

2016 State Administrative Agenda: CalFresh



For over two decades, California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has worked to incubate and advance innovative policy solutions that increase low-income Californians' access to nutritious food. We envision a healthy and food-secure California for all residents. Increasing participation in CalFresh, the state's largest nutrition assistance program, is vital to fulfilling that vision. We commend the state's commitment to enrolling an additional 400,000 children in CalFresh over the next two years, and ask state and county administrators to join us in increasing the reach and positive impacts of CalFresh for all Californians.

2016 Administrative Actions

- Increase CalFresh enrollment by fully integrating the application and reporting processes for CalFresh and Medi-Cal.
- Boost senior participation by supporting projects which simplify CalFresh enrollment for seniors, such as an Elderly Simplified Application Project. Implement data sharing among programs with high rates of senior participation and overlapping eligibility requirements.
- Increase CalFresh participation and retention by setting statewide targets for participation, timeliness, and caseload churn.
- Mitigate the loss of client benefits by preparing for the return of the three-month time limit for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs).

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Streamline Dual Enrollment between Medi-Cal and CalFresh

With the expansion of Medi-Cal via implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the state Office of Horizontal Integration anticipated a significant increase in dual enrollment. California established a state-level referral process through Covered California and local administrators have taken steps to develop links between CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Given that approximately one-third of Californians (more 13 million individuals) are now enrolled in Medi-Cal -- and a majority of new enrollees are also eligible for CalFresh -- this is a critical time to improve dual enrollment processes at the state level.

For more than 20 years, CFPA has been the state's trusted food policy advocacy organization dedicated to increasing low-income Californians' access to healthy food at home, at school, and throughout entire communities. CFPA's advocacy agenda draws on the anti-hunger, nutrition, and health movements. Working as both a policy leader and supportive policy ally, CFPA continues to build on its long history of success.

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Administrative Action: Maximize the effectiveness of the Covered California application “checkbox” referral process by ensuring that relevant data from health coverage applicants requesting referral to CalFresh is shared with and acted upon by county CalFresh administrators. The state should also seek to standardize county-level best practices such as cross-training staff in Medi-Cal and CalFresh programs and implementing “no wrong door” policies to create a seamless, simultaneous enrollment and reporting process for CalFresh and Medi-Cal.

Boost Senior Enrollment by Simplifying the Application Process

The number of food insecure, low-income seniors in California nearly doubled from 2001 to 2014. In 2014, nearly 31%, or 644,000, low-income seniors in California were food insecure. But according to the most recently available data, only 18 percent of our state’s eligible seniors participate in CalFresh, the state’s largest and most important nutrition assistance program. Simplifying the often burdensome CalFresh application process will improve the reach of CalFresh among seniors. Data sharing between social services agencies and agencies that administer other benefits for seniors (such as the Social Security Administration) can reduce the amount of paperwork required for a CalFresh application because a recipient’s information from one agency can be used to inform another application for benefits from another agency. AB 69, which became law in 2011, authorized counties to use data sharing with the Social Security Administration (SSA) as a means of simplifying seniors’ enrollment in CalFresh. Unfortunately, AB 69 was never implemented.

Administrative Action: Support county and state-level projects to simplify enrollment processes and implement data sharing between Social Security and CalFresh. Other programs with high rates of senior participation and eligibility requirements that overlap with CalFresh should be targeted for similar data-sharing projects.

Modernize the CalFresh Customer-Service Experience

Modernizing customer service standards among local CalFresh administrators will increase CalFresh participation and retention for eligible Californians. State administrators should work with counties to standardize service models that improve the timeliness of benefit issuance, enhance access for customers with transportation or other barriers, and minimize participant churn.

Administrative Action: Statewide policies standardizing the use of telephonic signatures, electronic signatures, and client-initiated telephone interview scheduling should be enacted. The State should promote the adoption of modernized business process improvements in lobby management,

self-service kiosks, and similar practices to improve the client experience and increase administrative efficiency.

Mitigate the Impending Loss of Benefits for ABAWDs

As a result of 1996 welfare reform, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) are limited to 3 months of CalFresh benefits within a 36-month period unless they satisfy the 20-hours-per-week work or training requirement or meet criteria for an exemption. The 3-month provision even applies to ABAWDs who want to work but are unable to find a job or a position in a work or training program. In this sense, this rule serves as a punitive time limit rather than an incentive to work.

In states or sub-state areas experiencing high unemployment, the ABAWD work requirement (time limit) can be waived. USDA has approved California's most recent request for an extension of its statewide waiver of the time-limit through December 31, 2017. Beginning January 2018, state administrators and local caseworkers will likely implement the ABAWD rules for the first time in eight years. With that in mind, 2016-17 will be a critical time for state and county administrators to issue guidance and implement procedures to minimize negative effects on CalFresh participants.

Administrative Action:

- State administrators should maximize future regional and local waivers for all areas experiencing high unemployment.
- Develop clear and timely Notices of Action to inform ABAWDs residing outside of these areas of their potential loss of benefits well in advance so that they can plan accordingly.
- Provide clear guidance to counties on the allowable uses of the unfit-for-work and good-cause exemptions, including the exemption for clients experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Prepare to strategically apply individual exemptions by targeting the most vulnerable ABAWD populations residing in unwaived areas.
- Support the expansion of Employment & Training programs among counties serving ABAWD populations at risk of losing benefits due to the time limit.