Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Experiences with Pandemic Food Access Among Clinic-based Community Supported Agriculture Program Participants

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The COVID-19 pandemic intensified food insecurity (FI) across the country, and families with children were disproportionately affected. This study explores experiences with FI and social resources during the pandemic among families participating in a free, clinic-based community supported agriculture (CSA) program. Free weekly boxes of organic produce from local farms were distributed to pediatric caregivers for 12 weeks at two pediatric outpatient centers associated with a children's hospital in a low-income, urban area. Demographics and a two-question FI screen were collected. Caregivers were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews about experiences with FI and community or federal nutrition programs during the pandemic. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Content analysis with constant comparison was used to code interviews inductively and identify emerging themes.The 31 interviewees were predominantly female; more than half were Black, FI, and SNAP beneficiaries. Study participants were more likely to have repeat participation in the CSA program. Interviews elucidated four major themes of barriers to food access during the pandemic: (1) fluctuations in price, availability, and quality of food; (2) financial strain; (3) faster consumption with all family members home; (4) shopping challenges: infection fears, store closures, childcare. SNAP, WIC, and school meal programs were generally facilitators to food access. Increased SNAP allotments were particularly useful, and delays of mailed WIC benefits were challenging. This qualitative study describes facilitators and barriers to food access among clinic-based CSA program participants during the pandemic. The findings highlight areas for further exploration and potential policy intervention.

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