

A PROGRAM OF THE
CENTER FOR FOOD ACTION

Hunger Free New Jersey

The logo graphic consists of a dark blue square on the right side, with a green curved line that starts from the top left of the square, curves around the top and right, and ends at the bottom right, partially overlapping the text.

2023 Legislative Priorities

Hunger Free New Jersey will continue to work to advance broad solutions to hunger, primarily focused on making it easier for struggling residents to receive federal food assistance and improving access to healthy food. In 2023, these overarching goals will be pursued through a variety of measures.

Senior Hunger

Nearly 11 percent of New Jersey's 1.5 million seniors face hunger each year. Across the country, the rate of hunger among seniors has more than doubled since 2001, with nearly 1 in 8 seniors nationwide having experienced hunger, and 1 in 4 seniors living alone. This number is expected to climb as baby boomers age.

Hunger can take a serious toll on seniors' health – putting them at risk of health conditions like diabetes, asthma, and heart failure. Seniors are more likely to deal with food insecurity if they identify as Latino, Black, or Native American; or have a disability. Hunger becomes more acute when out-of-pocket medical expenses arise, often consuming large parts of a seniors' monthly income.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, less than half of low-income seniors who are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participate in the program in NJ. Many seniors are deterred from applying for SNAP because of the stigma associated with the program, hesitancy about sharing financial and personal information, and complicated application processes. Often, seniors will not apply for SNAP because they feel it's not worth the effort. Nationally, among eligible older nonparticipants, an estimated two-thirds were in households eligible for the minimum benefit, only \$20 a month. This is consistent with previous findings that eligible people are more likely to participate in SNAP if they are eligible for a higher benefit level, according to a recent [AARP report](#).

College Hunger

More than 1 in 3 college students struggled with food insecurity and hunger, and this issue has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to a recent HOPE Center #RealCollege survey, 39 percent of students at 2-year institutions and 29 percent of students at 4-year institutions struggled with food insecurity in New Jersey in 2018.

As the cost of tuition and housing continues to rise, more and more students are being financially squeezed, often struggling to complete their education, and put food on the table.

Federal and state aid have not kept up with the skyrocketing cost of college, leaving students with more out of pocket expenses. In 1980, a Pell grant covered more than 75 percent of a student's costs at a public university, today it covers about 28 percent.

Often, students aren't aware of their eligibility for SNAP and other assistance programs. A new report from [The Hope Center](#) states that only 31% of college students nationwide who meet SNAP income limits reported receiving benefits. Some states are taking steps to ensure that all students that are likely eligible for SNAP know about the program, like California which recently passed [SB 20](#), requiring the California Student Aid Commission to notify students that they may be eligible for CalFresh benefits. While this cost-neutral legislation was only recently signed, a [2021 study](#) by the California Policy Lab that informed students of their eligibility for CalFresh benefits resulted in more than 7,000 new CalFresh applications from students in a year. They found that 3.7 percent of students who received two emails from the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) enrolled in CalFresh the same month, at a rate 2.2 percent higher than students who were not emailed at all.

Childhood Hunger

New Jersey has been on the forefront of child nutrition and has become a national model with programs like Breakfast After the Bell. 2022's passage of the Working-Class Families' Anti-Hunger Act, that will make over 25,000 more New Jersey students eligible for free school meals, continues New Jersey's tradition in leading the way on child nutrition programs.

While great strides have been made to feed more New Jersey students, there are two programs that we could focus on to ensure we're able to meet the nutritional needs of New Jersey's children: the After School Meal Program, a part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Like school breakfast and summer meals, afterschool meal programs provide federal dollars to feed hungry children, improving their health, well-being, and ability to succeed in school. From 2016 to 2019, the number of New Jersey children receiving afterschool snacks or suppers rose 21 percent. New Jersey falls short of reaching 15 children with suppers for every 100 low-income children participating in school lunch — a national benchmark set by the Food Research & Action Center. If New Jersey reached that goal, communities could collect an additional \$19.9 million in federal dollars.

CEP allows for schools across New Jersey and the nation to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at high-poverty schools at no charge while eliminating the traditional meal application process. Numerous districts in the state, like the Camden City School District, already take advantage of this program that can save school districts time, by reducing the administrative burden of collecting school meal applications. Schools also receive a higher reimbursement rate for each meal served under CEP than they would under the traditional meal programs, which allows enrolled schools and districts to focus more on children's health than worrying about their budgetary bottom line.

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