



Evidence to Support an Additional CACFP Meal Reimbursement for Family Childcare Home Providers

Policy Brief • December 2024

“Ideally, we would like a reimbursement for all the meals that we serve, which is five. But if I have a secondary choice, I would want to be reimbursed four meals, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, plus either AM snack or PM snack.”

– Family childcare home (FCCH) provider



BACKGROUND

Low diet quality is common among young U.S. children, particularly in families with low-income.^{1,2} The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), serving over 4.2 million children predominantly with low incomes, reimburses childcare providers for up to 2 meals and 1 snack daily, provided they meet nutrition standards. CACFP meals and snacks are more nutritious than those offered by non-CACFP providers and improve children’s diet quality and food security.³

However, only about half of qualifying providers participate in CACFP due to numerous barriers including insufficient reimbursements.⁴ CACFP participation is also declining, especially for family childcare homes (FCCH).⁵ Policymakers are proposing initiatives, such as an additional meal reimbursement, to reverse these trends.

*Sponsors are public or nonprofit private organizations that administer CACFP for licensed family childcare homes and childcare centers that do not choose to operate the program directly through the state.

WHAT WAS STUDIED

This brief summarizes a study conducted by the University of California’s Nutrition Policy Institute, UC Berkeley and CACFP Roundtable. We surveyed 277 CACFP-participating licensed FCCH in in 2024, and interviewed 10 FCCH providers, 5 sponsors* and 5 family-recipients in 2024, to understand perspectives about CACFP and reimbursements.⁶

KEY FINDINGS

CACFP Meals are Important for Improving Child Food Security

31% of providers said they worry children would be hungry if they didn’t get meals and snacks in childcare.

“I have children tell me that the meals that I give them here is what they get all day.” – FCCH provider

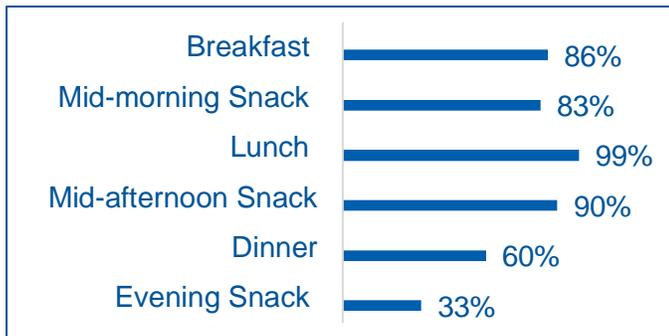


Providers Offer More than the Current Reimbursable 2 Meals and 1 Snack Each Day

On average, providers offered at least 4 meals/snacks to children each day.

"I appreciate that they will follow his needs... if he's still a little hungry, he gets an extra snack." – Family recipient

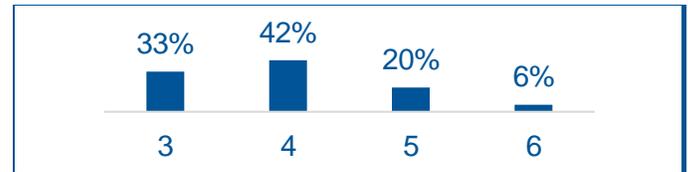
Daily Meals & Snacks Offered in Childcare



Providers Want More Meals and Snacks Reimbursed by CACFP

67% of providers say they want more than 3 meals/snacks reimbursed by CACFP; on average they want 4 meals/snacks reimbursed.

Ideal Number of Meals/Snacks Reimbursed



"All of our providers are serving all meals all day because their parents are working. If we were able to assist with giving those providers reimbursement for [all] those meals, it would be so helpful for them, their business, and the families and the children in their care." – FCCH sponsor

RECOMMENDATION

Policymakers should support efforts to **increase the number of reimbursable meals and snacks** for childcare providers that participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program to **4 per child per day** to support improved child nutrition and food security.

References: [1] US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. [Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 9th Edition. 2020–2025](#), December 2020. [2] Kay MC et al., Measuring Dietary Quality Among Toddlers in the Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study, 2016, Using the New Healthy Eating Index-Toddlers-2020. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2024;S2212-2672(24)00809-8. [3] Kenney EL, et al. The Child and Adult Care Food Program and young children's health: a systematic review. *Nutr Rev.* 2023;81(11):1402-1413. [4] Andreyeva T, et al. Federal Nutrition Assistance for Young Children: Underutilized and Unequally Accessed. *Am J Prev Med.* 2024;66(1):18-26. [5] US Department of Agriculture. [CACFP Family Day Care Home Participation Study](#). July 2023. [6] Fiedler K, et.al. In preparation. **Photo credit:** Danielle Lee

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