives low-income elementary schools funding to provide fresh fruits and vegetables at no charge to children during school.
- Flat funding of \$23 million for the **Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer** demonstration projects, which provide food assistance to low-income children during the summer by providing their families with more resources to use at food stores.
- The **School Meal Equipment Grants** are eliminated, which are competitive grants that go to schools across the country. These grants are currently funded at \$35 million and they may be used to help schools upgrade their kitchen equipment to serve healthier meals, improve food safety, and to help support the establishment, maintenance, or expansion of the school breakfast program.

WIC

The budget proposes level funding for the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** at \$6.2 billion. However, this program would see a decrease in funds from the FY17 enacted level due to a \$1b reduction in rescission of unspent funds. According to the National WIC Association, these unspent funds are due to flat food costs, low food cost inflation, and successful cost containment strategies and they estimate the proposed FY18 amount will be enough to meet projected caseloads.

It is important to recognize that the President's budget represents the Administration's wish list of priorities and not the force of law. Ultimately, Congress, not the President, holds the reins on setting funding levels and makes the final budget decisions during the appropriations process. We are heartened that congressional leaders do not appear to support the President's spending outline and will not be using it as a guideline for their FY18 budget.

As Congress begins the FY18 budget process in the coming weeks and months, First Focus will continue to remind lawmakers that investments in children are essential not only to protect their health and well-being but also to secure our nation's future economic success.

¹ "Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," White House Council of Economic Advisers, December 2015, available at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP_report_final_nonembargo.pdf