PolicyLab Researcher Helps Address Summer Hunger Through Complete Eats Program

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In the U.S., nearly 22 million low-income children depend on free or reduced-price meals during the school year. Summer, however, can be a time of hunger for those who depend on the program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides meals through the Summer Food Service Program, yet many families either don't know this option exists or aren't accessing the program. Here in Pennsylvania, only 1 in 10 students who use free and reduced-price school lunch accessed summer meals from the USDA's program in 2016.

PolicyLab researcher Danielle Cullen, MD, MPH, MSHP, and her research team saw an opportunity to utilize the emergency department (ED) as a setting to provide meals for kids during the summer months. She and her team created the Complete Eats program to offer free meals to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's patients and all kids between the ages of 2 and 18 once roomed in the ED. As part of the program, the researchers evaluated caregivers' awareness about the federal Summer Food Service Program and found that only 37% knew about the program before their visit to the ED. After participation in Complete Eats, however, nearly 80% planned to use a summer meal site in their community. You can read more about Dr. Cullen's research, and watch the video below that details how Complete Eats is helping low-income families.

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