

BMC pediatricians warn that cuts to SNAP program will harm children

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(Boston)—In a commentary in this week's issue of *Lancet*, pediatricians from Boston Medical Center (BMC) call the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program), one of America's most cost-effective and successful public health programs in the country. According to the authors, not only does it make life much better for children and families, it also saves society money.

Unfortunately they also point out that despite convincing evidence of the beneficial effects of SNAP on child health, legislators have targeted SNAP for cuts as they struggle to address the federal budget, lagging economy and the U.S. farm bill.

"SNAP acts as a vaccine against food insecurity and hunger," said lead author Deborah Frank, MD, Director of the Grow Clinic for Children at BMC and Founder and Principal Investigator of Children's HealthWatch. Food insecurity is the measure of a households' inability to get enough healthful food in socially acceptable ways for all its members to live active, healthy lives. "Our research consortium, Children's HealthWatch, has for more than a decade accumulated data on the impacts of food insecurity and interventions to decrease food insecurity among low-income babies and young children," Frank explained. She and her colleagues found the youngest Americans and their families are at highest risk of food insecurity.

"Infants and [young children](#) in the first three years of life, the most critical period for the growth of the body and brain, are the most physiologically vulnerable to lasting ill effects of food insecurity on

health and learning. Our research, and that of many others, has convinced us that food insecurity—which affects approximately 16 million U.S. children (21.6 percent)—is one of the greatest public health threats that our nation faces. SNAP is the most important and effective [public health](#) program we have for reducing the health impacts of food insecurity," added Frank, who is also professor of Child Health and Well-being at Boston University School of Medicine.

Evidence for the beneficial effect of SNAP on childhood food insecurity is strong according to the authors. SNAP benefits, when received by pregnant women, are associated with decreased rates of low birth weight. In households with children, SNAP reduces the risk of [food insecurity](#); enhances intake of B vitamins, iron, and calcium; lowers the risk of anemia, obesity, poor [health](#), developmental delays, hospitalization for failure to thrive, low academic test scores, and reports for child abuse or neglect. Children aged five through nine, from SNAP-participating families had better academic outcomes and less obesity than non-participating families.

"Scientific evidence shows that SNAP is a wise investment in the brains and bodies of American [children](#), an investment that should be increased, not curtailed," stressed Frank.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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