Promoting Healthy Childhood Behaviors with Financial Incentives in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

Date Posted:

Nov 05, 2021



Have you heard of the state-sponsored incentives and lotteries to encourage COVID-19 vaccination? This is just one of the ways financial incentives are increasingly being used to promote healthy behaviors. Unfortunately, a recent study of these incentives found no significant association with daily vaccination rates and no significant difference in vaccination trends between states with and without incentives. Still, incentives can be effective in other circumstances, and the task at-hand for researchers and policymakers is to explore which financial incentive design features work best to encourage different health behaviors.

While researchers have focused most financial incentive studies on adults, emerging research among children indicates they may be more sensitive to nominal incentives and could respond better to interventions to change habits, such as taking a daily dose of medicine.

In a recently published review of the research, we explored the existing evidence for designing incentives for children. First, we highlighted general considerations for child health incentive interventions. We then analyzed findings from randomized trials investigating key design features of financial incentive interventions, including loss- versus gain-framed incentives and immediate versus delayed incentives, as well as incentive size effects on a range of childhood behaviors. Additionally, we highlighted a few key distinctions between what has been found in adults and children and identified several areas of focus for further research.

Those designing and evaluating incentive interventions can use these findings to inform their work, and we also indicate future areas of exploration with respect to designing incentives for children that could improve health.

Carina Flaherty is a former clinical research assistant at PolicyLab.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director ***Lauren Walens****.*

Chén Kenyon
Chén Kenyon
MD, MSHP
Faculty Member