

SUN Bucks

*USDA's Newest
Food Assistance Program*



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**



FOOD INSECURITY IS A CRITICAL CHALLENGE IN NORTH CAROLINA



1 in 4

North Carolina children face food insecurity or chronic hunger¹



60%

of North Carolina children eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school¹



12.8%

of North Carolina residents live below the poverty line²



Causes of Food Insecurity During Summer

- Many students **lose access to school meals** during the summer months
- Lack of **access** to affordable supermarkets and grocery stores
- Dependency on **transportation** to summer meal sites

Impact to Children

- Reliance on schools to provide meals, **limiting summer access to nutritious food** and impacting children's health
- **Adverse childhood development outcomes**, including heightened stress and worse academic performance³

¹ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

² *Poverty Rate in NC (Statista)*

³ *Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review (NIH)*

PANDEMIC EBT (P-EBT) PROVIDED CRITICAL FOOD ASSISTANCE DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR, BUT THE TEMPORARY PROGRAM ENDED IN 2023



Overview

North Carolina's P-EBT program was a federally funded temporary food assistance program designed to provide grocery-buying benefits to purchase nutritious foods for students and young children during COVID-19. The program began in 2020 but **ended in 2023**.

Benefits

Like FNS EBT, benefits were provided on a pre-loaded card to buy food at authorized EBT retailers, including most grocery stores.

Statewide Impact*



1.76 million
children served



93% spend rate,
indicating a critical need
for food assistance



\$2.5 billion issued in
benefits

INTRODUCTION TO SUN BUCKS

NC DHHS, in partnership with NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), is expanding its food assistance efforts to become **one of the first states** to administer USDA's **new** summer nutrition program, "SUN Bucks."

How much in SUN Bucks benefits will be issued?

North Carolina will issue **\$120 in benefits** per eligible child, which can be used by families to purchase nutritious food.

Who will be eligible for SUN Bucks?

Students who participate in certain federal assistance programs will be eligible to **receive benefits automatically**, while other students **may apply** for SUN Bucks.



SUN BUCKS 2024 PROGRAM GOAL AND IMPACT

NC DHHS and NC DPI aim to combat hunger among North Carolina's most food insecure children and teens.

1 million*

NC children will receive benefits to increase access to healthy food choices during the summer months.

\$120 million*

in food assistance benefits during the 2024 summer months, feeding children while boosting NC's economy.

**All figures are approximate and rounded*



SUN BUCKS WILL ADDRESS EXISTING ACCESSIBILITY GAPS IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SUN Bucks will transform North Carolina's summer food assistance strategy into a **three-pronged approach** that emphasizes **accessibility**.

Currently, North Carolina operates two federally-assisted summer meal programs: the **Congregate (Group) Meal Service** and the new **Non-Congregate Meal Service (Meals To-Go)**. Accessibility challenges associated with these programs that **SUN Bucks will directly address** include:



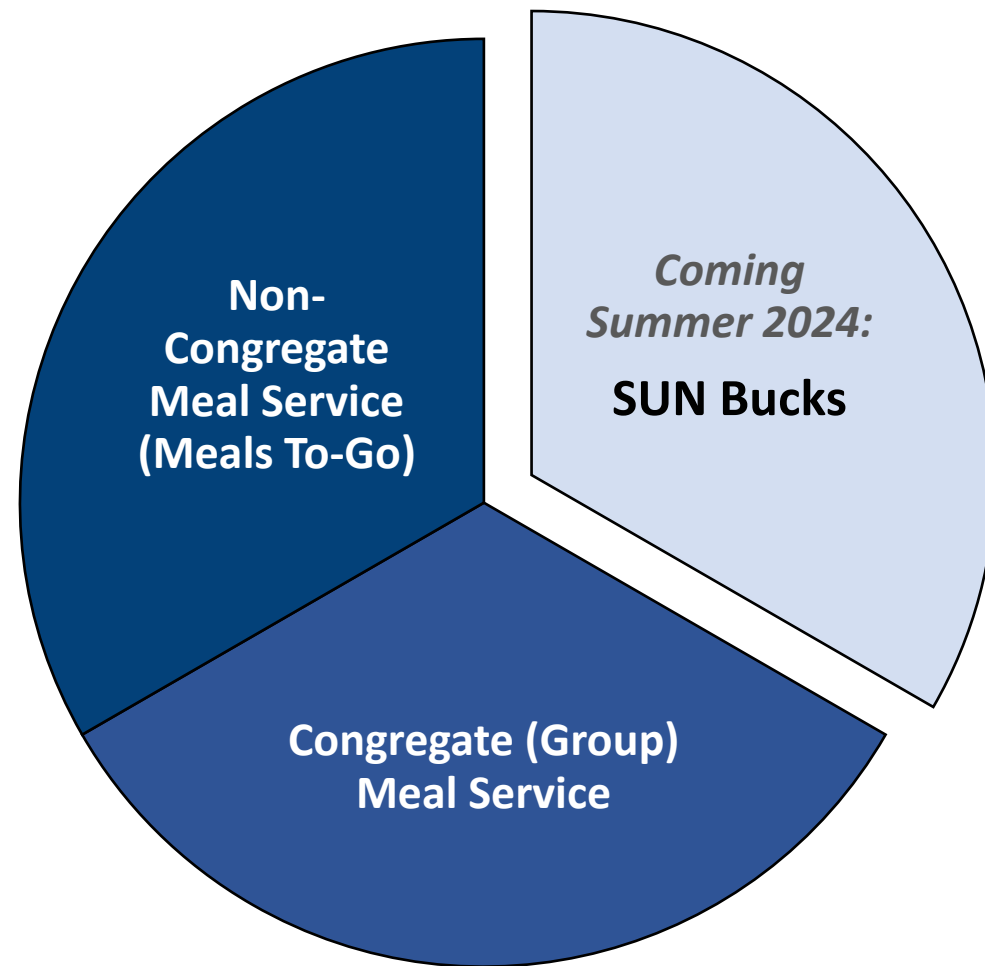
Children may live in areas that do not meet income requirements for summer nutrition meals.



Locating rural sponsors who can provide meals may be challenging due to transportation barriers.



89% of Group Meal Service sites require transportation to access, but only 30% of sites provide transportation.¹



¹ *Summer Meals Study. Summary. (azureedge.us)*

SUN BUCKS IS AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM, SUPPORTED BY A SUCCESSFUL 3-YEAR PILOT



Over a three-year period, USDA implemented a **successful** pilot program to provide electronic benefits in specific states and Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) to test its effectiveness. An evaluation assessment ¹ of the pilot found:



33% decrease in “very low” food insecurity in children



89% of participants redeemed their issued benefits



Increase in households’ food expenditures



Improved dietary quality for most of the nutrition outcomes surveyed



Increased whole grain, dairy, vegetable & fruit consumption



Decreased sugar-sweetened beverages consumption

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Alexandria, VA 22314; or

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