



Promoting Health in Early Care and Education

Executive Summary

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, families with young children have had to deal with many challenges, including school and early care and education program closures, lack of child care, unemployment, missed life events, and an overall sense of instability. The Black and Latinx communities have been hit the hardest, compounding preexisting disparities. Since the onset of the pandemic, Black and Latinx households with young children have reported higher levels of food insecurity while research shows that children from these communities exhibit higher rates of obesity. Children who experience food insecurity, even for a brief period, are at higher risk of developing long-term behavioral, emotional, and nutritional challenges later in life. Further, children who are obese are more likely to develop chronic diseases as adults.

Healthy development of young children is essential for their long-term health and well-being. Early care and education programs play a critical role in supporting children's healthy development, providing them with daily nutrition supports and helping them to build socio-emotional skills essential for long-term mental health. Thus, it is imperative that as policy makers strengthen

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on the lives of millions of American families with young children, exacerbated by the pandemic.^{1,2,3} The pandemic has also worsened the twin epidemics of food insecurity and obesity for children in Black and Latinx communities.^{4,5,6} Instability created by the pandemic has led to alarmingly high rates of food insecurity — the highest of which were among families with children. A report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shows that the rate of food insecurity among families with children that were categorized as “food insecure” more than tripled from 9.4 percent in February 2020 to 29.5 percent in June 2020. Furthermore, the report showed that Black and Latinx families with young children reported higher rates of food insecurity. The pandemic has also widened preexisting disparities in childhood obesity with children of color from low-income households having the highest prevalence for obesity. The report also found that the rate of obesity among children of color increased from 17.5 percent in February 2020 to 20.5 percent in June 2020. The report also found that the rate of obesity among children of color increased from 17.5 percent in February 2020 to 20.5 percent in June 2020. The report also found that the rate of obesity among children of color increased from 17.5 percent in February 2020 to 20.5 percent in June 2020.

Promoting Social and Emotional Development

Healthcare providers are reporting unprecedented increases in ambulatory psychiatric need, and much of this need is going unmet. Activities that promote positive parenting at home, while others such as Head Start include help navigating help our youngest children develop cognitive abilities as well as social and emotional skills, including emotional regulation, which are critical for overall mental health and success later in life.²³ As we continue to address

Legislative Actions Taken and Proposed Policies to Support Children and Families

Since the onset of the pandemic, Congress and both the previous and current Administrations enacted legislative actions to support children and families. Notable highlights include:

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- The Families First Coronavirus Response Act expanded food assistance to millions by providing states with additional funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).²⁴
- The CARES Act provided additional funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).²⁵
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The enhancement and expansion of these landmark programs are important steps forward as we work to build a strong foundation for long-lasting policies ensuring that our youngest children will have the opportunity to grow

Improve State Systems to Support Obesity Prevention and Children’s Healthy Development

There is currently no clear funding mechanism to support state-level capacity building for childhood obesity prevention initiatives. Furthermore, states do not have clear guidance on funding allocations or best practices. Funds can be used to support state-level capacity building for obesity prevention, but there is no clear guidance highlighting this as an allowable use of CCDBG funds.

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Sources

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