

Overview of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children Demonstrations

Program: A 2-year demonstration and evaluation that provides summer food benefits to low-income households with children

Goal: Reducing the rate of very low food security among children in the summer in the United States by leveraging existing programs and technologies

Concept: Test impact of a \$60 benefit per child per month on very low food security among children during the summer

First Year Results Across All Sites

Take-Up Rate: 90 Percent

Issued Benefits Redeemed: 83 Percent

Relative Reduction in Child Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity: ↓ 19 Percent

Very Low Food Security: ↓ 20 Percent

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 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 (FNS) to initiate the Summer Food for Children demonstrations, which develop and test alternative methods of providing access to food for low-income children during the summer.

The Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC), one such demonstration, conducted its initial proof-of-concept during the summer of 2011. The SEBTC demonstration aims to mitigate summer child food insecurity by leveraging existing electronic benefit transfer (EBT) technologies used by the WIC and SNAP programs.

The SEBTC evaluation randomly assigned treatment and control households in selected demonstration areas in five States. State 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.

The primary purpose of the first year of the SEBTC demonstration was to test the overall feasibility of the EBT delivery system and the evaluation procedures. The lessons learned from this proof-of-concept will be applied as SEBTC expands to 14 sites in 2012.

The SEBTC Program Design

Eligibility

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

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

Implementation

All five sites were able to successfully recruit and enroll households in spring 2011 and administer SEBTC benefits during the summer of 2011. Taken together, the 5 sites issued benefits to a total of 6,968 households with 12,463 eligible children.

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 80 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 (15 percent¹).

State	Consent	Consent Rate	Coverage Rate
Connecticut	Active	30%	29%
Michigan	Active	37%	34%
Missouri	Passive	89%	82%
Oregon	Active	24%	24%
Texas	Passive	98%	76%

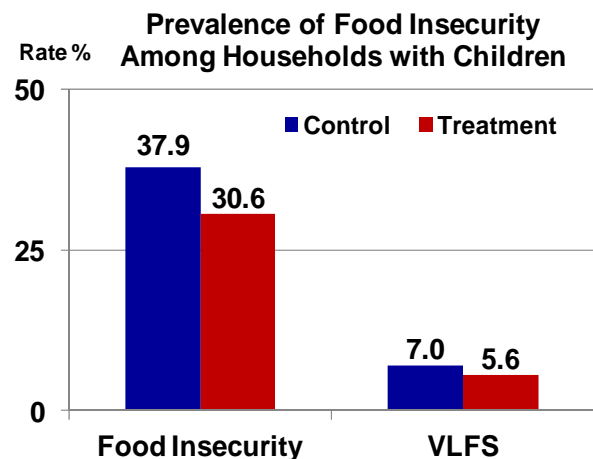
Benefit Redemption

Across all sites, over 90 percent of households that received SEBTC used the benefit at least once during the summer. These participating households, on average, redeemed between 71 and 99 percent of their issued benefits, totaling over \$1.6 million in summer benefits among 6,296 households. The average amount redeemed per household over the summer ranged from \$168 in Texas to \$349 in Oregon. Across all sites, 57 percent of households used all of their benefits in at least one month, and 35 percent spent all of their benefits for the summer.

Impact on Food Insecurity

Among the groups participating in the demonstration, SEBTC reduced very low food security among

children (VLFS-C) during the summer of 2011. The prevalence of VLFS-C was reduced from 7.0 percent in the control group to 5.6 percent in the treatment group. Thus, SEBTC eliminated VLFS-C for about one-fifth 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 similar proportional reductions.



Summary and Future Plans

The first year of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children demonstration shows promise, with indications of high coverage rates (especially when households must opt out of participation), and significant reductions in the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security among children. While the proof-of-concept results are encouraging, these initial results must await confirmation in 2012. In 2012, the proof-of-concept sites will more than double the number of children they serve, and the Cherokee and Chickasaw Nations and the States of Delaware, Nevada, and Washington will join the demonstration. The number of children served will expand to 64,000. Results from the expanded operations are expected to be available in summer 2013.

The full report is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/DemoProjects/SummerFood/Default.htm>

Collins, A., Briefel, R., Klerman, J., et al (2012). *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children: Evaluation Findings for the Proof-of-Concept Year*. Prepared by Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus under Contract No. AG-3198-C-11-002. Alexandria, VA: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer, Hoke Wilson, Alexandria, VA: November 2012.

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

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