

Program puts a dent in summer hunger

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When schools close their doors for the summer, many low-income children who rely on subsidized breakfasts and lunches don't know when they will get their next meal. An innovative program to fill this gap could serve as a model for communities looking to help feed struggling families when school is out.

Results of a study evaluating the impact of the summer feeding program will be presented on Sunday, April 26 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in San Diego.

In early 2012, Lisa Chamberlain, MD, MPH, FAAP, a pediatrician at a community clinic in East Palo Alto, Calif., and associate professor of general pediatrics at Stanford School of Medicine, observed a sharp rise in the number of parents who said they did not have enough money to buy food for their families. Dr. Chamberlain, and Janine Bruce, DrPH, director of the pediatric advocacy program at Stanford School of Medicine, partnered with the local [school](#) district, YMCA and Revolution Foods to establish a program to serve needy families during the summer of 2013.

The program, which used federal funds and private donations, was expanded in the summer of 2014 to provide breakfast and lunch to children, lunch to adults in the community and take-home meals for families. Meals were distributed at a local elementary school, where children were attending various summer school programs.

To date, the program has served more than 33,000 meals to over 1,200 children and adults.

"Over the past couple of years, I have witnessed firsthand how [children](#) can face seemingly contradictory problems of hunger and obesity," said study author Steve Ko, a medical student at Stanford School of Medicine. "This is, at least partly, a result of poverty and limited access to nutritious foods and compensatory overeating. Without appropriate intervention now, these youth will grow up to face myriad health problems."

In addition to providing meals, researchers surveyed participants at the beginning and end of the five-week program to assess levels of food insecurity, defined as being without reliable access to a sufficient amount of affordable, nutritious food. They also interviewed 35 families about their experiences with food insecurity and access to local food resources.

Results showed that 36 percent of families were food insecure at the beginning of the program compared to 22 percent at the end. More than 64 percent had experienced food insecurity at some time during the past year. Factors contributing to [food insecurity](#) were higher living costs and lower wages, according to interviews. Many families were aware of local food resources but often lacked transportation to get there. Some noted that they struggled more during the holidays than during the summer due to increased expenses for gifts and heating costs.

"While our program has worked to address some of these urgent needs, an even greater collaborative effort—involving parties such as the local government, community organizers, policy-makers, parents and many more—is needed to ensure that a child does not go hungry and has access to healthy food options in the community," Mr. Ko said. "Such, I believe, is a right that any child should and must have."

More information: Dr. Bruce will present "Addressing Summer Hunger: A Community-Campus Partnership" from 9:30-9:45 a.m. PT Sunday, April 26. To view the study abstract, go to http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS15L1_2145.7

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