

Federal Nutrition Programs for Grandfamilies & Kinship Families

This resource provides organizations working with grandfamilies and kinship families information on programs that can help families with low incomes access meals, food, and resources to buy food.

Across the U.S., approximately 2.5 million children are raised by their 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 expansion of a 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 programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the 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 other kin child 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, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and on Tribal lands. SNAP participants receive monthly benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) 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.](#)*

Did You Know?

- ▶ SNAP is targeted to households with low incomes. Generally, to be eligible for SNAP, a household must have a gross income below 130 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL), as well as a net income after expenses at or below 100 percent of FPL. Many states have increased the gross income limit. [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. 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).
- ▶ A household for SNAP purposes includes all 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 get SNAP.
- ▶ There are special rules for children in foster care (in the 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 child in foster care is included in the household for SNAP benefits, then any foster care maintenance payments the family receives are considered income when determining SNAP benefits. If the child in foster care is not included in the SNAP household, then the foster care maintenance payments are excluded from income. Children in foster care cannot participate in SNAP on their own.
- ▶ In some areas, participating in SNAP gives you access to resources such as a free cell phone and service, a reduced-price internet plan, bike share discounts, discounts on 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 \(SNAP\) for Kinship/Grandfamilies.](#)

SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS

Children and youth can receive meals that meet high nutrition standards at nearly 95,000 participating schools around the country. Children living in households with low incomes 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 (TANF), or 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, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont offer free healthy school meals for all students, regardless of income, and additional states are working to make this the case. New York will start during the 2025–2026 school year. 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.

For more, see the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [School Breakfast and Lunch Programs for Grandfamilies and Kinship Families](#).

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 for the summer, millions of children from low-income households 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 received free or reduced-price school meals during school year 2024–2025 received Summer EBT benefits (funds on an electronic benefit card, which worked like a debit card, to purchase food) for summer 2025.

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.

For more, see the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Summer Nutrition Programs for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#).



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

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 and children receiving Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF are automatically income-eligible for WIC.
- ▶ The program also connects participants with health services, such as nutrition education, immunizations, health referrals, and breastfeeding support.

For more, see the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's [Kinship/Grandfamilies and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#).



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 contact their [state agency](#) to learn 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 107 Indian Tribal Organizations and three state agencies.



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.
- ▶ The boxes are typically picked up at local food banks or other sponsors, with some programs also providing home delivery.

NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Administered by the
U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services



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 groceries 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.

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