

CalFresh

CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides benefits for low-income Californians with the aim of improving access to nutritious, affordable food.



Basic Information

CalFresh, known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides monthly a benefit for food purchases to low-income households. CalFresh benefits are delivered via a debit-like card, and are accepted at most grocery and food stores. Benefits can only be used to purchase food items; alcohol and hot, prepared meals may not be purchased with benefits.

SNAP is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level, CalFresh is administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and California's 58 counties have local administrative authority over CalFresh.

As a federal entitlement, CalFresh funding must meet demand; all eligible CalFresh applicants have a legal right to receive benefits. The federal government funds all of these benefits and half of the state's CalFresh administrative costs.

California's CalFresh participation rates are consistently among the lowest in the nation; approximately one out of every two Californians eligible for CalFresh receives benefits. During federal fiscal year 2011, average monthly CalFresh participation was 3.7 million individuals.¹

Many CalFresh participants are employed and have families:

- In FY2009, 34 percent of participating CalFresh households had income from earnings.²
- More than 70 percent of CalFresh households receiving benefits had children.³
- Five percent participating CalFresh households included elderly adults.⁴

Eligibility

Several factors, including income, citizenship status, age, and disability determine CalFresh eligibility. Various work requirements also apply to adults without dependents. Generally, applicants must have gross income below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), and must have net income below the federal poverty level.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for CalFresh, but certain permanent, documented non-citizens are eligible for state-funded benefits through the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP). From a client's perspective, CFAP and CalFresh benefits are one and the same. Because of a policy known as Cashout, SSI recipients are also ineligible for CalFresh benefits.

Benefits

- CalFresh supports health by providing low-income households with benefits that improve food security and nutrition.
- CalFresh serves as an important income support. Receipt of CalFresh benefits allows households to redistribute income that would otherwise be used for purchasing food.
- CalFresh stimulates the economy. USDA has shown that every dollar in CalFresh/SNAP expenditures generates \$1.79 in economic activity. A portion of redistributed income (as a result of CalFresh benefits) can be spent on taxable goods, such as medication, which generates sales tax revenue for the state and counties. With a low participation rate, California loses out on several billion dollars in federal nutrition benefits every year.

¹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (July 2012). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Participation (Persons) [Web page]. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/15SNAPpartPP.htm>

² California Food Policy Advocates, "CalFresh Characteristics Report, 2010." <http://cfpa.net/CalFresh/CFPAPublications/CalFresh-Characteristics-2010.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.