

SUMMARY OF SUMMER ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER FOR CHILDREN: EVALUATION FINDINGS FOR THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION YEAR 2012

Overview

The Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demonstration offered a rigorous test of the impact of providing a monthly benefit of \$60 per child - using existing electronic benefit transfer (EBT) systems - on food insecurity among children during the summer when school meals are not available. In the second year of operations, when the demonstration was fully implemented, the evaluation found that this approach could reach up to 75 percent of eligible children and reduce the prevalence of very low food security among children by about one-third.

Background and Methodology

Children's development, health, and well-being depend on access to a safe and secure source of food. Many children have limited access to free or reduced-price (FRP) meals during the summer months when they are not in school. Congressional appropriations provided for fiscal year 2010 enabled the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to initiate the Summer Food for Children demonstrations, which developed and tested alternative methods of providing access to food for low-income children during the summer.

The Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demonstration began as a

proof-of-concept in the summer of 2011 and expanded to serve additional sites and children during the summer of 2012. The SEBTC demonstration aims to mitigate summer child food insecurity by leveraging existing EBT systems used by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The SEBTC evaluation randomly assigned treatment and control households in 14 demonstration sites in 10 States and Indian Tribal Organizations. Grantees used two approaches to recruit households to participate—asking them to return forms to indicate they wanted to participate (opt-in or active consent) or to return forms to indicate they did not wish to participate (opt-out or passive consent). Consenting treatment households received approximately \$60 in benefits per child per month. The evaluation conducted two surveys, in the spring and summer, to calculate the impact of the SEBTC benefit on food security.

Implementation

All 14 sites were able to successfully recruit and enroll households in spring 2012 and administer SEBTC benefits during the summer of 2012. Taken together, the 14 sites issued benefits to nearly 37,000 households with 66,800 eligible children.

The SEBTC Program Design

Eligibility

Households with children from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade who are certified for free or reduced-priced meals in the demonstration area School Food Authorities

Benefit

Approximately \$60 per month per eligible child—comparable to the cost of Federal free lunches plus breakfast reimbursement during the school year

Benefits Administration

Benefits are provided to households during the summer on EBT cards and prorated for partial months. They are administered under the SNAP or WIC EBT delivery models

Coverage

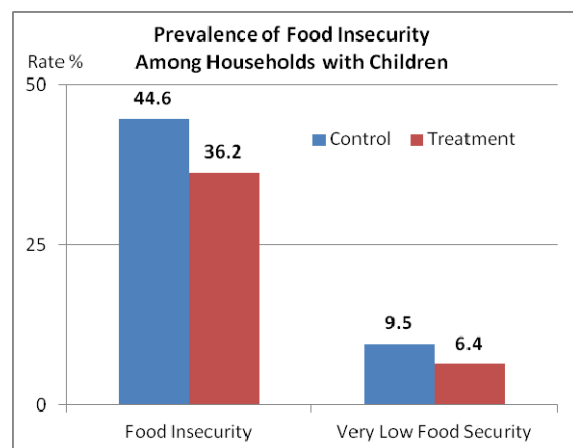
Potential SEBTC coverage rates, defined as the percentage of households that would participate in the program should participation not be limited by demonstration or funding constraints, varied widely across demonstration areas, from about 30 percent in sites with active consent to about 75 percent in sites with passive consent. Even with this variation, the percentage of eligible children reached at all SEBTC sites exceeded the percentage of eligible children served through traditional summer feeding programs (about 15 percent).¹

Benefit Redemption

Across all sites, almost 90 percent of households who received SEBTC used the benefit at least once during summer. Participating households, on average, redeemed between 71 and 99 percent of their issued benefits, totaling \$9.3 million in summer benefits. The average amount redeemed per child ranged from \$118 in Cherokee Nation to \$173 in the Oregon expansion site. Across all sites 45 percent of households used all of their benefits in at least 1 month, and 30 percent spent all of their benefits for the summer.

Food Insecurity

Among the group participating in the demonstration, SEBTC reduced very low food security among children (VLFS-C) during the summer of 2012. The prevalence of VLFS-C was reduced from 9.5 percent in the control group to 6.4 percent in the treatment group. Thus, SEBTC eliminated VLFS-C for about one-third of the children who would otherwise have experienced it. Analyses of related measures of food security—general food insecurity among children plus measures of both severe and general food insecurity among adults and households as a whole—indicate similarly large proportional reductions.



Summary

The full implementation year demonstration of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children exhibited large, significant reductions in the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security among children and indications of high coverage rates (especially when households must opt out of participation). The demonstration and evaluation will continue through the summer of 2013 to determine if similarly positive results can be obtained at half the benefit level (\$30 per month per child).

For More Information

Collins et al. (2012). *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Full Implementation Year*. Prepared by Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus under Contract No. AG-3198-C-11-002. Alexandria, VA: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer, Hoke Wilson. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/DemoProjects/SummerFood/Default.htm

¹ Food Resource and Action Center, *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*, June 2012.