

New report finds food prices in Boston and Philadelphia 50 percent higher

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Researchers from the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) at Boston Medical Center and Drexel University School of Public Health, have reported that low-income families in Boston and Philadelphia using food stamp benefits do not have the financial resources to buy the Thrifty Food Plan, the standardized food plan used as the basis for calculating food stamp benefits by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Even families receiving the maximum food stamp benefit would have to spend an additional \$2,250 in Boston and \$3,165 in Philadelphia annually to purchase the Thrifty Food Plan.

C-SNAP's latest report, "Coming up short: High food costs outstrip food stamp benefits," shows that, on average, the maximum food stamp benefit is insufficient to buy the Thrifty Food Plan in any size food store in participating neighborhoods in Boston and Philadelphia. Moreover, the researchers found it very difficult for families in the surveyed neighborhoods to find healthy foods – on average 27 percent of the items that make up the Thrifty Food Plan were missing, predominantly the healthier options like whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and low-fat milk and cheese.

As part of the Real Cost of a Healthy Diet Project, researchers at BMC and Drexel University School of Public Health in Philadelphia visited food stores in Boston and Philadelphia neighborhoods to price each item in the Thrifty Food Plan. In Boston, the average monthly cost of the Thrifty Food Plan was \$752, which is 39 percent higher than the maximum monthly food benefit for a family of four. A family would

need an additional \$210 per month to purchase a healthy diet. The average monthly cost in Philadelphia was higher; \$805 or 49 percent above the maximum benefit, requiring an additional \$263 for a healthy diet.

"With food and energy costs continuing to rise and an economy in decline, we are very concerned about low-income families' ability to provide enough healthy food for their children over the coming months," said Julie Thayer, MS, MPH, the lead author of the report. C-SNAP's research shows that a lack of adequate food (food insecurity) puts young children at increased risk for poor health, hospitalizations, iron-deficiency anemia, and developmental delays, but, conversely, young children who receive food stamps are 26 percent less likely to be food insecure.

"Our research has shown repeatedly that Food Stamps are 'good medicine' for families who are food insecure. As Congress is considering a second economic stimulus package, the sensible approach is to invest in the Food Stamp Program, which helps vulnerable families purchase nutritious foods needed for their health and boosts local economic activity," added John Cook, PhD, a co-principal investigator at BMC.

"The rising costs of food and fuel could force many families to face the decision of either eating or heating their homes in the coming months. We call it eat or heat," said Mariana Chilton, PhD, MPH, the principal investigator for The Philadelphia GROW Project and assistant professor at the Drexel University School of Public Health. "The Food Stamp Program can help to ease the burden of rising costs for these at-risk families, and help support the proper growth and development of children."

The report and additional resources can be found at: [c-](#)

snap.org/page.php?id=131 .

Source: Boston University

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