

# People Support Social Welfare When They're Hungry Themselves

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*The Atlantic:*

It's hard to know how to feel about Obamacare right now.

One one hand, there's outrage at stories that like that of San Francisco resident Lee Hammack and his wife, JoEllen Brothers, two middle-income people who had their affordable, comprehensive Kaiser plan cancelled and can only obtain a much less generous policy on the exchange, and without the help of the much-touted subsidies. At the same time, it's heartening that people like Kentucky resident David Elson, who can't afford to refill his diabetes prescriptions, keeps his unpaid medical bills in a cardboard box, and suffers from severe eye bleeding, can finally get some treatment.

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Lene Aarøe and Michael Bang Petersen, two professors at Denmark's Aarhus University, sought out the foundations of social welfare attitudes in an unusual place: among our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Anthropologists have shown that for hunter-gatherers, big-game kills were few and far between. Aarøe and Petersen reasoned that early man regularly experienced hunger, and when times were especially lean, he had to convince other group members to share their bounty.

Rather than divvying up mammoth steaks, though, today different groups are subsidizing each others' food stamps and health premiums.

"The social welfare system is the modern system for redistributing resources," Aarøe told me.

For their study, published last week in the journal *Psychological Science*, Aarøe and Petersen asked 104 university students to fast for four hours.

Read the whole story: [\*The Atlantic\*](#)