

# Food Access, Nutrition Assistance, and Addressing Stigma in the Face of Food Insecurity

Dr. Karpyn's research is focused on improving access to affordable, nutritious food, reducing stigma associated with food insecurity, developing evidence-based Food Is Medicine interventions, and informing policies that improve health outcomes.

## The Challenge

**Food insecurity affects approximately 1 in 7 U.S. households, reflecting persistent inequities in access to affordable, nutritious food. Beyond income constraints, structural factors** - including retail food environments, pricing strategies, and nutrition policy implementation - **shape what foods are available and promoted in communities, often reinforcing disparities in diet quality and health.**

## The Approach

Dr. Karpyn...

- Integrates clinical, behavioral, and administrative data with qualitative community perspectives.
- Uses community-engaged and implementation research frameworks to guide program evaluations.
- Examines how food assistance eligibility rules, payment models, and policy implementation influence access, participation, and stigma.
- Evaluates healthcare-based Food-is-Medicine and community nutrition assistance interventions.

## The Impact

Dr. Karpyn's research has resulted in:

- Evidence showing how retail food environments - including store placement, pricing, and marketing - shape food purchasing behavior in low-income communities.
- Development of a stigma framework used to examine how program design and service environments create or reduce stigma in food assistance programs.
- Development of medically tailored grocery programs embedded in healthcare systems and Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- State and national policy reforms affecting food procurement, Medicaid reimbursement, and improvements in SNAP, WIC, and emergency food programs.

### The investigator:

Dr. Allison Karpyn is a Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences and Co-Director of the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy at the University of Delaware. Dr. Karpyn is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University in Public Health and holds a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in Policy Research, Evaluation, and Measurement.

Find out more: <https://www.de-ctr.org/>

Supported under grant number U54-GM104941 (PI: Hicks)

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

### Dr. Karpyn's research has...

- Demonstrated how grocery store access and in-store marketing influence food purchasing and diet quality in underserved communities.
- Informed stigma-reducing program practices, including participant-centered communication, staff training, and improved benefit delivery systems (e.g., EBT and digital platforms).
- Generated evidence showing how Food-is-Medicine programs can be integrated into healthcare settings to improve diet and support management of diet-related disease.

## Key Benefits



CLINICAL

Demonstrated how Food-is-Medicine nutrition programs can improve diet behaviors and clinical indicators such as BMI and blood sugar.



COMMUNITY

Improved access to food and nutrition through SNAP, WIC, emergency food programs, and grocery store access.



COMMUNITY

Addressed food-related stigma to improve how emergency food programs communicate with and serve participants.



POLICY

Provided scientific leadership through service on the NIH Health Promotion in Communities Study Section, the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research, Delaware Council on Farm and Food Policy, and SNAP & WIC advisory committees.



POLICY

Provided expert testimony informing Delaware's Grocery Initiative legislation and examined the enforcement of the state's healthy beverage ordinance.

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CRESP Publication TSBM26.001.9