

“Every Child, Every Day”: Campaign to End Childhood Hunger in New Jersey by 2015



Today in New Jersey, many children start their day without breakfast, go hungry when school is closed, and lack the good nutrition they need to learn, grow and thrive.

Hunger is caused by:

- A **lack of an adequate income** for a family to meet their daily needs.
- A **lack of access** to federal nutrition programs.
- A **lack of information** about food programs for which children are eligible, and about how best to provide for a child's needs.

Join the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition in the “Every Child, Every Day: Campaign to End Childhood Hunger in N.J. by 2015”. The Campaign’s goal is to provide all of New Jersey’s children with access to safe, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. Through a core strategy to surround all children with reliable access to nutritious food every place that touches their lives — in the family, at school and throughout the community, together we can end childhood hunger in New Jersey.



Food for thought...Childhood hunger is like a hidden virus ... one that is deteriorating the social fabric of our communities, and silently but relentlessly undermining the health and learning potential of our children. An estimated **250,000** children in New Jersey suffer from hunger, miss meals, or have an improper diet. The future of these children is precarious, because the impact of even mild under-nutrition can be devastating: long-term health and emotional problems and decreased performance in school.

Imagine **every child** eats three nutritious meals **every day** in New Jersey. Imagine, no child ever goes to bed worrying about where his or her next meal will come from. This is possible if government, business leaders, community institutions, faith based groups and residents work together to end childhood hunger in New Jersey. Our community already possesses the tools, resources and expertise to properly feed the tens of thousands of children who suffer from or live on the verge of hunger. All we need to do is harness and mobilize these assets in pursuit of practical, cost-effective solutions that improve access to nutrition and help families help themselves. Join in the effort to end childhood hunger in New Jersey.

In the Family

- Parents and caregivers bear the first responsibility for their children's food and nutrition needs.
- Improve the family's overall economic security.
- Enroll and participate in USDA Food and Nutrition Programs including the Food Stamp (SNAP), school breakfast and lunch, Summer Food and others.
- Ensure access to healthy food.
- Provide motivation, knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices with available resources.

In School

- Ensure a full range of child nutrition programs are offered.
- Ensure nutritional quality for all school meals.
- Ensure that more children have access to and participate in school based in school, after-school and summer food programs.
- Increase awareness about the importance of preventing hunger to foster learning and healthy development.

In the Community

- Increase public awareness about hunger.
- Educate low-income people about their potential eligibility for nutrition assistance and connect them with the appropriate programs.
- Encourage use of food stamps at Farmers' Markets.
- Expand nutrition education.
- Ensure access to N.J.'s network of food banks & pantries.
- Advocate for improved public policies to end hunger.

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Goal #1: Maximize Participation in the Food Stamp Program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) –

The Food Stamp program is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. But in New Jersey, we serve just 60% of those who are eligible for the program and only 45% of the working poor households who are eligible. If New Jersey just matched the national rate of participation, about 80,000 people would be added to our food stamp program, bringing about \$80 million a year of new federal funds into the state, while also having a positive impact on nutrition and food and economic security.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

To reach the national average of 67% of eligible people and 57% of working poor eligible people by 2015.

Strategies:

- ❖ Expand Categorical Eligibility (Cat EI), by increasing the threshold gross income limit to 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and eliminating the asset test. Expansion of Categorical Eligibility would provide needed nutrition assistance to families with food insecurity. Cat EI would also establish similar eligibility criteria as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is set at 175% of poverty level, creating more uniformity between programs that help low-income people and enabling benefits to be packaged together for maximum impact. Changes to the asset rules would also simplify the application process, reducing agency administrative costs and errors. The majority of states have expanded categorical eligibility including the neighboring states of PA, DE, NY and MD.
- ❖ Extend certification periods to 12 months (and 24 months for seniors and disabled) to reduce the number of times a caseworker must review a case, reducing errors and freeing staff to process new applications and engage in outreach.
- ❖ Apply for a waiver from FNS that would allow the state’s entire caseload to be handled through telephone interview at initial certification. This will help low-income clients dealing with the high cost of transportation, those in rural communities, the elderly and disabled and working poor to access food stamps and will help ensure more applicants finish the application process.

