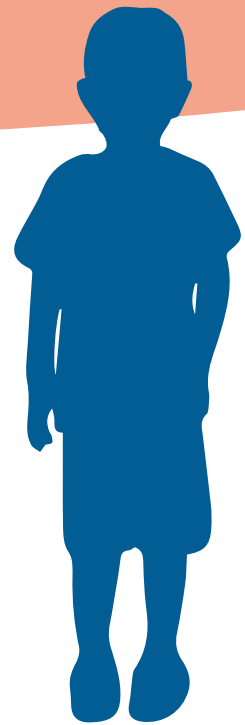


Why Nutrition for Children in Institutions Matters

Millions of children worldwide live in institution-based care like orphanages, group homes, and residential facilities, many waiting years for family placement. Proper nutrition during childhood, particularly in the first **1,000** days of life is essential for healthy physical growth and brain development. For children in institution-based care, many of whom have experienced neglect, prenatal risks, or limited stimulation, and may have a disability, adequate nutrition is essential. It is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of survival, development, and long-term health.



Evidence Nutritional Risks and Their Consequences

Children in institution-based care face significant nutritional challenges. Research findings reveal alarming rates of undernutrition:



Stunting
(low height-for-age)
9-72%



Wasting
(low weight-for-height)
0-27%



Underweight
(low weight-for-age)
7-79%



Overweight/Obesity
(BMI-for-age)
10-32%

Inconsistent diet quality and micronutrient deficiencies, including low calcium, iron, and vitamin levels, are widespread. Many children are undernourished when they reunite with families or join families through adoption.

The consequences of poor nutrition are profound and lasting. Undernourished children often experience:

- Impaired physical growth
- Weakened immune systems and higher illness susceptibility
- Cognitive and neurodevelopmental delays, including lower IQ, learning difficulties, and behavioral issues

Even when nutrition improves later, early deficits can have irreversible effects on brain development and educational outcomes.

Why Institution-based Care Settings Often Fail to Meet Nutritional Needs

Institution-based care is not ideal for children's full and healthy development. Systemic and structural barriers contribute to poor nutrition in care:



Budget constraints

Limited funding often results in reliance on inexpensive, low-nutrient foods with minimal dietary diversity and contributes to high child-to-caregiver ratios.



Inadequate caregiver training

Many caregivers lack practical knowledge of age-appropriate feeding practices, basic hygiene, and nutritional requirements, as well as the skills needed to effectively support children with disabilities.



Lack of individualized care or health assessments

Limited routine growth monitoring or tailored nutrition plans for children with disabilities plus limited one-on-one care for children.



Environmental factors

Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and frequent illness further compromise nutrient absorption and increase energy demands.

Implications and Required Actions

To safeguard children's health and rights, the following measures are essential:

- 1** Recognize adequate nutrition as a basic right for all children in institution-based care.
- 2** Implement regular growth and dietary monitoring, including height, weight, head circumference, and nutrient intake.
- 3** Ensure nutritionally balanced and diverse diets, with adequate protein, fruits, vegetables, and supplements as needed.
- 4** Provide comprehensive caregiver training on responsive feeding, hygiene, and nutrition needs.
- 5** Offer post-placement nutritional support for children transitioning to family-based care to promote catch-up growth and healthy development.

Conclusion A Matter of Rights

Every child has the right to adequate nutrition and the opportunity to reach their full potential. For children in institution-based care, ensuring proper nutrition is not merely a health intervention – it is a right that underpins their survival, development, and dignity.