

BMC pediatricians find increase in SNAP benefits associated with healthier children

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Pediatric researchers from Boston Medical Center (BMC), in partnership with Children's HealthWatch investigators in Boston, Minneapolis, Little Rock, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, have found that higher benefit amounts in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) protected the health and well-being of very young, low-income children during a period of great financial hardship for many families in America. These findings were released as a policy brief on Oct. 12.

In April 2009, the American Recovery and [Reinvestment Act](#) (ARRA) raised SNAP benefits across the board by a minimum of 13.6 percent.

According to the researchers, in the two years after the benefit increase children in families receiving SNAP were 15 percent more likely to be classified as "well children" than young children whose families were eligible for but did not receive SNAP. A "well child" is defined as neither overweight nor [underweight](#) and whose parents report that s/he is in good [health](#), has never been hospitalized and is developing normally for his/her age.

"These results demonstrate that the improved SNAP benefit levels were a more effective "dosage" for sustaining children's health compared to pre-increase benefit levels, which were too low to protect against major health impacts in our population of young, low-income children," explained Deborah Frank, MD, director of BMC's Grow Clinic for Children and Founder and Principal Investigator of Children's HealthWatch.

According to the researchers, the latest scientific evidence shows that the basic foundation for children's health and [academic success](#) is established in their first three years of life. "As we seek to ensure that all children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn, we must make sure that families have the resources to nourish their children and keep them well in their early years,"

added Frank, who is also an endowed professor in [Child Health](#) and Well-Being in the department of Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine.

SNAP is an effective public health intervention designed to help meet the nutritional needs of American families in difficult times. The improved benefits are set to end in 2014 and may be considered for cuts in current deficit discussions, yet previous research showed that benefit levels before the ARRA increase were too low to afford a healthy diet. The ARRA legislation raised benefits closer to the actual cost of healthy food. "Health care strives to be evidence based - social policy should too. These results are evidence that higher SNAP benefits protect young children's health and should be sustained," she added.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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