

HEALTHY CHOICES

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAM



Photo: Susan Warner

The Need

Across the United States, families are struggling to feed their children healthy meals. Fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive, and many communities do not have full-service grocery stores that regularly stock fresh produce. In schools and at home, children are not getting enough physical activity, in part because there are too few safe and accessible places to play year-round.

These challenges drive malnutrition in the U.S. Children living in poverty across America are filling up on easily accessible,

cheap, empty calories that may make them feel full, but leave their bodies and minds unfulfilled.

Consider the following:

- Close to one in three American children is overweight or obese.
- The prevalence of obesity in children has more than tripled over the past 35 years, putting children at higher risk for serious, even life-threatening health problems.
- Nearly 45 percent of children living in poverty are overweight or obese as compared to 22 percent of

children living in households with incomes four times the poverty level.

- In rural communities, 52 percent of children living in poverty are overweight or obese.
- On average, residents of rural communities have worse health and face greater economic challenges when compared to the general population. They are also more likely to lack access to quality health services and to experience increased food insecurity.
- Only one in three children are physically active every day. Children now spend more than seven and a half hours a day in front of a screen.
- More than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in food deserts – areas that are more than a mile away from a full-service grocery store.



Photo: Susan Warner

The childhood obesity epidemic has far-reaching consequences for all Americans, but none more so than the 1 in 5 children living in poverty who lack the resources to make healthy choices in the first place. If we are to give these children a fair chance to thrive and be healthy, then we have to start giving children and families healthier choices through policy and practice.

Innovative Solutions

Save the Children is combatting childhood obesity and malnutrition for children in the U.S. through the effective combination of practice and policy. Save the Children began implementing Healthy Choices, its health program, in schools in 2005.



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Today, Healthy Choices operates during afterschool and summer programs in 10 states. We use the research-based CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) curricula, developed by researchers at the University of Texas School of Public Health, and provide children with 30 minutes or more of daily, moderate-to-vigorous physical activity that teaches lifelong movement skills and combines fun and fitness.

In addition to physical activity, children participating in Healthy Choices receive a daily, healthy snack, in alignment with Save the Children's Healthy Snack Standards, and also participate in weekly nutrition education. Each month, students focus on a nutrition theme, such as "Making MyPlate Great" and "Fruity Tutti Fruits & VaVaVroom Veggies," teaching them about healthy food options, portions, and preparation. Through exposure to healthy snacks and nutrition lessons, children are encouraged to make good food choices and lead healthier lifestyles.

Where Practice Meets Policy

Together with Healthy Choices, Save the Children's advocacy work combines locally driven approaches that involve and inspire communities with policies that benefit all children. Working with local partners across the country, Save the Children aims to accelerate state and local policy change to increase children's access to affordable, healthy food.