

## Partnering with Families to Build Economic Security During Emergencies



# How Early Care and Education Can Help You Access Food Assistance

*The information in this tip sheet was current as of July 1, 2020.*

Families may experience food shortages during an emergency or natural disaster. Early care and education professionals can partner with you to:

1. Access food assistance
2. Track your progress and celebrate your successes



## Spotlight On: Food Assistance

### 1. Access Food Assistance

Your early care and education professional can give you information about different types of food assistance programs. They can also help you determine your eligibility and help you apply.

- **WIC and SNAP:** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help you meet your food needs.
  - The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 adds \$500 million to the WIC program to cover increases in program participation.
  - The federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is approving states to provide increased benefits to SNAP households that normally receive less than the maximum benefit to address temporary food needs.

- Use the WIC State Waivers and the SNAP State Waivers online search tools to learn about waivers in your state to address temporary family food needs.
- Learn more about WIC and SNAP and how to apply for benefits on the Food and Nutrition Service website.
- **Food banks:** Use the Find Your Local Food Bank online tool to locate food banks and meal distribution programs in your community.
- **National Hunger Hotline:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Hunger Hotline provides information about meal sites, food banks, and other local social services across the country.
  - English: 1-866-3-HUNGRY (1-866-348-6479, toll free)
  - Spanish: 1-877-8-HAMBRE (1-877-842-6273, toll free)
- **Food shopping tools:** The USDA has online tools to help families set budgets for healthy meals, plan meals, and read food labels. Find them on ChooseMyPlate.gov.
- **Food assistance for families with school-aged children:** The USDA is coordinating several efforts that may apply to older siblings of children in early care and education programs.
  - The Meals-to-You program provides families in rural school districts with boxes that contain 20 nutritious meals—10 breakfasts and 10 lunches—for children who would normally receive breakfast and lunch at school. These boxes are delivered every two weeks. Contact your school district to see if it is participating in this program.
  - Use the Meals for Kids site finder online tool to find free meals for your school-aged children. This website provides information on nearby school meal distribution sites, as well as hours of operation and contact information. The service is available in English and Spanish.
  - The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program gives some households with school-aged children a P-EBT card that families can use to buy food. The P-EBT card has the value of the free breakfast and lunch reimbursement rates for the days that schools are closed. Schools must close for at least five consecutive days for families to receive a P-EBT card. For your family to be eligible, your children must receive free or reduced-price school meals and attend schools that offer free school meals. The P-EBT program is currently available in 19 states. You can learn more on the Food and Nutrition Service website.

## 2. Track Your Progress and Celebrate Your Successes

Early care and education professionals can follow up with you about your progress toward accessing food assistance. Celebrate your successes!

Other Family Tip Sheets about building your family’s economic security during emergencies are available. Check with your early care and education professional.

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PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481



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