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Contact: Kristen Perfetuo, 617-638-8491, kristen.perfetuo@bmc.org

**NEW REPORT SHOWS SAFETY NET PROGRAMS
HAVE POWERFUL IMPACT ON U.S. BABIES' HEALTH**

Study highlights urgent need for funding and improvements of public assistance programs

(Boston) - As low-income parents in America face unprecedented challenges in providing their infants and toddlers with food and shelter, doctors find the health of young children reflects whether their families get access to federal assistance programs.

A new report from the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) demonstrates the powerful impact of five income-support and nutrition assistance programs (often called safety net programs) on young children's chances of having enough food, staying healthy, and growing normally.

Created in 1998, C-SNAP consists of a group of well-known pediatric clinicians and researchers from six urban medical centers in the United States who study the impact of public policy changes on the health and food security of thousands of poor, young children.

The new report begins by highlighting the health consequences of young children's lack of access to enough nutritious food, technically termed "food insecurity." Children who experience food insecurity are more likely to suffer poor health and illnesses severe enough to warrant hospitalization. The development of rapidly growing bodies and brains can be impaired by even mild to moderate undernutrition.

The report also presents medical and nutrition data from six years of research on the crucial links between safety net programs and young children's food security, growth, and health.

C-SNAP findings show stable benefits from safety net programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Food Stamps improve the health of vulnerable children and enhance their access to enough nutritious food.

The report indicates that WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), and public housing subsidies benefit children's health and growth. By supplementing low-income families' limited budgets, these safety net programs improve families' ability to purchase enough nutritious food for their children's developing bodies. C-SNAP data also shows young children receiving these benefits are less likely to be seriously underweight. Moreover, the research finds infants and toddlers receiving these benefits are no more likely to be overweight than those who do not receive them.

Despite proven benefits of safety net programs, the C-SNAP report highlights significant improvements that are urgently needed in order to maintain and strengthen these initiatives. Needed improvements include: Re-examining program sanction practices that terminate or reduce families' benefits, reducing administrative barriers to access, and sufficiently funding assistance programs so all eligible families can participate.

For example, programs such as energy assistance and housing assistance reach less than one-quarter of income-eligible families due to limited funding. From their data, researchers calculate that sufficiently funding these programs could allow more families to receive safety net benefits and could potentially protect thousands more young children from undernutrition.

“Food insecurity and hunger are increasing among America's poor families with young children, contributing to poor health and expensive hospitalizations among these infants and toddlers,” said Deborah Frank, MD, principal investigator of C-SNAP and director of the Grow Clinic at Boston Medical Center (BMC).

“Babies suffer, pediatric professionals observe and try to heal, but only our political leaders have both the power and the resources to change these trends by strengthening the safety net programs that ensure the food security, growth and health of our nation’s youngest and most vulnerable citizens.”

Study data were collected at medical centers located in Baltimore, Boston, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C.

The following public health professionals helped conduct this research and are available for comment:

Baltimore

Maureen Black, PhD
University of Maryland School of Medicine
410-706-5289

Los Angeles

Carol Berkowitz, MD
Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
310-222-3091

Boston

Deborah Frank, MD
Alan Meyers, MD
Boston University Medical Center
617-638-8491 (Contact: Kristen Perfetuo)

Minneapolis

Diana Cutts, MD
Hennepin County Medical Center
612-873-2671

Little Rock

Patrick Casey, MD
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
501-364-6561