

SUMMER ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER FOR CHILDREN: EVALUATION FINDINGS FOR THE THIRD IMPLEMENTATION YEAR 2013 (SUMMARY)

Overview

The Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demonstration seeks to find innovative strategies for addressing hunger during summer, when low-income children do not have access to school meals. Through a rigorous evaluation, SEBTC tests the impact of a monthly benefit during the summer on children's food security.

A prior evaluation of implementation in 2012 found that a \$60 per month per child benefit reduced very-low food security among children (VLFS-C) by one-third. The 2013 evaluation examined whether a \$30 benefit could produce similar results. The study indicated that the \$30 benefit reduced VLFS-C as well as the \$60 benefit, but the \$60 benefit produced greater reductions in food insecurity among adults and the full household.

Pilot Implementation

For the 2013 SEBTC evaluation, four of the 2012 grantees received additional funding to serve new families in a total of six sites. The 2013 sites included returning, expanded, and new areas:

- Chickasaw Nation served additional children in the 2013 evaluation;
- Delaware expanded to a statewide implementation;
- Michigan included sites in Mid-Michigan, Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and added Detroit;
- Oregon added Portland as a new site in 2013.

Delaware and Portland offered benefits using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP) Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) systems. The remaining sites used the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) model. These sites included urban areas (Detroit, MI, Grand Rapids/Kentwood, MI, and Portland, OR) and relatively large, predominantly rural areas (Chickasaw Nation and Mid-Michigan). Delaware contains a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas.

All 2013 sites used an "active consent" process, in which participants had to return forms in order to be included in the evaluation. Across the 6 evaluation sites, consent rates across sites ranged from 23% to 42% of eligible children. These rates were consistent with rates for active consent sites in previous years. As in 2012, the percentage of eligible children reached at all SEBTC sites exceeded the percentage of eligible children served through traditional summer feeding programs (about 16 percent).¹

Taken together, benefits were issued to approximately 51,000 households with 100,000 children. Of these, about 25,600 households with 50,000 eligible children were included in the evaluation.

Methodology

In 2013, households in the 6 evaluation sites were randomly assigned into one of two groups that received either the \$60 or the

¹ USDA FNS National Databank (NDB), 2013

\$30 benefit amount (there was no \$0 benefit group in 2013).

The evaluation conducted two surveys, in the spring and summer, to calculate the impact of the SEBTC benefits on food security, consumption, and spending patterns.

Findings

Benefit Redemption: Households in the \$60 benefit group had similar participation and redemption rates to those in the \$30 benefit group:

- Across all sites, 93% of households who received the \$60 benefit used it at least once during summer compared to 91% of those issued the \$30 benefit.
- Of those households that used their benefit at least once, the redemption rates were 74% for the \$60 group and 71% for the \$30 group.

The average amount redeemed over the summer per child was \$134, or 74% of the \$180 in total benefits received during the summer, for the \$60 benefit group and \$64, or 71% of the \$90 received, for the \$30 benefit group.

In the \$60 benefit group, 36% of households exhausted their benefits (i.e., used all available benefits) in at least one month, compared to 43% of households in the \$30 benefit group.

Food Insecurity: Both the \$60 and \$30 benefits had the same impact on VLFS-C, the most severe form of food insecurity. However, there were statistically significant differences on other measures of food insecurity. The prevalence of food insecurity among children (FI-C) in the \$60 SEBTC benefit group was 32.6% in the summer of 2013 compared to 36.3% in the \$30 SEBTC

benefit group. In addition, the prevalence of very-low food security and food insecurity was higher in the \$30 group than the \$60 group for adults and households.

The study conducted exploratory analysis using data from 2012 and 2013 to consider the impact of \$30 compared to no benefit. The results indicate that the impact of a \$30 benefit amount had greater impact on VLFS-C than no benefit.

Summary

The third implementation year of the SEBTC demonstration allowed a comparison between the impacts of a \$30 and a \$60 benefit.

Households in both the \$30 and \$60 groups redeemed their benefits at similar rates. The comparison of the impact of \$30 per month relative to \$60 per month on food insecurity showed that the \$30 benefit was just as effective at addressing VLFS-C as the \$60 benefit, but was not as effective for the other categories of food insecurity (i.e., less severe food insecurity among children, adults, households). This indicates that households were using the \$30 to meet the children's most severe needs. For households in the \$60 group, the remainder of the benefit helped to defray costs in ways that eased hunger for the rest of the family.

For More Information

Collins et al. (2014). *Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings for the Third Implementation Year*. Prepared by Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, and Maximus. Alexandria, VA: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Project Officer, Chan Chanhatasilpa.

Available online at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ops/research-and-analysis>