

# Summer Hunger is Too Expensive to Ignore

AN ANALYSIS OF THE HIDDEN TOLL SUMMER HUNGER  
TAKES ON AMERICA'S CHILDREN AND OUR ECONOMY



## OVERVIEW

### THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SUMMER HUNGER

A new report from Deloitte Consulting, "Summer Nutrition Program Social Impact Analysis," analyzes available research on the long-term impacts of childhood hunger during the summer months.

The study, conducted on behalf of No Kid Hungry (with support from the Arby's Foundation) shows that providing children with access to nutritious food beyond the school year and into the summer months has clear health, education and economic benefits.

National summer nutrition programs increase food security and have a lasting impact on children's lives. In the short-term, the programs can help mitigate summer weight gain, cognitive decline and summer learning loss for children from low-income families. In the long-term, they may help increase high school graduation rates and reduce susceptibility to chronic diseases, which are otherwise each accompanied by large potential costs to the children and their communities.

## THE FINDINGS

### THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SUMMER HUNGER

What could happen if all children receiving free or reduced-price school meals were able to access nutritious meals during the summer? Using existing research as a base, the study investigated the potential impact on American society and found:

- As many as **1 million fewer children** would be food insecure.
- Potentially 22,800 fewer child hospitalizations, **saving \$274 million** in associated costs annually.
- Potentially **81,600 more high school graduates** each year.
- Summer nutrition is closely tied to summer learning loss. Stopping the "summer slide" among kids from low-income families could **save up to \$50.6 billion in reteaching costs**, equal to approximately 10% of the current total U.S. spending on K-12 education.

## THE COST OF HUNGER FOR A CHILD



**\$12,000**

THE AVERAGE COST OF A CHILD'S HOSPITALIZATION. FOOD INSECURE KIDS ARE 31% MORE LIKELY TO BE HOSPITALIZED.



**\$300**

THE ADDITIONAL AMOUNT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES SPEND ON GROCERIES EACH MONTH DURING SUMMER.



**\$1,540**

THE AMOUNT SCHOOLS SPEND IN RE-TEACHING A STUDENT STRUGGLING WITH SUMMER LEARNING LOSS



**\$10,090**

HOW MUCH MORE A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE EARNS THAN SOMEONE WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE

“WE SEE A WHOLE HOST OF HEALTH PROBLEMS FROM KIDS WHO DON’T CONSISTENTLY GET THE HEALTHY FOOD THEY NEED...FOOD FOR KIDS ACTS AS A VACCINE. MAKING SURE OUR KIDS GET ENOUGH OF THE HEALTHY FOOD THEY NEED IN THE SUMMERTIME HAS THE POTENTIAL TO HEAD OFF MANY LONG-TERM, EXPENSIVE HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE.”

*Lee Hammerling, MD  
Chief Medical Officer, ProMedica*

## ANALYSIS

### SUMMER NUTRITION PROGRAM SOCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

#### The Education Impact

Students who do not get enough nutrition over the summer months are more likely to fall behind their peers once the school year starts.

- Studies show students from low-income families experience a greater “summer slide” in academics than their peers, returning to school two months behind in reading.
- The effect is cumulative, and by the end of fifth grade, “low-income youth are nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading.”
- Overall, nearly 80% of the achievement gap between high-income and low-income students may be attributable to this summer reading loss.
- Summer nutrition plays a role in academic achievement. According to the study, “nutritious meals protect against cognitive decline, which can help mitigate summer learning loss.”

#### The Health Impact

Students who do not get enough nutrition over the summer months are more likely to experience long-term health consequences than their more affluent peers.

- Without access to nutritious school meals, many children from low-income families struggle with hunger. Many turn to cheap, calorie-dense foods with little nutritious value. As a result, many low-income children gain weight two to three times faster during the summer than during the school year.
- Food insecurity makes children more susceptible to chronic diseases, like iron deficiency, anemia, asthma, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. They are also at a higher risk of hospitalizations.
- These issues carry a high-dollar cost. The average pediatric hospitalization costs \$12,000. And the average total health expenses for a child treated for obesity are more than 200% higher than the average child’s health cost.

#### The Economic Impact

Ending summer hunger has the potential to strengthen our economy.

- For example, a decrease in the summer learning loss would be expected to lead to a reduction in the achievement gap and an increase in students graduating from high school. Studies show that high school graduates have greater long-term economic productivity than those who do not graduate.
- In analyzing schools in Maryland which successfully began summer meals program, we found that schools offering a summer nutrition program see up to 5.3% more students graduating from high school, compared with schools that do not offer a summer nutrition program. High school graduates typically earn \$10,090 more per year and enjoy a 4% higher employment rate.

## CONCLUSION

### SUMMER NUTRITION PROGRAM SOCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Access to healthy and nutritious food should not be limited to the months that fall within the school year. Imagine closing the gap between 21.7 million kids receiving a free or reduced-price lunch during the school year and the 3.8 million children receiving meals through the federal nutrition programs over the summer. Millions more children would experience the associated health and education benefits, including increased food security, improved physical and mental health, and decreased summer learning loss. Ultimately, this can lead to long-term economic improvements for the children and their communities.