Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

The Impact of Food Insecurity in Early Childhood in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

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Nearly 13 million children across the United States—and more than 1 in 5 children in Philadelphia alone—experience food insecurity. Food insecurity adversely affects children's health, school performance and behavior.

A recent study in *Pediatrics* confirmed that food insecurity, particularly in a child's earliest years, negatively impacts growth and development. Researchers found that among children under the age of 4 years, those who were food insecure were more likely to have fair or poor health at nearly every age during this critical period. At the same time, these children were not at increased risk for obesity or underweight during the same ages—something the authors initially hypothesized would be the case.

The results also emphasized the importance of recognizing the effects on families beyond nutrition—such as caregiver stress—which often occur alongside food insecurity. The authors highlighted that screening questions can be beneficial in identifying challenges families face in order to connect them to necessary services.

At PolicyLab, we are exploring intergenerational approaches to assist both children and caregivers, such as screening for food insecurity, teaching Home Plate to empower low-income families to prepare healthy meals at home, implementing Complete Eats to provide summer meals for kids, and providing food to families through CHOP's Food Pharmacy. It is our hope that we can continue to innovate through research to ensure children have the ability to grow and thrive.

Gia Polk is a communications intern at PolicyLab and an undergraduate student at La Salle University studying communications.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director Lauren Walens.

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