

Summer Meals & WIC

Summertime Opportunities to Reduce Child Hunger in Your Community



In Massachusetts, over 200,000 youth live in food insecure homes. Hunger impacts a child's ability to thrive academically and puts them at risk for adverse health outcomes. Low-income families rely on healthy school meals to bridge gaps in their food budgets, where can they turn when school is out? The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally-funded nutrition program that provides free meals to youth ages 18 and under. With your help, we can reduce child hunger in the summer months.

WIC OFFICES AND SFSP: A WINNING PARTNERSHIP TO ADDRESS SUMMER HUNGER

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant and Children (WIC) provides healthy food, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support to pregnant women, new mothers, and children under 5. By serving meals through SFSP, WIC offices can provide additional nutrition to the families and communities they serve – including children over 5 who may be visiting the WIC office with parents and siblings.

Summer meals provide an additional opportunity to promote the core mission of WIC. Before or after children eat, staff or volunteers can provide programming such as nutrition education or deliver other important health messages.

According to the USDA, half of all infants born in America receive WIC.

Offering summer meals helps local WIC branches to achieve their mission to support good nutrition for young children and their families. As a trusted source of child health and nutrition education, WIC offices already engage with families who may benefit from receiving SFSP meals. Additionally, WIC's relationship with other social service and care providers can facilitate easier outreach to promote a meal site.

SUCCESS STORY: EAST BOSTON WIC

The East Boston WIC office is located in an East Boston Community Health Center building. Although the office is not on a major road, the office's parking lot faces two roads that are well trafficked by both cars and pedestrians. A bright banner is hung throughout the summer to advertise the twice a week meal to all who may pass by. On those two days, a tent with tables was set up to provide shade and a comfortable place to eat. Space was available inside for bad weather days.

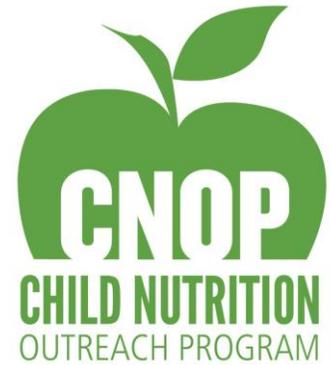


Banner at East Boston WIC

East Boston WIC uses text messaging to notify patients about various events and to remind them about appointments. These texts were used to send an automated reminder every Tuesday and Wednesday about the meal. Using their location and the texting, East Boston WIC was able to grow attendance from a handful of families with appointments to a wider audience including teenagers in the community in need of a meal.

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SITES & SPONSORS

WIC offices can help to provide summer meals to the youth in their community by becoming a “site.” Sites function as the physical location in which meals are distributed. Sites work alongside a “sponsor” which produces or procures the meals in accordance with USDA guidelines, delivers meals to the site, and provides administrative support by completing paperwork and handling meal reimbursements. No kitchen, no problem! Sites are not responsible for meal preparation, so having a kitchen is not required. CNOP and your sponsor can help troubleshoot meal storage.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

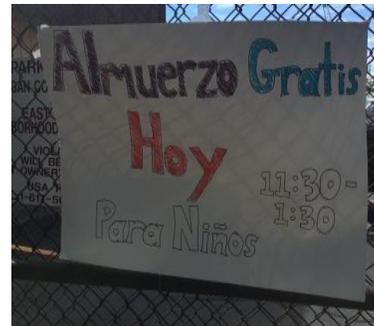
Communications: Although a WIC office is a trusted source for nutrition information, serving a meal at a WIC is likely a new idea for your community. Working with community partners to send fliers home at schools or canvass the nearby community can help get the word out. Use text messaging and social media to provide reminders to WIC clients that meals are available regardless of whether they have an appointment that day.

Signage: A banner outside a WIC office helps to further promote the availability of the program to all in the community who qualify. Signage inside the WIC office can help inform clients of a service that may benefit them, even if it is happening outside of their appointment time or when they would otherwise choose not to bring their children.

Staffing Matters: Partnering with a sponsor can help to reduce staffing burdens, but it is vital to have dedicated staff or volunteers on-site to welcome children, document the number of meals distributed, and ensure the program’s success. When staffing is a challenge, local partners can assist in providing additional support. As part of the technical assistance that CNOP provides, we can help WIC offices develop innovative local partnerships and staffing structures that work, whatever your capacity.

Dietetic Interns & Volunteers: Engaging young adults and early-career professionals to help with the logistics of setting up a summer meal site, outreach, or conducting complementary programming can be a tool to bridge staffing gaps when resources are limited. Bringing young people aboard to help promote the availability of free meals can help with outreach to teens and younger children by helping to reduce the stigma that is sometimes associated with the program.

Choosing a location: Finding the perfect location within your office may be a challenge, especially when waiting areas may be too busy to accommodate extra foot traffic. Serving meals outdoors helps to draw in additional youth participants and ensures that families in the community are aware that free meals are available nearby. Additionally, building a community presence outside the walls of the office provides a recruitment opportunity for eligible families not yet enrolled in WIC.



Sign in Spanish outside East Boston WIC site

NEXT STEPS: STARTING AN SFSP SITE!

Contact the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread at CNOP@projectbread.org to find out if your office is eligible to provide free summer meals to children and teens or visit us online at www.meals4kids.org.