

## Healthy Eating Research: Special Call for COVID-19 Related Projects Focused on the Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs

**Purpose:** [Healthy Eating Research](#), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has a limited amount of rapid-response research funds available to commission: 1) issue briefs/commentaries or papers/research reviews and; 2) small studies to explore the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on nutrition and diet quality, food security, and related health consequences for children and families.

This funding opportunity is focused on USDA Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs serving children and families. The goal is to inform decision-making regarding innovative policies and/or programs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A brief description of topics of interest, as well as study parameters are below.

**What we hope to learn and share:** [USDA Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs](#) (e.g., SNAP, school meals, WIC, CACFP) play an essential role in reducing food insecurity and hunger and improving nutrition and health among children and families in low income households by ensuring access to nutritious foods. Thus, these programs are inherently designed to improve health equity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for these programs has grown with the closing of schools and childcare centers across the country coupled with a loss of critical family income and rising unemployment and furloughs amidst the economic crisis. In response to the pandemic, USDA has provided waivers and flexibilities for the Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs to allow for maintaining or increasing families and children's access to nutritious foods. In addition, Congress and USDA have provided additional resources and flexibilities to provide more food through charitable institutions and agencies like food banks and pantries, as they also play a critical role in emergency response serving families that may not have access to sufficient federal benefits. The responses by various state and local agencies to these waivers and flexibilities across the country provide natural experiment opportunities to understand the impact of these program changes on diet quality, food security, and related health and economic consequences for children and families. This understanding can inform how respective programs can be strengthened now and after the COVID-19 pandemic to increase participation and/or quality of services, reduce food insecurity and improve the health and nutrition of children and families.

Many of the waivers and additional funds incorporated into federal care packages and state and local efforts for food assistance can be examined to identify best practices, and to understand their strengths and weaknesses, unintended consequences, and potential for long-term sustainability. It is important that submitted proposals do not just explore the current landscape, but also highlight program and/or policy implications related to changes and modifications made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that could be used to strengthen the federal nutrition assistance programs after the pandemic.

Consideration of geography, population density, ethnicity/race, and immigration status are key to understanding how policies and programs can be implemented and scaled-up during and after the pandemic to reduce pre-existing and emerging disparities in access to and availability of nutritious foods.

**Sample Questions to Consider:**

- How far have current policy and program responses gone towards meeting needs of children and families?
- What additional policy or program changes or other supports (e.g., childcare, transportation) are required to support nutritional needs of lower-income families and children?
- How could relationships or connections between the charitable food system and federal nutrition programs be strengthened?
- What potential policy changes or waivers should be made permanent? Why and how? If so, are there additional modifications to consider?
- Are there any policy changes/waivers that have had significant positive or negative implications for food insecurity and/or nutrition?
- What policy changes or waivers have potentially led to narrowing or widening the health disparity gap in the populations they are intended to serve? Why and how?
- What additional policy or program changes should be considered/are needed to address the needs of lower-income and racial and ethnic minority population groups that are at highest risk for poor health, well-being, and nutrition-related health disparities?
- What factors and processes supported the successful implementation of policy or programmatic changes or waivers?

**Total Awards and Project Information:** HER has up to \$230,000 (total) available to support these rapid-response research projects. Thus, we will be looking to fund projects that are lower in cost to maximize our available funds. The following types of proposals will be accepted:

1. Issue Briefs/Commentaries and Papers/Research Reviews: A total of \$30,000 will be available.
  - *Issue Briefs or Commentaries*: Each award will be for up to \$3,000 and for a maximum of 6 months. These products are often HER-branded and intended to distill existing research into an easily digestible brief format for an advocate or policymaker audience.
  - *Papers or Research Reviews*: Each award will be for \$5,000-\$8,000 and for a maximum of 6 months. These products may be a peer-reviewed manuscript or HER-branded research review.
2. Small Studies: A total of \$200,000 will be available. Each award will be for up to \$50,000 and for a maximum of 9 months in order to ensure we are providing timely and relevant information.

Examples of each product type may be found on the [HER website](#). The primary difference between issue briefs/commentaries and papers/research reviews versus the small studies, is that the studies will involve new data collection or analyses, whereas the briefs/papers will cover already published data.

**How to Apply:** Proposals will be accepted on a rolling basis through July 1, 2020, or until all available funds have been commissioned. Interested applicants will need to first submit a letter of intent to HER by email ([healthyeating@duke.edu](mailto:healthyeating@duke.edu)) with the subject line: ATTN: COVID-19 Proposal. The letter of intent should follow either the [template for studies or the template for briefs /papers, which are available on HER's website](#). Selected letters of intent will be invited by email to submit a full proposal. All proposals for small studies will be sent out for peer-review.

For more information, please visit the [FAQ document](#) on our website. The HER team does not have the capacity to discuss individual proposal ideas prior to submission. If you have logistical questions that are not answered in the FAQ document, please direct them to [healthyeating@duke.edu](mailto:healthyeating@duke.edu).