Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

State Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer and Food Insufficiency

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Importance: Children who receive free or reduced-price school meals often face increased hunger during the summer, when school-based meals are unavailable. Since 2024, states may opt into implementing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (SEBT) program, which provides low-income families a one-time, federally funded grocery benefit of $120 per school-aged child.

Objective: To examine the association between state implementation of SEBT and subsequent household food insufficiency among SEBT-eligible, low-income households with school-aged children.

Design, setting, and participants: This cross-sectional study used demographic and health data from January to September 2024 cycles of the nationally representative Household Pulse Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau. Eligible households included children aged 5 to 17 years who were eligible for SEBT based on reported Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) receipt and/or income 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or below. Data analysis was performed between April 2025 and August 2026.

Exposure: State-level implementation of SEBT between May and August 2024 (treated vs untreated states).

Main outcomes and measures: Household food insufficiency, measured by a respondent indicating they sometimes or often did not have enough food in their household during the previous 7 days.

Results: Among 31 059 SEBT-eligible households (1090 Asian [3.5%], 5692 Black [18.3%], 5845 Hispanic [18.8%], 21 166 White [68.1%]), the majority of households in both untreated (18 states) and treated (33 states, including District of Columbia) states had income below 185% FPL (10 233 [93.4%] and 17 105 [92.0%], respectively). Among 11 334 households in untreated states, 4392 received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (42.6%) and 1196 received Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits (12.3%); among 19 725 households in treated states, 9512 (50.4%) received SNAP, and 2126 (12.3%) received WIC. Among low-income families (185% FPL or below) with school-aged children, household food insufficiency increased by 4.0 percentage points (95% CI, 2.1 to 5.9 percentage points) during the summer compared with nonsummer months. Only a mean (SD) 30.3% (8.3) of SEBT-eligible households in treated states reported receiving SEBT. State implementation of SEBT was not significantly associated with a change in food insufficiency among SEBT-eligible households (0.8 percentage points; 95% CI, -2.4 to 4.0 percentage points).

Conclusions and relevance: In this cross-sectional study, household food insufficiency increased significantly during summer months among low-income households of school-aged children and state implementation of SEBT was not significantly associated with a change in food insufficiency among SEBT-eligible households.

Journal:

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