

New USDA Resources for Youth and Family Shelters: Serve Meals to Young Adults During COVID-19 Using CACFP

BACKGROUND

Emergency shelters (e.g., homelessness or domestic violence shelters and transitional housing facilities) provide individuals and families with housing, food, and other vital resources during a stressful time of housing instability and a need for refuge. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can provide shelters with a steady and sustainable stream of federal funds to enhance meal service to children and youth at risk of hunger. In addition, shelters may now be reimbursed for CACFP meals and snacks provided to young adults 24 years of age or younger as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

HOW IT WORKS

Shelters participating in CACFP can be reimbursed for up to three meals, or two meals and one snack, each day. All meals and snacks are reimbursed at the [free CACFP rates](#), which are updated every July. Shelters can also receive federal commodity foods or a “cash-in-lieu” of commodities reimbursement of \$0.24 for each lunch and supper. Shelters may receive commodity foods and food donations to supplement CACFP reimbursement for meals.

Under normal circumstances, shelters are reimbursed for meals served to youth through the age of 18 years. Now, shelters can be reimbursed for meals served to youth 24 years of age or younger. This expansion of CACFP reimbursements will be in effect until the COVID-19 public health emergency is lifted.

REQUIREMENTS

Shelters must comply with all applicable state and local health and safety standards, including any required inspections or permits. Each shelter ensures meals, including those that rely in part on commodities or donated foods, meet CACFP nutritional guidelines and document the number of meals served to eligible individuals. To account for the difficult circumstances unique to individuals and families that shelters serve, there are special accommodations for shelters, including those listed below.

- All youth served at the shelter are deemed eligible for meals reimbursed at the free rate. Shelters do not need applications or proof of income to serve participating youth.
- Shelters do not need federal, state, or local child care licensing or approval as a condition of eligibility.

ELIGIBILITY

An eligible shelter includes:

- a public or private nonprofit organization or its site that provides temporary shelter and food services to youth experiencing homelessness and/or their families; and,
- a residential child care institution (RCCI), but only when the RCCI serves a distinct group of children experiencing homelessness who are not enrolled in the RCCI’s regular program.

VALUE

An emergency shelter serving 50 youth and young adults three meals a day is eligible for \$445 per day (about \$8.90 per individual per day) in federal reimbursements. Over the course of the year, the shelter could receive more than \$162,425 in federal funding to feed individuals 24 years old or younger nutritious meals for 365 days.

HOW TO APPLY

The application process is streamlined and simplified to account for the unique challenges facing emergency shelters.

For more information on CACFP, refer to [USDA’s website](#).



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