



Resource Guide: Federal Resources for Feeding Homeless Families, Children and Youth in Houston

This resource guide is written for shelter staff, case workers and others who are working to help homeless families, youth and children access the food resources they need. There are a number of new and some existing rules that facilitate the participation of homeless children and youth in the federal food programs:

- School Meals Programs for Homeless Children and Youth
- Federal Nutrition Funds for Shelters Serving Children and Youth
- Food Stamps for Homeless Children and Youth
- WIC Program Serves Homeless Women, Infants and Children



Tools for you to share with clients include a brochure, written in a low-literacy format, explaining the new rules allowing homeless children to be automatically eligible for school lunch and another brochure highlighting all the federal food program options for families facing homelessness in Houston.

- School Meals in Houston Brochure:
Is Your Family Facing Homelessness or Housing Problems?
Special New Rules Make Signing Up For Free School Meals Fast and Easy!
- Federal Food Programs in Houston Brochure:
Food and Nutrition Programs: Getting Connected



FOUNDATION

*Sponsor of the Houston
Feed the Most Vulnerable Project*

The School Meals Programs for Homeless Children and Youth

The School Meals program rules have been expanded in several ways to assist homeless and runaway children and youth by providing:



- [Automatic eligibility for free school meals](#) to homeless and runaway children
- [Streamlined procedures](#) to document free school eligibility
- [Full school year eligibility](#) for free school meals

For more information on access to school meals for homeless children please contact Constance Thompson, Homeless Liaison and Program Coordinator for the Houston Independent School District: (713) 556-7019, cthompso@houstonisd.org.

Automatic Eligibility for Free School Meals to Homeless and Runaway Children

Before the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (2004) was passed, administrative guidance made homeless children, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, automatically eligible for free school meals. The Reauthorization Act establishes in law this categorical eligibility for homeless children, meaning that all children who are defined as homeless are eligible for free school meals.

The Reauthorization Act also confers automatic eligibility for free school meals on migrant children served through the Migrant Education Program and runaway children and youth served through the three grant programs established under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA): Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth, and Street Outreach Program.

Download [U.S. Department of Agriculture Memo SP 4](#)  and [FRAC's school meals brochure for homeless families](#)  for more information.

Streamlined Procedures to Document Free School Eligibility

The McKinney-Vento Act requires every school district to designate a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youth. The liaisons ensure that children receive the educational and other services for which they are eligible - including free school meals. Local educational agency liaisons, homeless or domestic violence shelter directors and RHYA service providers may provide documentation that children are homeless or runaway to school food service directors or other officials who determine school meal eligibility.

The documentation must include the child's name or a list of their names, effective date(s), and the signature of the local educational agency liaison, homeless or domestic violence shelter director or RHYA service provider. This list is acceptable in lieu of a school meal application usually submitted by the child's parent or guardian and is sufficient for school officials to approve the child's eligibility for free school meals.

School food service directors, principals and other school officials should work closely with local educational agency liaisons, homeless or domestic violence shelter directors

and RHYA service providers to ensure that homeless and runaway children and youth are provided free meal benefits as promptly as possible.

Download [USDA Guidance on Determining Categorical Eligibility](#)  and [USDA Memo SP 4](#)  for more information.

Full School Year Eligibility for Free School Meals

Once a student has been certified as eligible for free meals, including when based on designation as homeless or runaway by a local educational agency liaison, homeless or domestic violence shelter director or RHYA service provider, the eligibility remains effective for the remainder of the school year. This policy holds even if children or youth move into permanent housing and are no longer homeless or served by RHYA programs. In such instances, a new eligibility determination shall be made in the subsequent school year. Schools are allowed to continue a student's eligibility from the previous school year for 30 operating days into the subsequent school year, or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever occurs first.

Download [USDA Memo SP 3](#)  for more details.

