

#FundFoodWithCare: Messaging Guide



Our child care providers watch kids leave for the weekend knowing they won't get food until they come back to child care on Monday.

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The Problem (emphasize the impact on children, but also touch on the impact for child care providers)

Young children need food to grow, to develop, and to be healthy, but one in eight low-income families in California do not have access to enough food. We want all children in our great state to benefit from good nutrition, but children from communities with the greatest need are losing access to food in child care.

Child care providers want to help, but many are low-income themselves and don't have adequate funding for food. They often pull from other parts of their already limited budgets to make sure that they have enough food to put on the table.

California has slowly been raising the pay of child care providers to help them keep their doors open for low-income children. Unfortunately, funding for serving food has continued to be neglected. Not adequately funding food in child care harms our efforts to increase provider rates and fund child care as a whole.

The Solution (provide background and mention the impact on children and child care providers)

For decades, California supplemented the federal reimbursement for serving healthy meals to low-income children in child care. Similar to school meals, but targeted at our youngest learners, the program offered financial support to help child care providers feed low-income children. Then, at the height of the recession, Governor Brown cut the supplemental funding. As a result, participation in the child care food program has dwindled. By restoring the funding, California can help bring food to low-income children while supporting the financial viability of the child care workforce.

What is the child care food program?

Known in child care as “the food program,” the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), is an important, but often unrecognized, component of child care. At its core, it is a federally-funded nutrition program that provides funding for serving healthy food to low-income children in child care. Similar to school meals, providers of the meal program are required to meet nutrition guidelines for the food served and are reimbursed per meal and per snack.

Why are children losing access to healthy meals in child care?

Child care providers want to do all that they can to help our youngest children, but stagnant wages and the high cost of living in California make it hard to put fresh, healthy food on the table. Since 2010, child care in California has suffered devastating cuts and the state has failed to adequately update reimbursement rates for providers who serve low-income children. Today, annual funding for child care remains low and 70% of the child care workforce earns less than \$14 or \$15 an hour.

For over 35 years, California helped providers with the high cost of serving healthy meals by offering a supplemental meal reimbursement for CACFP. But in 2012, as the state faced a major budget crisis, the funding was cut. Without support from the state, many child care providers could not keep up with the cost of providing healthy meals that met the nutrition standards of the meal program day in and day out; because of this, hundreds of family child care providers across California stopped providing meals through CACFP. Many others choose not to participate, because the reimbursements are so low.

I know children in child care who get healthy meals every day, how would this funding make things any different?

There are many different forms of child care in California and some, but not all, make healthy meals available to children in need. Child care providers want to feed the children in their care, and many would prefer for that food to be healthy. However, the reality is that family child care providers have tight budgets and are often low-income themselves. Therefore, when they don't have adequate funding for food, child care providers are likely to cut back on what they provide or pull from other parts of their already limited budgets to put healthy meals on the table. [Research has found](#) that subsidizing meals served to eligible children through CACFP will likely result in improved overall diet quality, help children achieve a healthy body weight, and reduce their risk of developing poor health conditions.

Why is this funding important?

The child care food program primarily serves low-income children, which means an investment in the program primarily benefits the children most likely to go hungry. These children are already set up at a societal disadvantage and hunger only exacerbates the issue. Students who show up to school hungry for a lack of food at home, struggle to pay attention in class and quickly fall behind their peers. Hunger can disadvantage a child early, even before they have entered grade school; therefore, it makes sense to prevent hunger while children are young and rapidly developing.

Here is a short worksheet to help you craft your messages

**Tell us the problem
(provide context)**

**Tell us about
solutions**

**Tell us what we can
do to help (the
"ask")**

**Tell us a story that
explains the
problem or solution**

**Why is this urgent?
Why today and not
tomorrow?**

**What is it that you
hope will ultimately
happen or be
different?**

**What types of tough
questions would you
expect to be asked?
How would you
respond?**