



As the world's leading voluntary organization focused on heart and brain health, The American Heart Association strongly supports ways to help more Minnesota kids get access to healthy foods.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for many, but school-aged children have been especially impacted by school closings, the transition to virtual learning and, for many, a disruption in how they eat. With the economic downturn due to the pandemic, one in five children were food insecure in 2020, and Black and Hispanic households are more food insecure than white families.

To combat the food and nutrition insecurity plaguing our nation, many schools were able to provide free breakfast and lunch to students regardless of their income during this difficult time. New research has shown that medium and large schools that used the universal meal model saw a cost savings while maintaining nutritional standards. Unfortunately, the waivers that enable this are only temporary, scheduled to expire in June 2022.

A Universal Schools Meals Program would provide equitable access to healthy meals for children, remove financial burdens for families, help children who might be on the edge of eligibility access nutritious meals and mitigate the shame some students face in their school cafeteria. Every child deserves access to healthy meals, and this program would successfully remove barriers and ensure children are getting the nutrition they need to thrive. We look forward to working with you as you move this provision forward and would like to help in any way we can.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacy Frelund".

Stacy Frelund
American Heart Association
Regional Team Lead (MN, IA, WI)