- ❖ Eliminate the asset test for all food stamp applicants. Expanding Categorical Eligibility can be limited to simply waiving the asset test for all applicants without increasing gross income eligibility. This could be an alternative to expanding the income eligibility or could be a first step before moving towards increasing gross income eligibility levels.
- ❖ Maximize food stamp benefits to households by providing LIHEAP assistance to all food stamp households, allowing for increased food stamp benefits and a reduction in administrative responsibilities and errors when processing applications. Similar programs in MA and NY have increased Food Stamp benefits to households (thereby increasing revenues) and have reduced administrative responsibilities and errors when processing applications.
- ❖ Implement child care deductions (as in the 2008 Farm Bill provision); put procedures in place to ensure that applicants are aware of the deduction and make sure food stamp workers know how to verify expenses and calculate the deduction.
- ❖ Adopt the Transitional Benefits Allowance option, by giving families leaving TANF a five-month transitional benefit, to prevent these families from falling out of the program during a critical period. (Five months of benefits start after TANF cash assistance has been terminated.) Transitional Food Stamps also reduce administrative agency costs and errors.
- ❖ Incorporate a document imaging, shared file system so that records can be found more easily, clients do not have to provide the same documents multiple times, and all counties can access files for county-transferred cases. Aside from the elimination of re-verification of permanently verified information, (i.e., identity and SSN,) down-the-road we need a system that will allow any “on duty” food stamp worker to respond to a problem, complete a recertification or answer a status question.
- ❖ Implement an automatic match between food stamp working families and the state treasury income record to identify low-income wage earners who may be eligible for food stamps, as well as food stamp recipients who may be eligible for EITC but have not applied for it. Once identified, they can be sent an automated letter advising them that they could apply on-line, at the County Welfare agencies or by mail.
- ❖ Provide more training for eligibility workers on certification procedures for immigrants, including households with mixed immigrant status.
- ❖ Designate a key contact or liaison at each County food stamp office to work with select emergency food providers and other community based organizations. This person would work with staff at community-based organizations to resolve food stamp application issues, help clients keep appointments, obtain necessary documentation and promote successful completion of food stamp application.

- ❖ Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development and anti-hunger advocates work together to promote the benefits of the Food Stamp program at health clinics/hospitals, through the WIC program, ESL classes, Hispanic churches, community groups and through school social workers in an effort to reach out to low-income families and educate them about food stamps and how to apply. Partner with local organizations, community groups, schools and houses of worship, WIC offices, health clinics and hospitals to expand outreach in order to enroll more eligible children and seniors in food stamps.

- ❖ DHS and DFD partner with labor organizations such as Health and Hospital Workers, retail and restaurant workers unions to increase food stamp outreach efforts to low-income workers.

Goal #2: Maximize Participation in the Federal School Breakfast & Lunch Program

Ensure New Jersey children get breakfast and lunch by maximizing participation in the Federal School Breakfast and Lunch Program.

New Jersey ranks 46th out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the ratio of breakfast participation to lunch participation for low income students, serving school breakfast to a mere 36.7% of eligible low-income children receiving free or reduced price school lunch. New Jersey is also ninth on the list of top ten states “foregoing the most federal funds”, according to the Food Research and Action Center. If we served only 60 low-income children breakfast for every 100 receiving lunch, New Jersey would receive an additional \$17,588,755 in federal funds and serve 78,990 children who are currently un-served. Many school districts do not provide a school breakfast program and the majority that do provide school breakfast serve the meal early in the morning before the start of the school day and before most children are able to get to school.

Benchmark of the Campaign

To raise the level of participation in the school breakfast program to 60% by 2015.

Strategies:

- ❖ Implement a “universal” school breakfast program that would provide free breakfast to all children in schools in which 60% or more of their students are eligible for free or reduced price meals.
- ❖ Eliminate the reduced-price category from the school breakfast program.
- ❖ Amend the Fiscal Accountability, Efficiency and Budgeting Procedures Rules (NJAC 6A:23A) to eliminate 6A:23A-9.3, (c) 10 in subchapter 9 which prohibits schools from using any funds from the general budget to supplement the food service budget.
- ❖ Restore the per-meal supplemental monies in the budget of the Bureau of Child Nutrition to their original funding level. Explore other ways the funds might be used to help expand access to school breakfast for those students eligible for free or reduced price meals.
- ❖ Provide a per breakfast supplement of \$.15 per breakfast to schools which serve breakfast during the school day, after the bell (as opposed to before the start of the school day). For example, some schools serve breakfast in the classroom after the bell, others provide a grab and go breakfast after the bell to maximize the amount of students accessing the program.
- ❖ Provide small start-up grants to schools offering breakfast in the classroom after the bell, or in high schools that operate a “grab and go” breakfast program. Funds would be used to purchase equipment needed to implement the program; for example, dollies, lunch wagons, thermal bags, etc.

