

# Federal Nutrition Programs for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families

**This resource provides organizations information on how federal nutrition programs can help grandfamilies and kinship families with low incomes access healthy meals, food, and resources to buy food.**

Across the U.S. more than 2.5 million children are raised by grandparents, other extended family, or close family friends when their parents are unable to raise them. These grandfamilies and kinship families provide a safe, stable, and loving environment for the children in their care. With the sudden increase in household and caregiving expenses, some grandfamilies and kinship families may face struggles with getting the food they need.

The federal nutrition programs are available to help families put food on the table, and millions of families benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), school meals, and other programs. Participating in these programs can help families stretch limited budgets, help children learn, grow, and thrive, and help caregivers be healthy.

Nutrition programs are especially important resources for grandfamilies and kinship families, since legal custody of a grandchild or kin is not needed to participate in the programs.

## NUTRITION PROGRAMS Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)



### **SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)**

SNAP is available to eligible grandfamilies and kinship families with low incomes in every state, the District of Columbia, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and on Tribal lands. SNAP participants receive monthly benefits on an Electronic Benefits Transfer card — which works like a debit card — to purchase food. SNAP allows participants to buy the foods that are right for them at grocery stores, corner stores, farmers' markets, and other participating food retailers. There are no caps on participation or waitlists, so all eligible grandfamilies and kinship families can apply for and participate in SNAP.

**Note:** *Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands operate the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) instead of SNAP, and different program rules apply. [Learn more about NAP here.](#)*

### **Did You Know?**

- ▶ SNAP is targeted to households with low incomes. Generally, to be eligible for SNAP, a household must have a gross income between 130 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL) or lower, as well as a net income after expenses at or below 100 percent of FPL. This [USDA chart](#) shows which states have gross income limits above 130 percent of FPL. Households with an [older adult or a disabled person](#) do not have to meet a gross income test.
- ▶ A household for SNAP purposes includes all eligible people who live, buy, and prepare meals together. People do not need to be related or have a legal relationship to be considered a SNAP household, so a caregiver does not need to have legal custody or guardianship, or be related to, the child living with them in order to receive SNAP.
- ▶ Most states and territories have eliminated or increased asset or resource limits for SNAP. This [USDA chart](#) shows which states, District of Columbia, Guam, and U.S. Virgin Islands, do not consider assets or resources at all,



or it shows what they do consider. In the states that do have a resource limit, many household resources are not counted for SNAP eligibility, including: a home or lot, a car, and most retirement and pension plans (though in some cases withdrawals from these accounts may count).

- ▶ There are special rules for children in foster care (in legal custody of child welfare), whether with kin or not. Foster children can be included or excluded from the household unit applying for SNAP under certain circumstances. If the foster child is included in the household for SNAP benefits, then any foster care payments the family receives are considered income when determining SNAP benefits. If the foster child is not included in the SNAP household, then the foster payments are excluded from income. Foster children cannot participate in SNAP on their own.
- ▶ In some areas, participating in SNAP provides access to resources such as a free cell phone and service, a reduced internet plan, bike share discounts, community recreation center classes, and free museum access. Additionally, some stores and farmers' markets have programs where you can double your SNAP dollars when you buy fruits and vegetables.

For more, see the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\): Background Information for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#).

## **SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS**

Children and youth can receive meals that meet high nutrition standards at the nearly 97,000 participating schools around the country. During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, schools were able to offer free meals to all students, but most schools have returned to collecting school meal applications in order to determine if a child is eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals. In these schools, children living in households with low income can receive free or reduced-price school meals (breakfast and lunch). Some high-need schools are offering meals at no charge to all students — without the need for a family to complete a school meal application — primarily through the federal Community Eligibility Provision. If there is any question about whether or not a school is offering free meals to all students or a child needs to submit a school meal application, organizations working with grandfamilies and kinship families can contact the school district’s school nutrition department.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Caregivers do not have to have legal custody or guardianship, or be related to the child they are raising in order to complete an application for free or reduced-price school meals.
- ▶ Some children and youth are automatically eligible to receive free school meals (breakfast and lunch), including children: in households that receive the means-tested benefits of SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; in foster care; experiencing homelessness;



in migrant households; and in Head Start. This makes the process simpler for households with a child who is automatically eligible to receive free, healthy school meals.

- ▶ California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Vermont offer free healthy school meals for all students, regardless of income, and additional states are working to make this the case. However, in these states, most families will still need to complete a school meal application depending on the school their children attend.
- ▶ Meals served through these programs must meet high federal nutrition standards, and research has shown that for many children school meals are the healthiest meals they eat.



