

# CalFresh Goals

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*CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is and should be recognized as an efficient form of nutrition assistance. To increase participation and build public and political support for CalFresh, CFPA has outlined the following three-year goals.*

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## CalFresh is a critical component of health coverage, health care, and healthy lifestyles

Reduced food insecurity and improved access to nutritious foods are fundamental goals of CalFresh. These objectives are also strongly linked to supporting the overall health and well-being of participants. The connection between CalFresh and health benefits, programs, and services should be made explicit.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) expands eligibility for health coverage among low-income households and requires that states create an enrollment portal (the Exchange) with online and phone capabilities. Under this expansion, an estimated 2 million Californians will become newly eligible for and enroll in Medi-Cal beginning in 2014. When Californians apply for health coverage through the Exchange, they should also have the option to apply for CalFresh benefits using the information provided. This concept is known as horizontal integration and should be fully implemented in California. To best support the effectiveness of horizontal integration, eligibility for both Medi-Cal and CalFresh should be aligned to the greatest extent possible.

CalFresh and other nutrition assistance should also be readily available to people in a variety of health care settings. While doctors, hospitals, and clinics frequently treat patients with immediate health needs, the infrastructure and referral systems in health care settings should incentivize those providers to connect and refer patients to resources like CalFresh that can support their health in the future.

CalFresh successfully reduces food insecurity, contributing to the health of low-income Californians. To strengthen the role of CalFresh in supporting healthy eating, nutritious foods should be appealing, affordable, and easily accessible to CalFresh participants. Incentives for healthy purchases and other additional policies to improve nutrition among participants should also be considered.

## Enrolling and Participating in CalFresh is straightforward and consistent for individuals and families across the state

Currently, policy options granted by the state allow some counties to administer an innovative and efficient CalFresh program, while others remain slow to change. These differences result in inconsistent client experiences dependent on location. Rigorous statewide standards for policy implementation and program innovations would ensure that all CalFresh applicants receive the same, high quality experience no matter where or how they apply.

The CalFresh enrollment experience should be consumer friendly with a "no-wrong-door" approach to improving access to benefits. The process should reflect recent improvements and modernization to the program. Applications, whether submitted in-person, via mail, over the phone or online, should be processed in a timely and efficient manner.

Beyond enrollment, applicants should have easy access to recertification materials and receive guidance on how to maintain benefits. Upon receiving benefits, applicants should be provided with clear instructions on where and how to use benefits, and who to contact for additional assistance.

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## **The CalFresh brand reduces stigma and enhances the public image of CalFresh. “CalFresh” becomes the name predominantly used by policymakers and participants**

As a result of extensive focus group testing, the new CalFresh name and brand was implemented in 2011 to reflect critical improvements and modernizations to the “Food Stamp Program”. The CalFresh name and brand was developed in an effort to launch new strategic communication opportunities aimed at both current and potential participants.

Messaging should emphasize that Californians can apply for CalFresh in-person, via mail, over the phone or online. In addition, rebranding provides an opportunity to enhance the connection between CalFresh, improved health, and access to nutritious foods. Rebranding strategies should focus on countering the stigma and myths previously associated with the “Food Stamp Program” that remain a hindrance to participation today. Rebranding strategies should also address signage used to promote CalFresh at food retailers. Public and private partnerships can encourage positive and appropriate uses of the new CalFresh brand.

## **“In-reach” to other public benefit programs increases CalFresh participation**

Many Californians who are eligible for, but not participating in, CalFresh may be receiving other public benefits, such as WIC, Medi-Cal, social security and subsidized child care. In-reach is a tool to better inform, connect, and enroll households using other public benefit programs into CalFresh. Data sharing between CalFresh and other programs could reduce redundancy in the application for multiple benefits, and ensure that low-income households can easily access an array of benefits. In-reach strategies should be used to identify Californians who are potentially eligible to receive CalFresh. As trusted members of the community, organizations and agencies that provide resource and referral services for public benefits play an integral role in implementing in-reach strategies and should be equipped to encourage CalFresh participation and increase accessibility to the CalFresh application.

## **Data are a primary factor driving CalFresh policy decisions**

Evaluation based on the use of reliable data can help identify successful policies and areas for program improvement. Consistent, statewide data collection should be used as an indicator for the effectiveness of program improvements, such as the increased availability of online applications and phone interviews. Benchmarks for performance should be established to measure intended outcomes, as well as identify areas for further examination. Such performance measures will help support efforts to increase consistency in service across the state. Statewide data should also be used to track caseload trends, such as case retention, as well as to inform policy solutions and enrollment strategies targeting hard-to-reach groups.

## **Feedback from CalFresh applicants and participants is a primary factor driving CalFresh policy decisions**

As a vehicle to improve the health and well-being of low-income Californians, CalFresh policy decisions should be grounded in real life experiences and opinions of program participants and those eligible for benefits. To the greatest extent possible, CFPA aims to gather feedback from participants and grassroots partners that utilize and administer benefits on a daily basis.

## **Strategic alliances between CalFresh stakeholders increase CalFresh participation and optimize the benefits of CalFresh participation**

CalFresh is a complex benefit program; from policies to administration of CalFresh, a variety of partner organizations and agencies contribute to the effectiveness of CalFresh. CFPA seeks to strategically engage and work with partners to maximize impact.