

MarketWatch

Children in low-income families suffer during the summer without subsidized school food programs

By [Leslie Albrecht](#)

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An analysis looked at how families change their spending in response to cuts in food assistance.



Tim Boyle

Families may cope with the lack of food by having older children skip meals so their younger siblings can eat, researchers said.

Families who rely on government food programs to keep their fridges stocked don't have the financial resources to feed themselves when those programs disappear, according to [a new study circulated by the Cambridge, Mass.-based National Bureau of Economic Research](#). Researchers wanted to see how families changed their spending habits after losing government food assistance, so they analyzed what happened in the summer months when low-income children don't have access to school breakfast and lunch programs.

The study, by Columbia University research scientist Lorenzo Almada and Emory University economics assistant professor Ian McCarthy, looked at 2,840 families who had school-aged children and who participated in SNAP — the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps. The study analyzed families' spending between 1996 and 2014.

The study comes as President Donald Trump has vowed to [slash \\$193 million in federal funding for SNAP, which dates back to the 1960s](#). The program cost taxpayers \$71 billion to provide benefits to more than 44.2 million people in 2016, researchers said.

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The study found that when families didn't have access to school lunch and school breakfast programs, they changed their household spending and spent more money on food at home. But the spending increase was minimal — less than \$2 per week per child, the researchers found.

That's not nearly enough to cover the lost value of the school breakfast and lunch programs, which amount to \$25 a week, the researchers said. And it falls well short of the more than \$32 a week that the U.S. Department of Agriculture says is required to provide a nutritious diet for a school-age child, researchers noted.

"When people are subjected to this reduction in the assistance they receive, we don't see households making up for that loss by taking out of other categories of expenditures," co-author Ian McCarthy told MarketWatch. "We think it must mean that people just don't have the flexibility to overcome that type of reduction."

Families may cope with the lack of food by having older children skip meals so their younger siblings can eat, or by going into debt to pay for food with payday loans or credit cards, researchers said. "The policy debate has been that we need to cut these benefits because we're spending too much on these households, but we're saying if you cut them, what else are these households going to do?" McCarthy said.

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Retirement Income Calculator ⁱ

Annual Income ⁱ

\$ 50,597

Current Savings ⁱ

\$ 25,000

Monthly Savings ⁱ

\$ 252

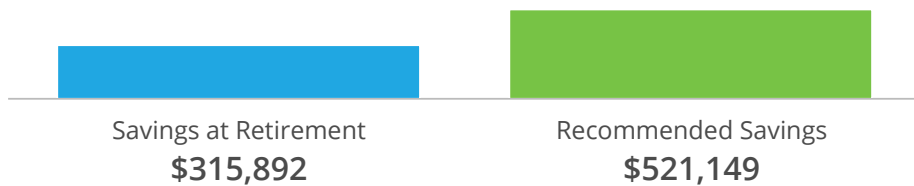
6% of income

Birth Year

1982




We recommend saving **\$521,149** at retirement. This will cover **\$67,432** per year in retirement income.

Retirement Age ⁱ 66



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	APY 1.10%	Rate: 1.09% • Min Deposit: \$10,000 Min Balance: N/A • Fees: \$0.00	Featured Open Account
360 Money Market(SM): 1.10% APY for Balances \$10K+ - Open Now			
	APY 1.20%	Rate: 1.19% • Min Deposit: \$100 Min Balance: N/A • Fees: \$0.00	Featured Open Account
Easy Withdrawals. No Monthly Fees.			
	APY 1.15%	Rate: 1.14% • Min Deposit: \$0 Min Balance: N/A • Fees: \$0.00	Featured Open Account
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