## **AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Children and teens can access healthy meals and snacks after school, on weekends, and during school holidays while attending enrichment programming at participating sites. When school lets out, millions of low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks and meals they receive during the regular school year. The Summer Nutrition Programs are designed to help fill this gap. Meals and snacks for these programs can be offered at schools, community-based organizations, grandfamily or intergenerational housing, and other sites where children come together. These programs help kids stay fueled, engaged, safe, and ready to learn. In most states, children who are receiving free or reduced-price school meals during school year 2022–2023 will receive Pandemic EBT benefits (funds on an electronic benefits card, which works like a debit card, to purchase food) for summer 2023.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Meal sites generally serve children 18 and younger. Sites are either located in a low-income area or serve primarily children from low-income households. Once a site qualifies, the children who participate at the site can receive meals.
- ▶ These programs are a great opportunity for organizations that provide programming during the summer, after school, and on weekends for children and youth in grandfamilies and kinship families to leverage federal funds to provide healthy meals and snacks.



## **SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)**

WIC is an important source of nutrition support for infants, children up to age 5, and pregnant and postpartum people. Participants receive nutritionally tailored monthly food packages that families redeem in participating food retailers.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers can apply for WIC for eligible infants and children up to age 5 in their care. Grandparents and other kin caregivers do not need to have legal custody or guardianship to apply for WIC for a child living with them. They do have to show that the child lives with them and that they are responsible for the child.
- ▶ Families or grandchildren or children receiving Medicaid or SNAP are automatically income-eligible for WIC.
- ▶ The program also connects participants with health services, such as nutrition education, immunizations, health referrals, and breastfeeding support.

## **CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM (CACFP)**

Through CACFP, child care providers, emergency shelters, and adult day care providers receive federal funding to serve healthy meals and snacks to the children or eligible adults in their care.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ For organizations that refer grandfamilies and kinship families to child care, it can be helpful to know which centers in their area provide free, healthy meals and snacks through CACFP. All Head Start centers participate in CACFP.
- ▶ Family day care home providers may be eligible to receive funding for meals.
- ▶ CACFP supports health, nutrition, and well-being during early childhood. Meals and snacks served through this program must meet federal nutrition standards.

## **EMERGENCY FOOD**

Food banks and pantries provide food to households and are important ways to get food when people need immediate help. The type of food, hours of operation, and who can access services varies. Many of these emergency food sites receive federal support in the form of commodities or operating support through The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Some food banks also provide other resources, such as help with SNAP applications, summer meals for children and youth, non-food personal care items, or referrals to other services.

## **FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS (FDPIR)**

Through FDPIR — commonly known in Indian Country as “Commods” — households with low incomes living on Indian reservations and Native American households residing in designated areas near reservations or in Oklahoma can receive a monthly food package. Households **cannot** participate in FDPIR and SNAP in the same month.

### Did you know?

- ▶ FDPIR is administered by more than 275 Indian Tribal Organizations.
- ▶ FDPIR is particularly important for households with children and with elders; approximately two-thirds of participating households include a child, and 40 percent of FDPIR households include a member age 65 or older.

## **COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM (CSFP)**

Through CSFP, older adults (age 60+) with low incomes can receive a monthly box of commodities — containing foods like cereal, beans, tuna, and canned fruits and vegetables — to supplement their diets and improve their health. This program is limited to certain geographic areas.

### Did you know?

- ▶ CSFP can help older adults get foods for a healthy life. It's important for older adult caregivers to stay well-nourished and healthy for themselves and for the children in their families.
- ▶ CSFP participants may be able to access other services, such as referrals to other nutrition programs or nutrition education, through the organizations and agencies that distribute CSFP boxes.

## NUTRITION PROGRAMS Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living

### **HOME-DELIVERED AND CONGREGATE MEAL PROGRAMS**

There are multiple programs available to help older adults get healthy meals and foods in their homes or at community sites, and often these programs are accompanied by opportunities to socialize. These programs have participation caps and are not offered in all locations.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ These programs connect older adults to meals that help them gain nourishment and promote health, so that they can be healthy for themselves and for the children in their families.
- ▶ While these programs are targeted to adults age 60 and older, programs also can serve some caregivers, spouses, and/or younger people with disabilities.

### **MEDICALLY TAILORED MEALS**

There are various programs that deliver medically tailored meals or food to people with HIV and other severe illnesses.

### Did You Know?

- ▶ Medically tailored meals are important for helping adults with severe illnesses manage their health and be there for children and other loved ones.
- ▶ It is rare, but some medically tailored meals programs also provide meals for the dependent children and older adult caregiver of a person with HIV and other severe illnesses.

**For more information, download the federal nutrition program chart for grandfamilies and kinship families with the QR code to the right or by visiting the website: [bit.ly/FNP\\_GRAND](https://bit.ly/FNP_GRAND)**

