

New Research: For Many Working Families Loss or Reduction of SNAP Benefits Can Cause Serious Harm

Research by Children's HealthWatch and others has shown that SNAP participation promotes child health and development by helping families afford a nutritionally adequate diet.^{i,ii,iii} Families lose this protection when they have been cut off of SNAP or receive reduced benefits due to an income increase from a job, household size changes, receipt of tax credits, child support or disability benefits. In the Children's HealthWatch five-city sample of 21,781 low-income families with children under the age of four, 2,986 (14 percent) experienced a loss of SNAP benefits and 2,227 (10 percent) reported a reduced SNAP benefit between 1998 and 2012.

We found that:

- 1. Young children in families that experience a loss or a reduction in SNAP benefits due to an increase in income are more likely to:**
 - a. **Be food insecure^{iv}** (a known child health risk),
 - b. **Be in poor health**
 - c. **Have developmental delays****than young children in families whose benefits do not decrease**
- 2. Families that report losing SNAP benefits when they exceed SNAP income eligibility limits are more likely to**
 - a. **forego needed health care due to inability to afford care**
 - b. **be food insecure**
 - c. **struggle to pay for heat and utilities****than families whose benefits do not decrease**

In the group of families that lost SNAP, 93 percent reported someone in the household was employed. Seventy-nine percent of those whose SNAP benefits were reduced had at least one employed household member compared to 63 percent of those who had no decrease in their benefit. **Earning more income should always be a positive step for families who are working towards economic self-sufficiency.** Self-sufficiency is defined as making enough money to meet basic needs without public subsidies or private assistance.^v

Policy Implications

For working families with young children, low wages make it very difficult to pay for basic necessities, such as food, housing, utilities, and child care. Public assistance programs help to reduce this gap between low wages and basic family needs. Such programs are important work supports and are intended to help families move towards economic self-sufficiency. Therefore, we must:

Improve the SNAP calculation to reflect real costs of living, by using the Low Cost Food Plan as the basis for benefit calculation and removing the shelter cap

Reduced or lost SNAP benefits due to income increases exacerbate families' already difficult task of putting nutritious food on the table. Children's HealthWatch, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and others have shown that the SNAP benefit calculation results in benefit amounts that are too low because they are based on outdated assumptions about the cost of a healthy diet. Current benefit levels do not sufficiently support families in purchasing healthy food options.^{vi,vii,viii} The Low Cost Food Plan (instead of the current Thrifty Food Plan) would be a healthier, more realistic basis for calculating benefits. Housing costs are also not adequately reflected in the calculation, especially in high-rent areas. Removing the cap on the shelter deduction would help to address this problem. It is important to ensure that the SNAP benefit calculation rises to reflect the real expenses and income

of families in order contribute to a smoother benefit decline. Minimally, extending the benefit levels in place under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will ensure that this problem is not exacerbated.

Increase eligibility limits and remove asset tests by preserving categorical eligibility to encourage self-sufficiency

SNAP calculations should encourage progress toward self-sufficiency, such as saving, by removing asset tests and accounting for temporary income increases (e.g. holiday overtime). Higher eligibility limits help families to work towards economic independence and ensure they have an adequate diet. Categorical eligibility accomplishes several of these goals for low-income families by allowing states to streamline administration for caseworkers, raise the gross income limit for eligibility (all applicants must still meet the same *net* income limit), and waive the asset test for certain groups, such as families with children, and disabled and elderly households.

These findings demonstrate the importance of SNAP to the health and development of young children and to their families' well-being. **Conversely, there are unintended consequences to cutting off or reducing SNAP benefits to families who are working toward economic self-sufficiency; such reductions actually counteract SNAP's protective health and developmental effects.** As Congress takes up consideration of the Farm Bill and the reauthorization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is considered, as pediatric health professionals we urge Members of Congress to assess the far-reaching impacts that changes to SNAP will have in both the short and long term for the health of children and families and our economy as a whole.

**Minimum Wage, Fair Market Rent and SNAP Eligibility Limits for Households with Children
by Children's HealthWatch State**

State	Minimum Wage	Fair Market Rent 2 Bedroom ^{ix}	Gross Income Limit	Asset Limit
Arkansas ^x	\$6.25/hr to \$7.25/hr	\$594/month	130% FPL	\$2,000
Maryland ^{xi}	\$7.25/hr	\$1,291/month	200% FPL	no asset test
Massachusetts ^{xii}	\$8.00/hr	\$1,369/month	200% FPL	no asset test
Minnesota ^{xiii}	\$5.25/hr to \$7.25/hr	\$904/month	165% FPL	no asset test
Pennsylvania ^{xiv}	\$7.25/hr	\$835/month	160% FPL	\$5,500

FPL: Federal Poverty Level

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www.childrenshealthwatch.org

ⁱ The SNAP Vaccine, Children's HealthWatch 2012

ⁱⁱ Food Stamps as Medicine, Children's HealthWatch 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ SNAP and Public Health; The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving the Health and Well-being of Americans, Food Research and Action Center, 2013. Available at: http://frac.org/pdf/snap_and_public_health_2013.pdf

^{iv} Food insecurity is inadequate access to enough food for a healthy and safe life.

^v The Center for Women's Welfare, <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/standard.html>

^{vi} "Real Cost of a Healthy Diet: 2011", Children's HealthWatch, 2011.

^{vii} Caswell J and Yaktine A. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Examining the Evidence to Define Benefit Adequacy" Institute of Medicine. 2013

^{viii} Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in Order to Provide Adequate Allotments for SNAP Beneficiaries.” Food Research and Action Center. 2012.

^{ix} Bravve E, Bolton M, Couch L, Crowley S. Out of Reach 2012. National Low Income Housing Coalition. 2012.

^x State of Arkansas: http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dco/dco_docs/QuickReferenceSNAPEligibilityOctober2012.pdf

^{xi} Getting Food Stamps in Maryland. MD Hunger Soltutions, 2012. Available at:
http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/maryland_getting_foodstamps_guide_2012.pdf

^{xii} MassResources.org: <http://www.massresources.org/snap-financial-eligibility.html>

^{xiii} Benefits.gov: <http://www.benefits.gov/benefits/benefit-details/4782>

^{xiv} PA Department of Public Welfare:
<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/foradults/supplementalnutritionassistanceprogram/index.htm>