For more information on access to school meals for homeless children please contact Constance Thompson, Homeless Liaison and Program Coordinator for the Houston Independent School District: (713) 556-7019, cthompso@houstonisd.org.

Federal Nutrition Funds for Shelters Serving Children and Youth

Homeless, runaway and domestic violence shelters are eligible to use the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to feed children and youth up to 18 years of age in their facilities. The Reauthorization Act raised the age limit for children who may be fed through the program, and this expansion of eligibility from a maximum age of 12 to 18 years will help provide financial support for often strained shelter budgets.

Shelters can be reimbursed for meals and snacks served to children age 18 and under residing in the shelter. Participating shelters can receive a reimbursement of \$1.35 for breakfast, \$2.47 for lunch or supper and 68 cents for a snack. For each child served, shelters can receive reimbursement for up to three meals or two meals and one snack each day. Shelters also receive commodities or a “cash-in-lieu” of commodities reimbursement of 18.75 cents for each lunch and supper.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program can also be used for serving homeless children in child care centers and family child care homes.

To apply or receive information about the Child and Adult Care Food Program, contact the Gayle Butler, Program Manager, Houston Area Program Office, Texas Health and Human Services Commission: (713) 696-3635, www.snptexas.org.

For more information and program brochures please see the *Feed the Most Vulnerable Outreach Tool Kit* for serving children and teens in homeless, runaway and domestic

violence shelters.

Food Stamps for Homeless Children and Youth

Youth who live independently in a shelter or entirely alone should be able to apply for food stamps on their own. Their parents' income should not be used in calculating whether they are eligible for food stamps. If they live in a shelter, service providers may assist such youth by providing letters for them to bring to food stamp offices.

Homeless people living in shelters are eligible for food stamps, even if the shelter provides meals. The food stamp office has special rules that allow homeless families to receive food stamps, even if they do not have photo IDs or do not have a regular address. The food stamp office may accept as ID the word of a shelter director who can identify the food stamp applicant. If a household's income is low enough, the food stamp office in Houston must issue food stamps within 24 hours of when the household applies and is interviewed. For more information on Texas expedited Food Stamp rules see: <http://www.dhs.state.tx.us/publications/omnibusreport/index.html>

See also FRAC's [Homeless Persons' Rights Under the Food Stamp Program](#) and or FRAC's brochure [Food and Nutrition Programs: Getting Connected](#)

To apply for Food Stamps, contact Cataline Quesada at the Houston Food Bank at 713-547-8663. For help filling out the Food stamp application, contact the Families Under Urban and Social Attack at (713) 374-1279.

WIC Program Serves Homeless Women, Infants and Children

Since 1988 the law has assured eligible homeless women, infants and children access to the WIC program. The law defines homeless individuals as people lacking a fixed and regular nighttime residence, staying in a temporary shelter, temporarily living with others in their residence, or staying in a place not designed as a regular sleeping accommodation. Homeless women, infants and children meeting the income and nutritional risk standards are eligible for WIC benefits even if they receive meals from soup kitchens, shelters, other emergency food assistance programs, or any federal food assistance programs. Homeless women, infants and children are considered at nutritional risk because of the likelihood that they experience hunger and poor diets.

The Texas State WIC agency has a plan for providing WIC benefits to eligible homeless women, infants and children. The local WIC clinics in Houston have the option to tailor the food package in order to meet the special needs of homeless individuals for foods that can be stored and prepared without a kitchen. For example, if a homeless mother does not have access to refrigeration or cooking facilities she will need ready-to-feed infant formula instead of concentrate or powders. WIC can conduct outreach to homeless and domestic violence shelters and should be partnering with Health Care for the Homeless and other service providers.

See also FRAC's brochure for clients, [Food and Nutrition Programs: Getting Connected](#). For additional information or to set up an appointment, contact your local WIC clinic at 713-794-9090 or hltwicinfo@cityofhouston.net for information about WIC in Houston.

Or contact the Food Research and Action Center (202) 986-2200 extension 3025.