



## Study: Children who move due to housing costs more likely to lose access to safety net programs

February 6, 2024

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Article type: [News](#)

Topics: [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#), [Nutrition](#), [Public Health](#)

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Children who moved to a different home due to cost were more likely to have a gap in coverage by social safety net programs than who moved for other reasons or did not move, a new study found.

“These results merit attention from policymakers, particularly given high levels of financial strain and housing insecurity among low-income families during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent period of inflation,” authors wrote. “Keeping children connected to housing, food, and health care is an urgent priority.”

Researchers analyzed 2011-’19 data from emergency departments and primary care clinics in Baltimore and Philadelphia. The study included just over 9,000 children under 4 years whose family had ever received benefits through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and who were covered by Medicaid in the past year.

About 26% of children with cost-driven moves (typically due to inability to pay rent/mortgage, eviction or foreclosure) had disruption in program coverage compared to 22% with a non-cost-driven move and 20% of children with no residential moves, according to “[Moving Due to Unaffordable Housing and Disrupted Social Safety Net Access Among Children](#),” (Leifheit KM, et al. *Pediatrics*. Feb. 6, 2024).

Children with a cost-driven move had 44% higher adjusted odds of disrupted access to a social safety net program compared to children who had not moved, according to authors’ calculations.

Losing access to programs could have resulted from missing mail during the move or because stressed parents did not fill out the necessary paperwork promptly to stay in the programs, according to the study.

Authors also said a loss of benefits may have caused some families to move.

“Regardless of the direction of the associations, our results indicate that children experiencing cost-driven moves are more likely to experience social support disruptions; these interconnected deprivations may weigh heavy on the health trajectories of affected children,” they wrote.

The team called on health care providers to screen for housing security and help those who are moving stay connected to their benefits. In addition, they said policy changes are needed to reduce the administrative burden of applying for safety net programs and to increase the supply of affordable housing, especially for marginalized communities.

Authors of a [related commentary](#) suggested administrative burdens could be reduced by using common applications and sharing information across agencies. They also called for increasing affordable housing in addition to expanding rental assistance.

“Innovation in public policy that keeps families at the center by streamlining access to public benefits and supporting families in achieving economic stability is essential for supporting children’s health,” they wrote. “Pediatric providers have an important role to play in both keeping families connected to support and advocating for nuanced, cross-sector policies that help families stabilize, in turn freeing bandwidth for basic needs as well as planning for a brighter future.”

## Resources

- [AAP policy \*Promoting Food Security for All Children\*](#)
- [AAP policy \*Poverty and Child Health in the United States\*](#)
- [Toolkit for pediatricians to address food insecurity](#)