Goal #3: Expand the Reach of the Summer Food Service Program –

Help all New Jersey providers of summer programs to participate in the Summer Food Service Program, to ensure they serve all eligible children, youth and adults in need. Building on the success of the Summer Food Service Program, filling a vital seasonal gap in healthy eating for many children who participate in the school breakfast and lunch programs the rest of the year.

From 2006-2007, New Jersey's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) reached only 20.4% of the children who participated in free/reduced price lunch during the school year. In this same period, NJ experienced a 2.2% decrease in the amount of summer food sponsors and a 12.6% in the number of summer food sites. Without an adequate number of sponsors and sites in the community that are able to administer the Summer Food program, low-income children will not have access to nutritious meals when school is not in session. If New Jersey served only 40 children per 100 that it serves through the school lunch program, we would receive an additional \$3,595,892 in federal reimbursement monies and serve an additional 59,663 children.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

To increase participation in Summer Nutrition to 40% of children who get free or reduced price lunch by 2015.

Strategies:

- ❖ Institute a Summer Food mandate requiring that any school district that operates a summer school program and in which 50% or more of the students are eligible for school meals, operate a Summer Food Service program. The mandate should also state that schools must take the leadership role in the community for insuring that summer food is available.
- ❖ Create a state and local partnership to promote and/or pilot public libraries as Summer Food sites.
- ❖ Advertise the Summer Food program through schools and recreation programs.
- ❖ Emergency food providers (food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens) and other community based organizations promote summer food sites to clients; schools advertise and promote summer food sites to students and their families at the end of the school year

Goal #4: Ensure Access to a Nutritious Diet for all Pregnant Women, Infants, Preschool and School Aged Children –

No infant, toddler, preschool or school aged child can grow and learn properly without adequate nutrition. Two federal programs provide food and nutrition benefiting the youngest children: the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which assists pregnant women and their newborn babies, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which funds meals provided to low-income preschool children as well as to after school, shelter and adult day care programs. Both programs have proved successful. WIC has produced clear, measurable gains in providing critical nutrition, improving the health of pregnant women and their infants, and saving Medicaid expenditures down the road. CACFP has provided vital financial support to licensed day-care centers, early childhood education programs, preschool and after school programs. As with the other federal nutrition programs described here, the problem with WIC and, especially, CACFP is that not all eligible participants are enrolled and receiving benefits. We intend to change that.

WIC:

Because of the way the numbers are kept, it is difficult to fully assess how many of the “estimated eligible’s” New Jerseys WIC program is serving. What we do know is that there is significant disparity in the percentage of estimated eligible’s participating from one county to another.

Cumberland County has the state’s highest percentage of estimated eligible’s participating at 120.9%. Hunterdon County has the states lowest percentage of estimated eligible’s participating with 52.22%. Sixteen of the states twenty-one counties have over 75% of estimated eligible’s participating.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

To raise participation level of WIC to at least 75% of eligibles in all 21 counties in NJ by 2015.

Strategies:

- ❖ Increased funding for breastfeeding promotion and support activities as well as increased funding for effective EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) technology.
- ❖ Make the extensive changes that are needed to the computer systems to appropriately assign the new food packages to the correct participant status.
- ❖ Develop clear and precise messages regarding the new foods in the WIC food packages for local agency staff, participants and retail grocery store personnel. In addition, nutrition education specific to the new healthier food choices must be provided to encourage participants to consume the foods that are better for their health.
- ❖ Conduct outreach about the WIC program and its benefits through clinics, hospitals and early childhood centers.

CACFP:

Over the last ten years, New Jersey has lost 36.9% of its Family Child Day Care Providers from the program, the second largest decline in the nation. Only 4% of our states licensed day care providers participate in the program. In addition, based on analysis of program data for the CACFP At- Risk After School Snack Program in New Jersey, Maryland and Pennsylvania, New Jersey provided this program to only 0.2% of NJ children in poverty (2000-02 Census data) and had only a 16% increase from 2000 to 2003 in the average daily attendance of this program. In Maryland, 6% of Maryland children in poverty (2000-02 Census data) participated in the program and there was a 305% increase from 2000 to 2003 in the average daily attendance of this program. In Pennsylvania, 4% of its children in poverty (2000-02 Census data) participated in the program and there was a 380% increase from 2000 to 2003 in the average daily attendance. Participation in this program in NJ has remained stagnant when compared to program participation levels in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

Increase family child care daily participation in CACFP by 36.9% (restoring it to the level it was 10 years ago).

