



California Association
of Food Banks

Catholic Charities
of California

Western Center on
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California Family
Resource Association

Los Angeles Regional
Food Bank

California Food
Policy Advocates

San Francisco and
Marin Food Banks

A STATEWIDE CALFRESH PARTICIPATION PLAN
A Standard, Proven Approach for All Counties Needed
In order for California to Increase Participation by All Eligible People
September 2013

PROBLEM: California has more struggling and hungry families and fewer federal resources to assist people and stimulate the economy than it should, given the availability of federal CalFresh benefits. People in California who are eligible for federal CalFresh benefits to purchase food are still participating in the program at lower rates than other states; there is also significant variation in participation between different counties in California. The persistently low participation rate by people in need suggests continued challenges with access to and retention of benefits, despite some important improvements in recent years. (CalFresh is California's name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.)

PROGRESS: California has taken several actions to address low participation. Policies are being simplified, such as reporting and interviewing requirements. Access has begun to be modernized, with many counties providing more telephone and on-line applications and some offering "same day service." Outreach has increased, through partnerships with community based organizations. Overall, the number of people enrolled expanded sharply during the recession, along with the increase in unemployment. However, there is still more to do to increase the percentage of those eligible who are receiving help.

OPPORTUNITY: Increasing participation is a priority of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the State Legislature, the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and its member counties, and advocates, among others. In spring 2012, the State Senate Budget Subcommittee #3 on Health and Human Services requested a plan from CDSS to increase CalFresh participation by eligible people. CDSS, in turn, requested plans from the 58 counties. In spring 2013, CDSS shared with the Subcommittee a summary of those county plans, in addition to a list of state actions to date, to increase participation.

The urgent next step is for the counties and CDSS to act together, with a standard statewide plan based on the best proven strategies, to increase participation in all corners of the State. California has many best practices to pull from; what it does not have yet is a unified approach that can move the state quickly and effectively to a tipping point. Only with a standard plan implemented consistently across the State will people in all counties have excellent and modern access to the CalFresh benefits they qualify for and desperately need.

RECOMMENDATION: The following recommended Statewide Plan is based on a review of selected plans submitted by the counties to CDSS in late 2012, plus additional models from Western states that have increased their participation rates. The Alliance was able to review the plans of the 24 counties with the largest CalFresh caseloads, plus 3 additional counties; together, these counties serve more than 90% of the people receiving CalFresh benefits. All county and state plans cited are posted at:

<http://cafoodbanks.org/Statewide-Participation-Plan-Index.html>

LEADERSHIP: Use data and involve stakeholders to set bold goals, guide implementation, and continuously improve.

- 1. Be Data-Driven:** Key indicators to track include a) overall participation numbers, current and projected; b) churn rates; c) dual participation in Medi-Cal and other programs; d) participation break-outs by demographic, such as working families and seniors; and e) service standards, such as timeliness and accuracy. *County plans with data-driven goals, benchmarks, and/or dashboards:* [Butte](#), [Placer](#), [Riverside](#), [Sacramento](#), [Santa Cruz](#).
- 2. Collaborate with Stakeholders:** Involve management, labor, advocates and consumers in prioritizing problems and identifying solutions. (Note: counties were not asked for this information in their plans, so examples are from other states). [Hawaii](#) shared their business process review experience - first unsuccessfully and then successfully involving the workforce - at the CDSS/CWDA/USDA "CalFresh Modernization" Conference, September 2012. [Oregon](#) works with advocates via monthly meetings and joint "secret shopper" initiatives.

ACTION: Implement initiatives in four key areas, at the county, consortia, and state levels.

- 3. Streamline Business Processes,** with the goals of a) integration with Medi-Cal, especially the new Affordable Care Act changes, and b) same day service for majority of consumers. *County plans that propose new same day service:* [Kern](#), [Riverside](#), [Sacramento](#), [San Francisco](#), [San Joaquin](#), [Santa Cruz](#), [Stanislaus](#). *Counties that have already made this move include:* [Placer](#), [San Mateo](#), [Santa Barbara](#), [Tulare](#).
- 4. Reduce Churn,** so people receive benefits as long as their need and eligibility persists, through proactive processes to recertify still-eligible clients. *County plans to reduce churn include:* [Butte](#), [Imperial](#), [Kern](#), [Marin](#), [Sacramento](#), [San Diego](#), [San Francisco](#), [San Joaquin](#), [San Mateo](#), [Santa Clara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), [Sonoma](#), [Tulare](#).
- 5. Conduct Strategic In-Reach to other County Channels** - especially to Medi-Cal participants, both now and through Affordable Care Act expansion - so people can "tell their story" once and receive the supports they qualify for and need to thrive. *Counties outlining strategic in-reach in their plans include:* 1) For Medi-Cal, [Butte](#), [Imperial](#), [Orange](#), [Placer](#), [Riverside](#), [Sacramento](#), [San Bernardino](#), [Santa Cruz](#), [Solano](#), [Sonoma](#), [Tulare](#); 2) For school meals and other programs, [Alameda](#), [Butte](#), [Marin](#), [Riverside](#), [San Bernardino](#), [San Diego](#), [Ventura](#).
- 6. Target Outreach,** focusing on harder-to-reach populations such as immigrants, working families, and seniors, in partnership with community based organizations serving those groups. *Counties with targeted outreach in their plans include:* [Alameda](#), [Butte](#), [Fresno](#), [Kern](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Orange](#), [Placer](#), [Riverside](#), [Sacramento](#), [San Bernardino](#), [San Diego](#), [San Francisco](#), [San Joaquin](#), [Santa Barbara](#), [Santa Cruz](#), [Sonoma](#), [Tulare](#), [Ventura](#).

ADVOCACY: Support the state and federal simplifications and the resources needed for success.

- 7. State and Federal Simplification.** Top requests from counties to federal and state authorities for CalFresh simplifications include 1) aligning with Medi-Cal – and especially the new Affordable Care Act changes -- at intake and recertification; 2) enabling electronic verifications; and 3) expanding telephonic signatures. Other policy ideas suggested include waiving recertification interviews for seniors in favor of change reporting; longer certification periods for other beneficiaries with stable incomes; allowing students to work less than 20 hours a week; and lifting all restrictions on people with prior felony convictions.
- 8. Resources.** Throughout, the resources required for a standard, high-quality service, additional simplification, and continued modernization will need to be identified and secured (for example, changes needed to the SAWS computer systems - CalWIN, C-IV, and LEADER - or to the networked call centers).