

# Act Now: Co-sponsor legislation to fight severe child malnutrition globally

results

All children deserve a strong start in life, regardless of where they are born. As a leader in global health and development, the United States has been instrumental in [reducing](#) the number of countries with very high prevalence of child malnutrition by half over the past 20 years—from 67 to 33. But progress is not happening quickly enough. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, malnutrition underpinned [nearly half](#) of all deaths of children under 5 years old.

In 2020, nearly [150 million](#) children under 5 were stunted (too short for their age) and over [45 million](#) were affected by wasting (too thin for their height). Both stunting and wasting are forms of severe malnutrition and indicate that a child has not received adequate calories, nutrients, or both, to grow and develop to their full potential.

Experts predict that pandemic-related disruptions to food and health systems could cause up to a [50 percent](#) rise in global malnutrition—and wasting is [expected](#) to be the single biggest driver of increased child deaths. However, we may not see the full toll of COVID-19 on malnutrition for [several years](#). Each day counts for the world's children and their families—failure to act now will have devastating [long-term consequences](#) that affect poverty and malnutrition levels for years.



The first 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday is a period of rapid development. During this time children's brains grow faster than any other stage of life, so **it is essential that caregivers of young children have access to adequate food and information on safe feeding practices and nutrition.**

*Photo credit: Riccardo Gangale/USAID Kenya*

We know what works to fight malnutrition, but the global community has failed to prioritize nutrition in funding and policy priorities. [Less than 1 percent](#) of total global official development assistance goes toward nutrition.

Child malnutrition and poverty go hand-in-hand. **With COVID-19 reversing progress on global poverty for the first time in decades, bold U.S. leadership on nutrition is needed—especially for young children who face the [gravest impacts](#) of severe malnutrition.**

## Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act

The Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act ([S.2956/H.R.4693](#)) is led by Senators Christopher Coons (D-DE), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Tim Kaine (D-VA) and John Boozman (R-AR), and Representatives Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Michael McCaul (R-TX), Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA) and Young Kim (R-CA). This legislation better positions USAID, our country's main international development agency, to support countries to save more lives. The legislation focuses on increasing coverage for high impact, proven and affordable interventions, including providing prenatal vitamins, breastfeeding support, vitamin A supplementation for young kids, and emergency therapeutic foods to treat life-threatening severe malnutrition.

This legislation requires strong monitoring and evaluation of programs and aims to hold USAID accountable for providing reliable benchmarks to track progress against malnutrition. It will ensure USAID:

- **Increases coverage of highest-impact, evidence-based interventions and monitors progress with measurable goals and targets** by setting clear benchmarks and intended timelines for increasing coverage of key interventions.
- **Prioritizes the most vulnerable** by targeting interventions to underserved, marginalized, or impoverished communities, including children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- **Prioritizes country leadership and country-specific implementation plans**, including building capacity of local and community-based organizations and increasing the use of context and country-appropriate fortified staple foods.
- **Increases coordination within USAID and across U.S. agencies and multilateral partners** by establishing an inter-bureau Nutrition Leadership Council within USAID.
- **Leverages investments to increase impact of nutrition programs** and expands domestic resource mobilization for nutrition interventions, as well as encouraging investment into innovative and multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- **Is held accountable through rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and reporting requirements.**

The world is not on track to meet global goals on nutrition—but U.S. leadership can help change that. The policies in this legislation will make U.S. nutrition assistance more effective and help make sure that every child in the world has a chance to not only survive but thrive. **Will your boss co-sponsor the Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act (S.2956/H.R.4693)?**