

AB 1560 (Fuentes) Food for Health: Aligning Medi-Cal and Nutrition Assistance

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ISSUE

Although nutrition is a critical component of health and wellbeing, many Medi-Cal recipients who are currently eligible for CalFresh do not participate. To ensure that low-income households can support healthy living, nutrition assistance should be offered hand-in-hand with Medi-Cal.

In 2009, 7 million low-income Californians relied on Medi-Cal; we have an opportunity to more easily connect those recipients with CalFresh and subsequently, free school meals. With the implementation of health care reform in 2014, an additional 2 million Californians will enroll in Medi-Cal; removing barriers to CalFresh enrollment now will have a great impact on current participants and will ensure that new enrollees also receive CalFresh.

Because children in CalFresh households are automatically certified for free school meals, by connecting Medi-Cal households with CalFresh, households could easily access three vital services: health coverage, nutrition assistance, and free school meals.

NEED

Only half of eligible Californians participate in CalFresh, in part because of stigma, a burdensome application, or misinformation regarding eligibility. As Californians struggle to make ends meet, it is critical that they receive nutrition assistance.

This bill removes one CalFresh income barrier for Medi-Cal recipients and their families, helping them to access to a package of health benefits. Directly linking Medi-Cal with CalFresh can also encourage currently eligible Medi-Cal recipients to participate.

REQUEST

CFPA requests that the legislature take the following steps to make certain that low-income households with a Medi-Cal recipient can also receive CalFresh, and children in those homes are certified for free school meals.

Align eligibility	Remove a CalFresh income barrier for Medi-Cal recipients and their families by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making households with Medi-Cal recipients categorically eligible for CalFresh, thereby removing the CalFresh gross income test requirement. The net income test still applies. Once enrolled in CalFresh, children in these households would be directly certified for free school meals.
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HISTORY

Using a similar enrollment strategy in 2008, California passed AB 433, which eliminated the asset test for CalFresh recipients. This allowed applicants and participants to accrue moderate savings and maintain CalFresh eligibility. With the passage of AB 433, generally, CalFresh recipients still must have gross income below 130% FPL to qualify for benefits.

Nationwide, 27 other states have boosted enrollment in nutrition assistance by removing the asset test *and* removing the gross income test for applicants. AB 1560 would eliminate the CalFresh gross income test for households with a Medi-Cal recipient.

OUTCOMES

Removing a CalFresh income barrier for Medi-Cal recipients and their families can increase CalFresh participation, improve administrative efficiency, ensure that low-income students in those households have access to free school meals, connect health with nutrition benefits, and draw down \$9.7 million federal nutrition benefits into the economy.

AB 1560 will streamline CalFresh eligibility for an additional 227,000 Californians, and better connect the 1.2 million Medi-Cal recipients that are currently eligible but not participating in CalFresh. This bill supports the overall well-being of households that rely on Medi-Cal by providing them with nutrition benefits and giving their children automatic access to free meals at school.