

# 1 In 7 U.S. Households Struggled To Afford Food Last Year: Report

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[One in seven U.S. households](#) struggled to afford food last year, according to a new report. Yet, many families in need didn't take advantage of safety net programs that could help alleviate the issue.

The number of food insecure households has remained "essentially unchanged" since 2012, holding steady at [17.4 million households](#), a USDA report found. But advocates are concerned about the fact that safety net programs are being underutilized.

According to the report, only 61 percent of households in need are taking advantage of such key programs as WIC, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and free school meals.

This school year, health advocates are trying to change that by making a concerted push to encourage qualified families to access breakfast at school.

Nearly [10 million kids who qualify for free lunch](#) at school don't eat breakfast there, according to the Food Research and Action Center.

The problem, experts say, is that the morning meal is often served before classes start and it's challenging for

already strapped parents to get their kids to school any earlier. Another issue is that children often feel too ashamed to admit to their classmates that they need to take advantage of the free meal.

To make breakfast more accessible, a number of schools around the country are working to [bring breakfast into the classroom](#) to remove the stigma and make it part of the regular schedule.

After implementing this strategy at nearly 600 schools in Los Angeles over the past four years, [more than 117,860 additional low-income kids](#) there have participated in the free morning meal program.

But children in need could be at risk of losing some of those benefits.

This month [the Child Nutrition Act](#) is up for reauthorization in Congress. It provides more than 20 million free or reduced-price lunches and more than 11 million free or reduced-price breakfasts for students every day.

Even if the act isn't reauthorized, most of the main programs would continue — including in-school meals and WIC, according to U.S. News & World Report.

But, if the act isn't reauthorized, schools could lose out on a number of perks. For example, schools that don't participate in federal meals wouldn't get [milk reimbursements](#). And, the farm-to-school program, an initiative that brings local food to schools, would falter.

“If we want to be successful economically, if we want to reduce health care costs and we want to ensure our national security, then we also have to see child nutrition in the way we see so many issues involving national security and economic security and health care security,” Tom Vilsack, agriculture secretary, said at an event in Washington, D.C., according to U.S. News & World Report. “It’s a critically important part.”