

April 4, 2023

Expiring Nutrition and Medical Assistance Expansions

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 Rolls Back Several Assistance Expansions Initiated by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act

Wellness and nutrition benefits expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic are rolling back in March and April 2023. ***Educators should be aware of nutrition and medical assistance changes and recognize that they may have an impact on wellness for some children while families adjust to previous program requirements and limitations.***

This *Advisory* details the changes to medical and nutrition benefits, identifies student behaviors that might stem from these changes, and shares resources and suggestions for those needing further assistance.

Nutrition Assistance

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Families eligible for food assistance through SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, received emergency allotments through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This legislation allowed states to waive the household and income adjustments for SNAP payments and provide all SNAP recipients with the maximum benefit based on their family size alone or an additional \$95 per month if they already received the maximum benefit. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 removed emergency allotments from the COVID public health declaration causing the expanded benefits to be discontinued beginning March 1, 2023. On average, SNAP benefits are reduced by about \$90 per person per month and reflect a baseline SNAP allocation average of around \$186 per person per month (or \$6.10 a day).¹ Furthermore, families which became accustomed to bi-monthly SNAP payments will return to one-per-month payments which could additionally contribute to food instability during this transition period.

School Breakfast and Lunch Programs

While the COVID-era universal free school lunch provisions expired in the fall of 2022, free and reduced-price lunches remain available for eligible families through the National School Lunch Program. All families who receive any level of SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in Pennsylvania. Several lower-income school districts in Pennsylvania continue to provide universal free lunches under the Community Eligibility Provision.² As for school breakfasts, former Governor Wolf allocated funds to provide universal free breakfast in Pennsylvania schools during the 2022-23 school year. Similar funding is included in Governor Shapiro's proposed budget, which, if approved by the Legislature during the budget process, would continue free breakfasts during the 2023-24 school year.

Summer Meals Program

Families with school-aged children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch will continue to have access to a summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program to help with summer nutrition. Through this program, funded in

¹ Based on [estimates](#) by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

² More information on the Community Eligibility Provision and eligible PA districts is available on the [PDE Website](#).

part by the early termination of the SNAP emergency allotments, families will receive a \$40 grocery benefit per child per summer month with eligible children automatically enrolled in the program.³ In rural areas, summer meal programs will provide students with meals to eat at home through [Summer Meals Sites](#).

Suggested Resources

Several programs and organizations are available to help individuals find nutritious meals for children including:

- PA 211 to connect with various local food resources (www.pa211.org).
- Feeding Pennsylvania to find local food banks and other food assistance programs (www.feedingpa.org).
- The Department of Human Services' ending hunger page (dhs.pa.gov/ending-hunger) and the Department of Agriculture's food security page (agriculture.pa.gov/good_security) for information on assistance programs and other resources.
- No Kid Hungry (nokidhungry.org/find-free-meals/)
- USDA's National Hunger Hotline: 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (for Spanish).

Medical Coverage

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 further impacts student wellness through changes to medical coverage. The continuous enrollment provision for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage expired on March 31, 2023. This provision allowed states, like Pennsylvania, to continue coverage for individuals—even if they were no longer eligible—unless they moved out of state, passed away, or requested coverage termination. The change means that all current MA and CHIP recipients (or their guardians) must complete an annual renewal to see if they are eligible for continued coverage. Families must complete the annual renewal to continue benefits even if recipients will still be eligible for the coverage.

Suggested Resources

For those who are no longer eligible for Medical Assistance or CHIP, the Department of Human Services is working to ensure that affordable coverage is available in the Pennsylvania health and dental insurance marketplace, [Pennie](#)[®]. Additional health care for uninsured individuals is available through [community health centers](#) and [free clinics](#) available throughout the Commonwealth.

Impacts on Students

During this period of transition, students from affected families may demonstrate academic and/or behavioral impacts. When hungry, students may struggle with concentration or a lack of energy causing them to fall behind academically. Challenging behaviors could result from increased irritability, excessive sleepiness, headaches, or frequent trips to the nurse for basic medical care. Students might also be late or absent from school at higher than typical rates. Educators and locals may find it helpful to explore available support options which may include programs to provide access to snacks, access to community health resources, or guidance on how to best engage with the supports available through pupil services.

For More Information

For more information, please contact Dr. Gina Gullo (Ggullo@psea.org) about changes to benefits or Judith Petruzzi (JPetruzzi@psea.org) about strategies to help students with challenging behaviors succeed.

³ This program was partially available in previous years but was made permanent by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023.