

New research links SNAP participation to reduced risk of premature deaths among US adults

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A new study published in the journal *Health Affairs* by researchers from Syracuse University's Maxwell School and the University of Kentucky reveals that participation in the national Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) reduces the risk of premature mortality among U.S. adults.

SNAP is the largest food assistance program in the United States, providing \$61 billion in nutrition support to more than 40 million Americans and 20 million households. While the program is known to reduce [food insecurity](#), comparatively little evidence provided a clear link between the program and [health outcomes](#). Analyzing restricted-access data from the CDC's National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) for the years 1997-2009, linked to data for 1999-2011 from the National Death Index (NDI), the study authors demonstrate a decline in the risk of premature death from all causes among participants by 1—2 percentage points.

"A major challenge in demonstrating the positive health impact of SNAP is that the same criteria that make a household eligible for participation—such as low income—are associated with poor health outcomes on average," says study author Colleen Heflin, professor of public administration and international affairs at Syracuse University's Maxwell School and senior research associate in its Center for Policy Research. "By looking at the incidence of premature death, we are able

to help fill an important gap in the scientific literature to help policy makers weigh the benefits and costs of food nutrition programs on population health and associated impacts."

Of particular policy salience, according to the authors, is the well-documented rise in "deaths of despair," or middle-age mortality from alcohol poisoning, opioid overdose, and suicide, as well as an overall decrease in life expectancy starting in 2014. This study is the first to demonstrate a specific link between participation in SNAP and a reduction of .8% in risk of death from these causes among adults aged 40—64.

"Our results further demonstrate the benefits of SNAP for the American people, and policies to restrict access to the program could have serious health consequences from higher food insecurity to premature [death](#)," states James P. Ziliak of the University of Kentucky and one of the study's co-authors.

"The Effect of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program on Mortality" is published in the November 2019 issue of *Health Affairs*.

Provided by Syracuse University

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