

7 December 2020

## **BRIEF19**

*A daily review of covid-19 research and policy*

### **RESEARCH BRIEFING**

#### **Unemployment insurance helps individuals throughout the covid-19 pandemic.**

New evidence suggests that individuals with unemployment insurance during the covid-19 pandemic have fared better than those without, according to a new paper in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#). The role of unemployment insurance is threefold, as it covers social needs, healthcare expenses and can, in turn, reduce daily stress.

The researchers used a national survey called the Household Plus Survey, which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The study outcomes assessed access to food and healthcare, ability to pay rent and missing payments, and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Nearly 70,000 individuals completed the survey representing over 34 million unemployed individuals living in the US. Survey respondents were younger (average age of 34 years) and primarily women (51 percent). Thirty six percent of respondents reported use of unemployment insurance.

When compared to individuals without insurance, those with unemployment insurance felt more confident they would be able to obtain food, pay rent, were less likely to miss housing payments, and were significantly less anxious and depressed. Individuals with unemployment insurance also reported better health care access compared to those without.

Although this large, nationally represented survey study has limitations including possible selection bias, response rate and an inability to determine causation, the research is important as it has obvious face validity. In other words, access to unemployment insurance is good policy, and we should have a nationwide safety net in place for those who have suffered profound economic disruption from the necessary city- and state-wide quarantine measures.

—Joshua Niforatos, MD MTS

### **POLICY BRIEFING**

#### **A look at the new proposed bipartisan Senate stimulus package.**

Passage of additional coronavirus aid has faced a stalemate for approximately five months in Congress, since the May [passage](#) of the HEROES Act by the House of Representatives (seen as too expansive by the Senate) and the July [passage](#) of the HEALS Act by the Senate (seen as too limited by the House). Now, however, bipartisan momentum seems to be building for a new \$900 billion package proposed by the Senate. One-hundred eighty billion dollars would be used to establish a federal unemployment benefit of \$300 billion through March, \$25 billion in housing assistance, \$45 billion for transportation industry support and \$82 billion for education. The plan would inject another \$288 billion into the Paycheck Protection Program and \$160 billion for state and local government support.

While Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) has publicly [opposed](#) the effort, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-California) has called any package under \$1 trillion a [non-starter](#). As a result, rank-and-file support and public pressure for Congress to act before the winter recess may break the logjam that has plagued the process so far. *Various*.

—Joshua Lesko, MD