



**September 2016**  
Online Version

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) is pleased to release this new issue of *FRAC Focus: Obesity and Poverty*. This periodical e-newsletter focuses on obesity and low-income children and adults, looking at the intersection of obesity, low income, food insecurity, the federal nutrition programs, and federal food and nutrition policy.

September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, and also a month that marks the return to school for many of the nation's children. With this in mind, the e-newsletter feature article provides an overview of some of the research on the "Role of the School Meals Programs in Improving Food Security, Dietary Intake, and Weight Outcomes."

The six *Research Highlights* that follow provide digests of, and links to, peer-reviewed studies on a variety of topics, including the role of the school food environment and federal nutrition programs in obesity prevention, and disparities in diet quality by income.

The issue concludes with seven summaries of, and links to, important resources and reports recently published by national organizations, government agencies, and policy researchers.

**New from FRAC!**

**Role of the School Meals Programs in Improving Food Security, Dietary Intake, and Weight Outcomes**

Food insecurity and poor nutrition are detrimental to the health and well-being of children and adolescents in both the short term and long term. Research conducted over the past several decades shows that the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program play a critical role in improving food security, dietary intake, weight outcomes, health, and learning, especially among the nation's most vulnerable children. This brief reviews just some of the research published in the past

decade that most directly connects the positive outcomes of the school meal programs to the needs of low-income children in terms of food security, dietary intake, and weight. [More...](#)

## Research Highlights

### ***Federal Nutrition Programs***

#### **The school food environment and obesity prevention: progress over the last decade**

Research conducted over the past decade shows that school food programs and policies — including school meals, local school wellness policies, competitive food and beverage policies, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program — play a critical role in improving children’s diet, weight, and health, according to a recent literature review in *Current Obesity Reports*. [More...](#)

#### **Revised WIC food package and children’s diet quality**

Revisions to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food packages are associated with higher dietary quality among children in WIC households, according to a recent study in *Pediatrics*. [More...](#)

#### **Nutrition assistance programs: cause or solution to obesity?**

A new review article in *Current Obesity Reports* concludes that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) “may play a positive role in preventing obesity.” [More...](#)

#### **Fruit and vegetable, fat, and sugar-sweetened beverage intake among low-income mothers living in neighborhoods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) is associated with favorable impacts on fruit, vegetable, and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among low-income mothers, based on a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. [More...](#)

### ***Disparities***

#### **Dietary intake among U.S. adults, 1999–2012**

A study in *JAMA* finds many improvements in self-reported dietary habits between 1999 and 2012 among U.S. adults, but disparities in diet quality persist or have worsened based on race/ethnicity, education level, and income level. [More...](#)

#### **Adverse family experiences and obesity in children and adolescents in the United States**

A new study in *Preventive Medicine* finds that cumulative exposure to two or more adverse family experiences (AFEs) is associated with child obesity, and certain experiences (including hardship due to family income) are more strongly associated than others. [More...](#)

## In Case You Missed It!

### **New Reports and Resources**

The reports and resources highlighted below were chosen because of their focus — in whole or in part — on obesity, hunger, and the federal nutrition programs among poor and low-income populations.

#### **Food and Nutrition: Hard Truths About Healthy Eating**

A data brief from the New York Academy of Medicine, based on survey data and focus groups, explores factors that impact the health and well-being of primarily low-income people living in New York City. Study participants recognized the importance of diet on health and desired healthier food. However, they described a number of challenges in adopting positive eating behaviors, including high stress, limited time, the high cost of healthy food, and limited availability of healthy food in their communities. Study participants also described the inadequacy of government assistance benefits given the high cost of living.

### **Declining Childhood Obesity Rates: Where Are We Seeing Signs of Progress?**

An updated research brief from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation summarizes recent child obesity trends, including declining rates in some school districts, cities, counties, and states across the nation. Places with declining rates have initiated a wide range of strategies to support healthier choices and behaviors, such as expanding the use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits at farmers' markets and improving the foods offered in child care. While promising trends have emerged over the past decade, progress has been more limited in communities of color and low-income communities. The brief concludes with a number of recommendations to achieve additional progress (e.g., prioritizing and funding efforts to improve food access).

### **The State of Obesity 2016: Better Policies for a Healthier America** (pdf)

This annual report from Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation examines obesity trends and policies addressing obesity, and includes sections on food insecurity, food access, adverse childhood experiences, and toxic stress. The report identifies signs of progress in addressing the nation's obesity problem, such as the leveling off of the national child obesity rate and declines in adult obesity in four states. However, obesity rates remain too high and disparities persist. The report highlights positive nutrition, physical activity, and obesity-related policies and programs, including screening patients for food insecurity in healthcare settings and connecting them to the federal nutrition programs.

### **Americans' Eating Patterns and Time Spent on Food: The 2014 Eating & Health Module Data**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service released a new report describing Americans' eating and other food-related time-use patterns (e.g., grocery shopping, meal preparation, time spent eating while engaging in another activity). Among the many findings, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants spend more time in food preparation on an average day than non-participants (50 minutes versus 36 minutes). Similarly, participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children spend more time in food preparation on an average day than non-participants (62 minutes versus 36 minutes). In addition, those who are food-insufficient, SNAP participants, or low-income are less likely to grocery shop on a given day than others.

### **The Stimulus Act of 2009 and Its Effect on Food-At-Home Spending by SNAP Participants**

Another new report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service examines the impact on food spending behavior as a result of the temporary increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The report finds that "SNAP benefits provided a larger boost to food-expenditure share than an equal amount of cash ... Lowest income households (here, those with incomes under \$15,000 per year), single-parent households, and households with an unemployed member increased the food share of total expenditures the most in response to increased benefit levels ... [H]igher SNAP benefits can redirect households' spending behavior toward food at home."

### **Where Households Get Food in a Typical Week: Findings From USDA's FoodAPS**

A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service examines where households acquired food during a seven-day period in 2012, using data from the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (also known as FoodAPS). The report includes a number of comparisons between Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households and non-SNAP households. For example, SNAP households allocated a significantly greater share of food-at-home spending to large grocery stores and supermarkets (60 percent) than did higher income non-SNAP households (54 percent).

**Meeting the Dietary Needs of Older Adults – Exploring the Impact of the Physical, Social, and Cultural Environment** (Workshop Summary)

The Health and Medicine Division (formerly the Institute of Medicine) released a summary of a workshop discussion that examined the factors in the physical, social, and cultural environment that affect the ability of adults ages 50 and older to meet their dietary needs. Food insecurity was raised as an important factor that impacts nutrition and health outcomes among this population. Increasing enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was one strategy identified for improving food security and addressing the dietary needs of older adults. The workshop also reviewed recent research on obesity among older adults, and its potential impact on mortality and health later in life.