

PANDEMIC EBT PROGRAM:

WHAT FOSTER FAMILIES AND ADVOCATES NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS PANDEMIC EBT?

The Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (P-EBT) was passed by Congress to provide temporary food resources (SNAP) for all families with children who receive free or reduced lunch. A state can opt into the P-EBT program if schools have been closed for at least 5 consecutive days. A few key facts about the program include:

- Families receive an EBT card with the value of breakfast and lunch for the days that school was closed.
- Families do not need to apply directly for the benefit; others can apply on their behalf.
- Families can receive the EBT card via mail.
- Families can receive benefits backdated to the first day of school closure due to the pandemic.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE?

Children and youth in foster care are categorically eligible for free lunches. Once a state has an approved Pandemic EBT program, foster families (relative and nonrelative) could receive these benefits on behalf of the children in their care.

HOW TO ENSURE FOSTER FAMILIES RECEIVE THESE BENEFITS?

Federal guidance to states on the P-EBT program was released in mid-April. Many states are still in the process of setting up their programs. See [here](#) for current list of states with approved plans. Depending on where things stand in your state, here are things you can do:

- Join with other [advocates](#) to ensure your state acts on the opportunity to establish a P-EBT program, if they haven't already done so.
- Determine how your state is issuing benefits to households. Advocate for as seamless a process as possible for all families, including allowing foster families to automatically receive the benefit, or enroll through a simplified opt-in process.
- Work with your child welfare agency, private providers, advocates and foster parent groups to educate foster families about the benefit and, if necessary, ensure they get enrolled and receive the EBT card.

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

How states identify children eligible for P-EBT and distribute the benefits may vary based on their capacity to track information across their systems and their ingenuity in deploying responsive services and supports. This will impact how easily families will be able to access P-EBT benefits. For example,

- [California](#) will automatically distribute to all eligible families and has explicitly identified those in foster care as recipients.
- [Michigan](#) is relying on data from schools and mailing to the parent or guardian and address on record.
- [Illinois](#) is requiring families that have not previously received EBT/SNAP benefits to submit a brief application.

RESOURCES

- Food and Research Action Center (FRAC) overview of Pandemic EBT program: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/pandemic-ebt.pdf>
- USDA links to approved state plans and guidance to states: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt>
- For more information about CHAMPS see our website at www.fosteringchamps.org or contact Lynn Tiede for more information on this document at lynn@fosteringchamps.org