

# Nutrition Assistance for Immigrant Children

*"It is always about people." —César Chávez*

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## SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps)

- Provides basic nutrition assistance to individuals and families experiencing financial hardship.
- Provides a safety net from hunger.
- "Our children's ability to grow, learn, and meet their full potential . . . depends on regular access to healthy meals." President Obama, in response to a U.S. Dept. of Agriculture report that in 2008.

## History of immigrant children's eligibility for SNAP

- Undocumented immigrants—including children—are not now and never have been eligible for food stamps.
- Prior to August 1996, lawfully residing immigrants generally were eligible for food stamp benefits on the same terms as U.S. citizens.
- The 1996 federal welfare law cut most lawfully residing immigrant children from food stamp eligibility.
- Recognizing the critical need to ensure food access for children, Congress restored food stamp eligibility for many lawfully residing children in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act.
- Although many children in immigrant families are now eligible for SNAP, their participation rate barely exceeds 50 percent and remains much lower than for children with U.S. citizen parents.<sup>1</sup>

## Children of immigrants

- In 2010, there were an estimated 1 million undocumented immigrant children under age 18 in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> A third of these children are in families who live below the poverty level.<sup>3</sup> Many undocumented immigrant children suffer from hunger and food insecurity<sup>4</sup> but under the current rules remain ineligible for SNAP.
- The parents of undocumented immigrant children have high employment rates but are concentrated in low-paying jobs that do not provide a living wage.

## Children in the proposed lawful provisional status

- Unless Congress acts, children transitioning to the proposed "lawful provisional status" will be denied needed SNAP benefits. It is reported that individuals may be in this status for up to 10 years—a lifetime for a child.
- Denying aspiring citizen children basic nutrition will have profound and long-term consequences on their health and their ability to learn, work, and contribute to U.S. communities.
- Families securing a provisional status will need to meet strict requirements. It's morally troubling and financially unwise to penalize them further by restricting their children's access to crucial nutrition.

<sup>1</sup> *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Guidance on Non-Citizen Eligibility* (Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, June 2011), [www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/Non-Citizen\\_Guidance\\_063011.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/pdf/Non-Citizen_Guidance_063011.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *A Nation of Immigrants* (PewResearch Hispanic Center, Jan. 29, 2013), [www.pewhispanic.org/2013/01/29/a-nation-of-immigrants/](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/01/29/a-nation-of-immigrants/).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States* (PewResearch Hispanic Center, Apr. 14, 2009), [www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/14/a-portrait-of-unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-states/](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/14/a-portrait-of-unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-states/).

<sup>4</sup> Randy Capps, et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants* (Urban Institute, Feb. 2005), [www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311139\\_ChildrenImmigrants.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311139_ChildrenImmigrants.pdf).

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