



Healthy Choices

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.

This is the face of malnutrition in the United States. 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 this:

- More than 23 million children and adolescents in the United States—almost one-third—are obese or overweight, putting them at higher risk for serious, even life-threatening health problems.
- 52 percent of rural children living in poverty are overweight or obese—20 percent more than children nationally.
- In just the communities Save the Children's serves, an average of 59 percent of the population does not have access to fresh, healthy foods; in some communities, it's as much as 98 percent.
- More than 60 percent of 5- to 10-year-olds have at least one risk factor for heart disease.
- The percentage of children, ages 6–11, who are obese has quadrupled over the past 35 years, making this a public health epidemic.

Last year, in the United States, Save the Children reached 240,000 children, through our home, school and community programs and emergency responses.

The childhood obesity epidemic has far-reaching consequences for all Americans, but for none more so than the 1 in 4 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.

AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

Save the Children is combating childhood obesity and malnutrition for children in the United States through the effective combination of practice and policy.

Save the Children began its health program in schools in 2005. Today, Healthy Choices operates in the afterschool and summer environment in 15 states and the District of Columbia, serving more than 14,300 children living in poverty. We use the research-based CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) curricula, developed by researchers at the University of Texas School of Public Health. We 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 the Healthy Choices program also receive a daily, healthy snack, in alignment with Save the Children's Healthy Snack Standards, and 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.

Save the Children's Healthy Choices program utilizes the "Fitnessgram/PACER" fitness assessment to evaluate progress of those children receiving regular physical activity through our afterschool programs. A nutrition assessment measures children's increases in nutrition knowledge throughout the school year.

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 in the fight against childhood obesity. 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 and opportunities for physical activity.

For more information on Save the Children's U.S. Programs visit www.savethechildren.org/usa or call 1-800-728-3843.