

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.

When children do not receive the proper micronutrients and calories needed to fuel their growing brains and bodies, it can lead to lifelong disability and death. In 2020:

- **Nearly 150 million children under 5 were stunted.** Stunting is when children don't grow well over time. It's often identified by height – when children are too short for their age – and is the result of chronic and prolonged malnutrition. Stunting and poverty go hand in hand. When children are properly nourished they go on to be healthier, attend school for longer, and be more economically successful as adults than their peers who were stunted. This helps break the cycle of poverty and malnutrition for their own children.
- **Nearly 45 million children were wasted.** Wasting is when a child is too thin for their height. Wasting is often a sign of acute malnutrition from recent and severe weight loss, usually from a combination of a low-quality diet and illness. Children who are wasted have a much higher risk of death than well-nourished children.

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.



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

Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act

The Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act ([S.2956](#)) is led by Senators Christopher Coons (D-DE), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Tim Kaine (D-VA) and John Boozman (R-AR). After receiving more than 100 bipartisan co-sponsors, the House of Representatives [passed the bill 384-44](#). Now the Senate must do its part.

This bill will ensure U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) nutrition programs are more coordinated, effective, and accountable to our existing global nutrition efforts. This would ensure that we are maximizing U.S. investments and directing nutrition funding to the programs that save the most lives.

This bill would also require USAID to report to Congress on progress toward clear and defined benchmarks and goals. One of our first tools in the fight against malnutrition is information. We need more data so we can make sure our strategy works. Then we can tailor our approach to reach more children and their families with lifesaving and life-sustaining care. This legislation 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 accountable through rigorous monitoring and evaluation 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)?**