

Policy At A Glance: Federal and California State Efforts to Improve Nutrition through Policy

Globally, the number of undernourished people has grown exponentially, constituting a crisis largely driven by conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This brief will focus on how the United States and California are using policy as a tool to combat malnutrition and improve nutrition.

Introduction

The prevalence and incidence of hunger and malnutrition have worsened significantly around the globe due to international conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a United Nations report, the number of people affected by hunger globally has risen to as many as 828 million in 2021, which is an increase of about 150 million since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.¹ The double burden of malnutrition consists of both undernutrition and overweight/obesity, as well as diet-related non-communicable diseases.²

The Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act of 2021 (H.R. 4693) was signed into law by President Biden on October 19, 2022, to advance targeted and evidence-based interventions for the prevention and treatment of global malnutrition and to improve the coordination of programs with a similar goal.³

In California, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the 2022-23 Budget Act (SB/AB 178), which includes several critical investments into California's anti-hunger programs to help make significant strides towards the collective goal of ending hunger in California.^{4,5,6}

This brief will cover the Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act of 2021 (H.R. 4693) and California's efforts to improve nutrition among adults and children through policy.

Definitions

Nutrition Process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth⁷

Malnutrition Deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients⁸

Undernutrition Insufficient intake of energy and nutrients to meet an individual's needs to maintain good health⁹

Overnutrition Overconsumption of nutrients and food to the point at which health is adversely affected¹⁰

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Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act of 2021

On October 19, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act of 2021 (H.R. 4693), which authorizes the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to undertake efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition globally.^{3,11} Specifically, this bill does the following:^{3,12}

- Authorizes the USAID administrator to scale up the prevention and treatment of global malnutrition and coordinate with relevant public and private partners on these efforts
- Directs the USAID administrator to select priority countries that would receive prioritized nutrition assistance
- Establishes the Nutrition Leadership Council to coordinate USAID's efforts on preventing and treating malnutrition, with representatives from relevant inter- and intra-agency offices
- Directs the USAID to develop and submit an implementation plan to prevent and treat global malnutrition
- Requires the USAID to submit an annual report to Congress on the progress made toward preventing and treating global malnutrition

This bill strengthens the United States' commitment to support the health and nutrition of families and children around the world to prevent malnutrition from increasing in severity and having lasting effects.¹³

White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

On September 28, 2022, the Biden-Harris Administration hosted the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. During this conference, President Biden laid out a bold goal to “end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030 so that fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases like diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.”¹⁴ During this conference, the Administration announced that over \$8 billion in private and public-sector contributions will be dedicated towards integrating nutrition into healthcare delivery, among other initiatives.¹⁵ For more information, please refer to IHPL's December 2022 Issue Brief titled [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#).



California's Policy Efforts to Improve Nutrition

Policies to Enhance Nutrition Assistance

Temporary Augmentation to CalFresh

Administrative Funding⁵

- The CalFresh Program, federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides federally funded nutrition assistance to low-income Californians. For more details about CalFresh, please refer to IHPL's November 2021 Policy Brief titled [Policy Changes to Improve and Expand CalFresh](#).
- California's 2022-23 budget allocates a temporary augmentation of \$95 million in total funds to CalFresh administrative funding.

Expansion of the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to All Immigrants 55 Years or Older⁵

- Previously, CFAP provided state-funded nutrition benefits to low-income legal residents of the U.S. However, AB/SB 178 expands the program to all individuals aged 55 or older, regardless of immigration status.

Creation of a Nutrition Assistance Grant Program for Tribal Communities⁵

- The 2022-23 budget allocates \$5 million to create the Tribal Nutrition Assistance Program, through which the Department of Social Services will award grants to tribal organizations to address food insecurity within their communities.

Policies to Improve School Nutrition Programs

Provision of Universal Meals⁶

- Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, California became the first state to implement a statewide Universal Meals Program for school children. All schools are required to provide one free breakfast and one free lunch per school day to any student requesting a meal. Schools that have at least 40% of students eligible for free meals are required to participate in the federal meal program. For more information, please refer to IHPL's March 2022 Policy Brief titled [California's Universal Meals Program \(AB 130\)](#).

Kitchen Infrastructure and Food Service Professional Development^{16,17}

- On June 30, 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law AB 181 which approved a \$600 million investment for school kitchen infrastructure and related support.
- This law also expands the 2021 Kitchen Infrastructure and Training (KIT) funding, providing \$750 million for staff development. Trained food service staff will focus on promoting nutritious foods by expanding meal options that include locally and sustainability grown fruits and vegetables and using minimally processed ingredients when cooking. Additionally, it will include an expansion of student meal options to include plant-based meals and enhance restricted diet options.

Conclusion

Nutrition is a critical part of health and development as it can improve infant, child, and maternal health; strengthen immune systems; lead to safer pregnancies and childbirth; lower the risk of non-communicable diseases; and increase longevity.⁷ Additionally, healthy children learn better and people with adequate nutrition are more productive.⁷ On the other hand, malnutrition in every form poses significant threats to human health. Globally, populations are faced with a double burden of malnutrition that includes both undernutrition and overweight/obesity.

Building a long-term, equitable, and sustainable food system that focuses on the unmet needs is critical. The Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act of 2021 and current policy efforts by California are making strides towards decreasing the prevalence of malnutrition. To truly eliminate malnutrition globally and in the U.S., however, a plethora of interventions and strategies with coordinated and collaborative partnerships between private and nonprofit sectors are needed to meet the unique food needs of various communities and populations.



Did you know?

Malnutrition claims approximately 3.1 million children's lives each year and is a key factor in approximately 45% of deaths in children under age five.¹³

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