Strategies:

- ❖ Promote CACFP through an extensive outreach campaign designed to increase the number of CACFP sponsors across the state, specifically family home care providers, afterschool programs and homeless shelters.
- ❖ Hold a CACFP/Childcare summit to examine who is not accessing the program and how to increase access.
- ❖ Add reimbursement for a third meal for children in family day care programs. This would ensure access to good nutrition for children of working parents who rely on day care for extended hours.
- ❖ Program requirements and documentation information should be available on line to all interested program sponsors. Program descriptions should be current and include access to applications and training schedules.

Goal #5: Increase Families Access to Affordable, Fresh Produce –

By working with local government, the private sector and the agricultural community, to increase access to neighborhood supermarkets, grocery stores or farmers' markets selling affordable, fresh produce, and expanded use of local produce in schools and soup kitchens and food pantries.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

All areas of the state with high prevalence of childhood hunger will have a supermarket, farmers market and community gardens to insure access to affordable, fresh produce.

Strategies:

- ❖ Identify target areas in New Jersey with high rates of childhood hunger. Working in those target communities with government, and neighborhood organizations to create incentives that encourage the establishment of supermarkets in those communities that make fresh produce and foods available at affordable prices.
- ❖ Work with the NJ Department of Agriculture and neighborhood organizations to streamline the process of establishing farmers' markets and to gain certification for the farmers to accept federally funded farmers' market nutrition program coupons and food stamps in those target communities with high incidence of childhood hunger.
- ❖ Investigate the feasibility of creating a cooperative purchasing among small corner grocers and NJ farmers to reduce their cost and increase their access to the fresh food and produce their customers need.
- ❖ Increase the number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs available to people with low incomes, whereby local farmers deliver fresh fruits and vegetables directly to neighborhood groups, congregations or individual homes on a weekly basis.
- ❖ Expand Farm to School programs throughout the state. By 2015, pilot a farm to school program in at least one district in each county of the state.
- ❖ Work with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to expand the number of community gardens in urban areas by 100% by 2015.

Goal #6: Provide Comprehensive Public Education about Available Assistance –

Ensure all eligible New Jersey families know about the food and nutrition programs available to them using aggressive, targeted, multilingual, community-based outreach.

Benchmark for the Campaign:

By 2015, the overall level of service at food pantries and soup kitchens has declined by 10%, indicating that people are less reliant on the emergency food system in New Jersey.

Strategies:

- ❖ Conduct a multifaceted public education campaign focused on the geographic areas and the demographic groups most at risk of hunger, and where the greatest gaps in nutrition program participation remain.
- ❖ Create compelling informational materials designed for target audiences of parents and students, and distributing these materials through public schools, churches and other community organizations.
- ❖ Provide public service announcements designed to both promote awareness and increase utilization of federal feeding programs, to local media outlets.
- ❖ Launch a community-wide social marketing effort to spur volunteerism, donations and support for ending childhood hunger.

Goal #7 Ensure Access to Nutritious Food in Shelters and Food Pantries –

By their nature, neighborhood food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters are not a “cure” for the societal disease of hunger and homelessness; rather, they provide temporary relief of the symptoms. Neighborhood food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters are no more a permanent solution to childhood hunger and homelessness than hospital emergency rooms are permanent solutions to the health care crisis. Yet, ensuring access to both is crucial.

That is why New Jersey’s network of food pantries must be maintained. Although our success in ending childhood hunger will reduce the need for so many neighborhood kitchens and food pantries, they must still remain available for any and all adults and families in crisis. Over time, as the need for supplemental food decreases, we will increase support for the delivery of fresh produce to the community through the same network.

Benchmark of the Campaign:

Increase by 50% the percentage of fresh fruits and vegetables distributed by emergency food providers.

Strategies:

- ❖ Increase funding to \$10 million each year for anti-hunger and food security initiatives to fund the State Food Purchase Program, infrastructure improvements to the emergency food system and innovative food production and job training efforts to expand healthy food into the emergency food system.
- ❖ Work with shelter operators to ensure that all children in residence who are eligible for federal food and nutrition programs are enrolled.
- ❖ Continue to support the New Jersey Food Banks in their work to provide more agencies with nutritious food.
- ❖ Continue to support and expand projects like Farmers Against Hunger in their efforts to expand the supply of fresh, local produce to the emergency food system.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on “Every Child, Every Day: Campaign to End Childhood Hunger in New Jersey by 2015”, contact the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition (NJAHC):

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