

Children's HealthWatch warns of risks to families under the current government shutdown

Every day matters for young children during the critical early years of brain and body growth. Even brief deprivation for infants and toddlers creates negative short and long term health consequences. With each passing day that the US government is shut down, as federal workers and contractors go without pay, and funding for food and housing assistance dwindles, we grow more and more concerned for the health of our patients and children across this country. As pediatricians and public health researchers, we know that when families are unable to afford food, housing, and other basic needs the health of young children and their families [suffers](#).

The health of children and families depends on reliable pay checks and seamless delivery of life-saving programs that are currently halted.

Over one million people, including young children, live in families that depend on the compensation of federal workers to pay for everyday living expenses, particularly those at the lower federal pay grades. As these workers are forced to either stay home or work without pay, many of them [struggle](#) to put food on the table, pay their mortgage or rent, and keep the heat and lights on. The longer this shutdown continues, the more they will be unable to make ends meet. The situation is unacceptable and threatens the health of America's public servants, their families, and all of our communities.

The shutdown is impacting millions of additional families with low and moderate incomes, who depend upon the economic activity and programs that our federal government contributes to our nation. Failure to fund key programs that help families afford food, a stable home, and other basic needs imperils our nation's children.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has made clear that if the shutdown continues they will no longer be able to provide vital rental assistance nor renew housing contracts, consequently placing the health and well-being of thousands of children and their families in danger. Families who need rental assistance to afford a safe, stable home for their children are at risk of eviction and potentially even homelessness because the shutdown has caused housing assistance contracts to expire for properties that are home to tens of thousands of renters. If the government is not open to process their contract renewals, evictions may begin. As [time progresses](#), more contracts will expire without renewals and public housing authorities will be unable to make subsidy payments to landlords. A [stable home](#) is a prescription for good health. Research shows housing assistance is associated with [better health outcomes](#). If HUD does not reopen, the housing stability of thousands of families, persons with disabilities and elders will be jeopardized.

Millions of families for whom the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and school meals provide vital nutrition are now [worried](#) that they may not have resources to put food on the table at home and at school if this shutdown continues. While we were pleased to see the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [guidance](#) issued on January 8th indicating there will be funding for SNAP and WIC through February, we are gravely concerned that this will not be sufficient to meet the needs of families who may

need to access the program. USDA's funds will likely cover those enrolled as of the deadline date of January 20th, but what of the families who may fall on hard times after that date, possibly even as a result of the shutdown? The nutrition assistance these families become eligible for as a result of the shutdown will likely not exist. If the shutdown continues beyond February, millions of young children and their families are at risk of losing their benefits and going hungry.

The consequences of this shutdown are unconscionable. The health and well-being of young children and their families is at risk with each passing day. The longer federal agencies that employ hundreds of thousands of public servants, and administer programs that are the bedrock of the health of millions more, remain shuttered, the more our nation's current and future health will suffer. The vitality of our country is at stake. An immediate end to the government shutdown is the essential first step to a solution.

[Children's HealthWatch](#), headquartered at Boston Medical Center, is a nonpartisan network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and policy and child health experts committed to improving children's health in America. Every day, in urban hospitals across the country, we collect data on children ages zero to four who are from families experiencing economic hardship. We analyze and release our findings to academics, legislators, and the public to inform public policies and practices that can give all children equal opportunities for healthy, successful lives.

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