

# Ensuring New Mexico's Kids Have Enough to Eat

Fighting food insecurity through policy change

New Mexico children face major challenges when it comes to having enough food to eat, but there are common-sense policy solutions that we can take to end food insecurity and improve children's health, well-being, and opportunities to reach their full potential.

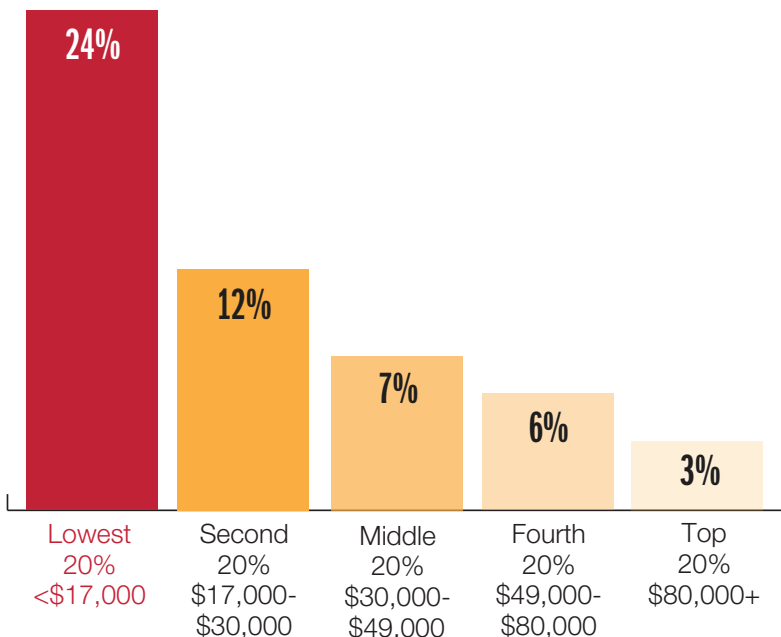
## THE PROBLEM

Childhood food insecurity is associated with<sup>1</sup>:

- Increased risk of developmental delays and chronic disease
- Forgone medical care
- Behavioral and emotional challenges
- Increased disciplinary actions and lower test scores at school
- Lower educational attainment
- Reduced economic mobility

## FOOD TAKES A BIGGER BITE OUT OF SMALL BUDGETS

Those with the lowest incomes must spend the largest share on food (Percentage of income spent on food for consumption at home by quintile)



## BY THE NUMBERS

**1 IN 4** - The number of New Mexico children who experience food insecurity<sup>1</sup>

**36%** - The percentage of children ages 0-3 who experience food insecurity<sup>1</sup>

**71%** - The percentage of children in low-income households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)<sup>1</sup>

**75%** - The percentage of children who participate in the free and reduced-price school lunch program<sup>2</sup>

**29%** - The percentage of New Mexicans who live in a food desert<sup>3</sup>

**\$1,914** - The additional health care costs per year for food insecure children<sup>4</sup>

**24%** - The percentage of income spent on groceries in families earning the lowest incomes<sup>5</sup>

**3%** - The percentage of income spent on groceries in families earning the highest incomes<sup>5</sup>





# FIGHTING FOOD INSECURITY

Nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP, increase household spending power on healthy food, and frees up income for spending on other necessities, like housing, education, and transportation.

School meal programs, including school lunch, breakfast after the bell, and after-school meals, ensure reliable access to nutritious food so students can focus at school, building a foundation for future success.

Cash assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), helps parents afford basic household needs including diapers, clothing, and housing, allowing families to spend more money on food.

Tax credits and rebates, like the Working Family Tax Credit (WFTC) and the Low-Income Comprehensive Tax Rebate (LICTR), reduce food insecurity by giving families earning low incomes more money to spend on food and other basic needs.



Federal nutrition programs, cash assistance, and tax benefits for families with low incomes are associated with:<sup>1,6</sup>

- Improved performance in school
- Improved infant health
- Economic benefits
- Better childhood health outcomes

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement a Heat and Eat program to increase SNAP benefits by \$90 for 68,000 families (\$1.5 million).
- Eliminate school meal co-pays to benefit 12,400 students from low-income families (\$1.5 million).
- Increase funding for local food programs such as Double Up Food Bucks (\$150,000).
- Do not tax food.
- Increase funding for TANF Transition Bonus Program which provides \$200 a month for working TANF participants (\$1.8 million).
- Eliminate TANF work requirements.
- Supplement TANF benefits with a monthly diaper stipend for 3,300 TANF recipients with children ages 0-3 (\$3 million).
- Pass a state Child Tax Credit and increase and expand New Mexico's Working Families Tax Credit.
- Eliminate and reduce child care assistance co-pays (\$30 million).
- Restore funding to Tax Help New Mexico (\$200,000).
- Increase LICTR and index it to inflation (\$36 million).
- Comprehensively study food insecurity and access in the state and identify solutions for ensuring that all residents have access to a nutritious and sufficient diet.

1 Think Babies State Factsheets, FRAC, 2019

2 Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals, NM PED, 2018

3 Berkowitz et al., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019

4 Food Access Research Atlas, USDA, 2017

5 Consumer Expenditure Surveys, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018

6 EITC and Child Tax Credit, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015