
MATHEMATICA Policy Research

Karen Cunnyingham Senior Researcher



Karen Cunnyingham specializes in federal nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). She is an expert on microsimulation modeling and on using small-area estimation techniques to measure program eligibility and participation rates.

Cunnyingham, who has been with Mathematica for 14 years, directs projects for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) involving the use of microsimulation to estimate how changes in SNAP policy would affect benefit costs, eligibility, and participation. She also examines the characteristics of SNAP participants and helps estimate national and state rates of SNAP participation. In addition, Cunnyingham is a senior researcher on a project in which Census Bureau survey data are linked to SNAP administrative records in two states; she uses these data to examine the composition of SNAP households in the administrative records versus simulated SNAP households in the survey data. In recent years, she has directed projects to (1) examine state trends in SNAP eligibility and participation among elderly people; (2) estimate the effects on SNAP of eliminating California's Supplemental Security Income cash-out policy; (3) assess how changes to SNAP asset and categorical eligibility policies are likely to affect SNAP eligibility, total SNAP benefits, participant characteristics, and state-to-state equitability; and (4) provide estimates to the Congressional Budget Office on the effects of various changes to SNAP.

Cunnyingham has presented research findings to policy and professional groups, including at Association of Public Policy and Management (APPAM) and Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (ACF OPRE) conferences. She holds an M.P.P. from the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.