

Native Youth Nutrition Programs

Vision Statement: Every Native young person should have access to healthy, affordable meals and snacks and be equipped to make healthy decisions resulting in positive social, emotional and physical well-being.

Background

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) are meal and snack programs managed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Native Boys & Girls Clubs across the country serve as sites and sponsors for USDA programs, providing healthy meals and snacks to children during out-of-school time, while also supporting educational and enrichment programs that keep children learning, engaged and safe. Native Boys & Girls Clubs are trusted organizations in their communities and fulfill a critical need when children are not in school.



Every dollar invested in Boys & Girls Clubs **returns \$9.60** in current and future earnings and cost-savings to their communities.



More than 80% of Native youth receive breakfast and lunch at school.

These programs provide a valuable resource to individuals with the greatest need. For many children, these may be the only nutritious meals they get on a normal day. Especially during summer, these site-based meal programs serve a critical need in Native communities. COVID heightened existing inequities in food insecurity facing Native youth, gaps in which Boys & Girls Clubs quickly organized to respond to and eliminate. In addition to providing healthy meals, these programs address summer learning loss through educational programs, keep kids active and provide safety check-ins during the summer.

Food and water insecurity affect 25% to 40% of those living in rural tribal communities who also lack access to fresh produce and healthy food options due to reservation food deserts.

Improving Access to Nutritious Foods

The reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is an opportunity to expand and further support meal and snack programs provided at Native Boys & Girls Clubs across the country. In order to ensure increased access to these programs, policy changes must include:



- **Streamlined Application Process** – **Reduce red tape** by allowing Native Clubs to complete one application in order to provide children meals year-round through one program after the school day ends and over the summer months.



We ask Congress to prioritize the nutritional needs of our Native youth by expanding the capacity of Native Boys & Girls Clubs to serve healthy meals and snacks year-round by incorporating the **Summer Meals Act of 2021 (S. 1170/H.R. 783)** in any reauthorization package of the federal child nutrition programs this year.

- **Improved Area Eligibility** – Allow communities to participate if **40% of area youth** are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals which would be consistent with area eligibility requirements of the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program. The current requirement is 50%.
- **Third Meal During Summer** – Currently, Native Clubs can be reimbursed for a maximum of two meals and a snack per day per child. Allowing sites **to serve a third meal per day** would eliminate the need to skip a meal and encourage full day or evening programming, to further support working families.
- **Transportation Grants** – Improve nutrition in rural, underserved and hard-to-reach areas. This would provide grants to help **increase transportation** for these underserved regions. Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to meal participation for kids in these communities.

Native Success Story

Woodland Boys & Girls Club, Wisconsin continues to be an example of the positive difference that USDA’s funds make in Native Club communities. While the Club’s programming was always centered around onsite food distribution, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required an adjustment.

Club CEO Ron Corn reflects, “All of a sudden, we had so many kids gathering outside of the Club for food. We had to come up with a solution to feed all of these children.” The Club applied for a waiver to the initial USDA requirements, which USDA accepted. This allowed the Club to implement a mobile food distribution program that avoided unsafe crowds.



Through this mobile distribution, the Club delivered **250 daily meals** to youth and families in the community. Combined with the existing meals that are distributed at its two sites, the Club has provided around **400 total meals per day**. The food is prepared at the Club, with a head cook who makes meals with a pre-approved and healthy menu. Food that is used for the mobile program is then packaged and delivered.



The hybrid model is a direct response to a critical need in the local community that existed long before COVID. “There is a huge need to supply food to children on reservations. This funding was especially important during COVID-19, due to the fact that kids were not being fed at school. While 100% of our kids are eligible for free school meals, all of the schools were closed,” noted Corn. While mobile delivery has slightly decreased in recent months, the Club plans on continuing the hybrid model due to the expanded number of youth it allows them to reach. **“I hope that they realize at the Federal level, the tremendous impact that this funding is providing to Native communities. It is critical to make sure that Native children are fed,”** said Corn.