# Nutrition and Food Insecurity

A summary of the scientific literature on food insecurity and food assistance policies.



**How This Impacts Children's Development**

Food insecurity is a public health issue with serious consequences for children, including an increased likelihood of depression, anxiety, poor academic performance, birth defects, and behavioral problems.

Read the brief: Targeted policies can reduce the harmful consequences of food insecurity for children, 2018

Read the brief: food insecurity harmful to children's development, 2011

**Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs**

- Food insecurity affects one in six households with children, and nearly one-third of households led by single mothers (as of 2016).
- Though geographically concentrated, all states except North Dakota have food insecurity rates surpassing 12% (as of 2015).
- Food insecurity affects children and their parents:
    - Infants and toddlers: iron deficiency & anemia, poor health, & hospitalization.
    - School-age children: less likely to have social and emotional skills, more likely to internalize and externalize behavior problems, more likely to be suspended.
    - Parents: higher likelihood of depression and anxiety, likely to use harsh discipline.
- Food Assistance Programs have worked to reduce child food insecurity:
    - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) has reduced child food insecurity in eligible households by 63%.
    - The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has reduced prevalence of poor health in children by at least 29%.
    - The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has reduced food insecurity in eligible households by 20%.

**Policy Considerations in the Briefs**

- More generous Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) payments reduces food insecurity. One study found increasing benefits by 29% could eliminate all U.S. children’s food insecurity.
- Raising the income eligibility threshold for SNAP from 130% to 185% of the poverty line (equivalent to the Women, Infants, and Children, and National Lunch School programs) would reduce food insecurity by 60.3% in currently ineligible households with children.
- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) could also be expanded to reduce children’s food insecurity.

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