



California Counties Work to Improve Food Stamp Access April 2010

❖ **Business Process Improvements: Coordinated, Effective Automation is Leading the Way to Increase Client Access and Improve County Efficiency**

- **Web Portals/Online Application:** Clients can apply online for Food Stamp benefits in many counties right now, and in most counties by June 2010, with statewide implement planned for January 2011.
 - **C4Yourself:** www.c4yourself.com/c4yourself/
 - **BenefitsSF:** www.benefitssf.org/
- **Document Imaging:** Currently a majority of counties use document imaging, and use of this technology is quickly expanding. Document imaging allows counties to access client information more quickly, and from multiple locations, to improve client service and county efficiency.
- **Interactive Voice Response (IVR),** for clients to access benefit information via telephone: Availability in most counties now for incoming calls, many counties developing outgoing IVR call capability.
- **Call Centers:** At least 10 counties currently have call centers, and many others are planning or considering implementation. Call centers offer improved customer service and increase county efficiency.
- **Client Self Service and Lobby Kiosks:** Counties are in the planning stages to implement kiosks.
- Many of these automation improvements are funded with ARRA Food Stamp Admin dollars, including web portals, document imaging, and IVR.

❖ **Policy Improvements Underway:**

- **Inter-County Transfer:** State regulations do not allow clients to transfer their food stamp case from one county to another without completing a new application. Counties are taking the lead to sponsor state legislation to fix this, and automation changes are ready to go once state authority is provided.
- **Face-to-Face Waiver** for client application and/or recertification currently being implemented in most counties. Best practices are being developed and will be shared with all counties.

- **Restoration of Aid Waiver** planning is underway, and is scheduled for implementation by July 2010. This will allow clients with recently discontinued cases to have their cases restored with minimal paperwork.
- **Asset Waiver** was expanded to include all participants in early 2010.

- ❖ **Outreach Partnerships with Food Banks and CBOs.** Counties have longstanding partnerships with Food Banks and other CBOs to provide Food Stamp application assistance.

- ❖ **Federal Partnership for Immigrant Outreach.** Since immigrant families tend to have a lower than average Food Stamp participation rate, Los Angeles County DPSS will be partnering with the Bureau of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, to launch a campaign against the myths that Food Stamp recipients will become a “public charge” or will affect his/her application for naturalization. The campaign will target not only the immigrant population, but also immigration lawyers. Counties are considering how they might expand this program statewide.

- ❖ **Statewide Food Stamp Modernization Conferences, jointly sponsored by CDSS, CWDA, and USDA,** were held in October 2008 and April 2009. Next conference scheduled for July 2010.

**Addendum:
California Food Stamp Program Comparisons with Other States**

- ❖ **Participation rate comparisons between California and other states are not “apples to apples,” since the federal participation rate does not reflect California’s 1.2 million SSI recipients who receive a cash substitute for Food Stamps.**

California is the only state that provides all SSI clients a “cash equivalent” instead of Food Stamp benefits. This decision was made decades ago, to reduce Food Stamp administrative costs. But under the methodology used to calculate state Food Stamp participation, California gets zero participation credit for the over 1 million SSI individuals getting a cash equivalent, while SSI clients receiving Food Stamps in other states are included in their participation rates.

In fact, the USDA/Mathematica annual report on state participation rates notes that although SSI individuals are removed from California’s denominator, “It might be useful in some other contexts, however, to consider participation rates among those eligible for SNAP benefits or a cash substitute.”

Including SSI recipients in California’s participation rate provides an “apples to apples” comparison with other states. If only 80% of California’s SSI recipients were counted as participating in Food Stamps or a cash substitute, the state’s 2007 Food Stamp participation rate would increase from 48% to 58%.

Note that California’s cash-out program is similar in many ways to the Combined Application Projects (CAPs) in 18 other states, including FL, MI, NJ, NY, NC, PA, and TX. CAPs involve a partnership between the state and the Social Security Administration to integrate the Food Stamp application process into SSI application process and facilitate automatic SNAP enrollment for SSI clients. States with CAPs have a very high SNAP participation rate for SSI clients (some close to 100%).

- ❖ **California’s Administrative Cost per Case is Similar to Other States, when adjusted for our \$100 million Nutrition Education grant, and SSI Cash-out cases. California’s adjusted 2008 cost per case month is approximately \$24, close to the national average of \$19.49.**

As shown in the first table below, California has a large Nutrition Education component (almost 40% of the nation’s total nutrition funding), which skews our administrative costs. If nutrition education is excluded, California’s 2008 cost per case month goes from \$46.50 to \$36.84.

As noted above, every other state includes SSI recipients in their Food Stamp program. Since SSI clients have fixed incomes, and in many large states are administered via a low-cost CAP program, the administrative cost per case for these recipients is much lower than the cost for low-income families and individuals. Even

though California's cash-out program is administered in a similar fashion to other states' CAP systems, SSI cases are not counted in our cost per case, while SSI cases in other states are counted in their cost per case. When adjusted* to include SSI Cash-out cases, California's 2008 administrative cost per case is reduced from \$46.50 to approximately \$30 per month.

When both adjustments are made (Nutrition Education funding is excluded and SSI Cash-out cases are included), California's 2008 administrative cost per case is reduced from \$46.50 to approximately \$24 per month.

**2008 Food Stamp Administrative Costs
(dollars in millions)**

	California	% of CA Costs	US	% US Costs
Certification	\$207	41%	\$1,651	55%
Quality Control	\$11	2%	\$62	2%
Fraud Control	\$33	6%	\$130	4%
Automation – Eligibility	\$55	9%	\$237	8%
EBT	\$31	6%	\$154	5%
Employment and Training	\$42	8%	\$296	10%
Nutrition Education	\$106	20%	\$270	9%
Unspecified	\$18	4%	\$134	4%
Other	\$6	5%	\$44	1%
Total	\$510	100%	\$2,978	100%

Methodology*	CA Cost per Case Month
Exclude SSI Cash-out cases and Include Nutrition Education	\$46.50
Include SSI Cash-out cases	\$29.94
Exclude Nutrition Education	\$36.84
Include SSI Cash-out cases and exclude Nutrition Education	\$24.09

* The adjustment in this table to include SSI Cash-out cases assumes that the 1.2 million SSI recipients in California in 2008 is equivalent to 600,000 additional Food Stamp cases. The adjustment also assumes that each of these additional cases has a monthly cost per case equal to 25 percent of the monthly certification cost of all other non-SSI California Food Stamp cases.