

# CalFresh Utilization Project

Fighting poverty, filling plates

## A BIG PROBLEM: food insecurity.

**20%**  
of our county's kids live in a household that struggles with hunger.



**Hunger lives next door.** The US Census found that 16% of Santa Barbara County residents, including one in five children, live below the federal poverty level, increasing their risk of food insecurity and hunger.

**Hunger hurts us all.** Researchers have linked food insecurity to chronic physical health problems (like hypertension and diabetes), mental health problems (like depression), and for children, reduced academic performance and lifetime earnings.

## A BIG SOLUTION: CalFresh.

**\$5 = \$9**  
\$5 in CalFresh benefits generates \$9 of local economic activity.



[Learn more!](#)

**CalFresh is here to help.** Eligible low-income households receive a debit card that helps them buy more food at the supermarket, so they can get enough to eat. Researchers have linked the program to reductions in hunger, child poverty, and health problems, and improvements in high school graduation rates and life outcomes. The majority of recipients are children, working adults, disabled or elderly. (Turn the page to learn more about who can get CalFresh.)

**CalFresh boosts our economy.** Benefits are spent at local grocery stores and farmer's markets, generating \$1.79 in local economic activity for every dollar of benefits. The federal government pays 100% of the benefits.

## OUR CHALLENGE: Low CalFresh utilization.

**4 in 10**  
likely-eligible County households were enrolled in CalFresh.



**Many who need CalFresh don't receive it.** In 2014, the California Food Policy Advocates released a Program Access Index (PAI) ranking Santa Barbara County 56th of 58 California counties in CalFresh participation (based on 2012 data). That could mean 40,000 people not getting the help they need, and \$45 million in foregone benefits. Excluding those who would not qualify due to immigration or SSI status, the state estimates that about 42% of likely-eligible County residents are enrolled.

## OUR RESPONSE: the CalFresh Utilization Project.

### Phase 1: Study (2014)

**We built a diverse workgroup.** Composed of line, technical and supervisory staff, the Project workgroup researched the issues, identified best practices, and made dozens of recommendations, which were then categorized and prioritized. (Turn the page to see the names of participants!)

[Meet the people!](#)

### Phase 2: Solutions (2015)

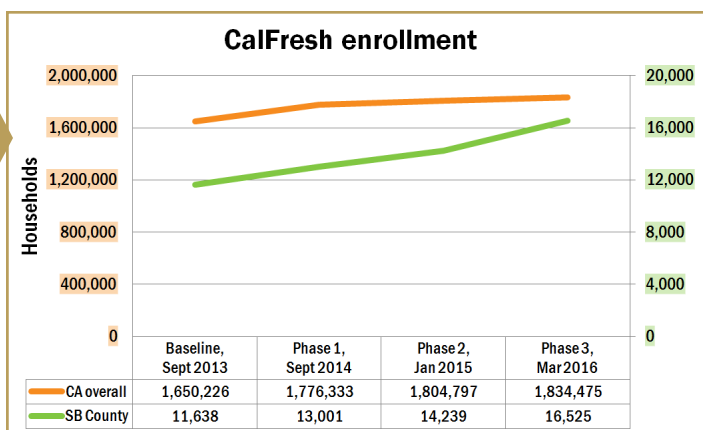
**We created and executed action plans.** Subcommittees were formed for each of five strategies: *outreach* to clients new to DSS, *inreach* to clients of other DSS programs, *retention* of existing CalFresh clients, *quality assurance* for correct casework, and *data* to measure progress. (Turn the page to see some of the solutions that the Project has implemented so far!)

### Phase 3: Ongoing (2016+)

**We're monitoring and progressing.** Our steering committee (the project leaders and subcommittee chairs and leads) is responsible for evaluation (developing reports and outcome measures) and continuous improvement (adjusting strategies per results, regulations and technology).

[See the solutions!](#)

**10x faster**  
caseload growth than state overall since start of Phase 2



**How are we doing?** The PAI has a two-year lag time, so we don't know the effect on our ranking yet. State CalFresh data is more current, and it shows our County enrollment growing strongly even as overall statewide enrollment is flat...implying an improved utilization rate. Between the start of Phase 2 and the start of Phase 3, our County enrollment grew by 16%, while statewide enrollment grew by 1.6%.

Rate of increase in number of households receiving NA CalFresh from January 2015 to March 2016. Source: DFA25.

Strategic Management\CalFresh Utilization\CalFresh infographic 8



# CalFresh Utilization Project

## Solutions we have implemented:

### IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

- New opt-in text and email notifications give clients notice of upcoming renewals, so they remember to turn in their paperwork.
- A new courtesy phone call reminds clients to provide missing verifications or reschedule missed appointments, to prevent denials at intake.
- Staff have received refreshers on the renewal process, and how to explain it to clients during intake and renewal interviews.
- To help clients and partner agencies resolve case issues faster, we established a community partner hotline to our Benefit Service Center (BSC), and promoted direct phone lines to the BSC in our district office lobbies.
- Our public website now highlights numerous ways for clients or applicants to access our programs, including community partners and the myBCW online application.

### REVISED BUSINESS PROCESSES

- Under our “horizontal integration” policy, our workers have been trained to ensure that current or prospective clients of other DSS programs are aware of CalFresh, and are offered the opportunity to apply.
- Under our “no wrong door” policy, we’re reducing the need to refer clients from one office to another. We’ve also made revisions for more efficient document processing, saving time and preventing lost documents.
- To prevent “churn”—the needless disruption of benefits—we’ve taken steps to prevent erroneous discontinuances...and to review and, if necessary, promptly rescind previous denials and discontinuances.
- To ensure accountability, we’ve established new staff expectations, and revised the supervisor case review process and forms. All administrative directives have been updated with the latest information, and made easily accessible to staff.

### STRATEGIC OUTREACH

- To see where outreach is needed, we have identified and mapped census tracts with high food need and low CalFresh utilization.
- To clarify where and to whom outreach is occurring, we have created an online tool to help DSS and our community partners plan, track, and report on CalFresh outreach.
- We attend a monthly THRIVE Food Pantry and other public events, hold outstations (office hours) at sites community-wide, and promote DSS and partner outstations and events on our website.
- We have developed flyers to dispel eligibility myths common among seniors, immigrants, students, and former foster youth.
- We’re exploring how Adult Services, Foster Care, school districts and nutrition educators can help us reach underserved populations.

### NEW MONTHLY REPORTS

- Households opting-in for electronic reminders
- Restorations completed
- Medi-Cal or General Relief households without CalFresh each month
- Former foster care youth receiving CalFresh

## Considering your own CalFresh Utilization Project?

We’re happy to share our insights and tools with other counties. Contact:

- Maria Gardner, Deputy Director, Economic Assistance Branch:  
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## Acknowledgments

*Executive Sponsor:* Maria Gardner

*Management Lead:* Heather Gardner

*Project Managers:* Veronica Alvarez & Dennis Tivey

### PHASE 1—STUDY: WORKGROUP MEMBERS

*Key Stakeholders:* Lina Bickel, Jose Clemente, Margery Gallegos, Christina Groppetti, Pam Powers, Mario Velasco, Davida Willis

*Project Team:* Eloise Aguillon, Sandra Ayala, Margie Cuellar, Maria Dwyer, Liz Eulloqui, Brenda Finnerty, Julisa Sahagun, Lupe Salinas

### PHASE 2—SOLUTIONS: SUBCOMMITTEES

#### Outreach (Offsite Efforts)

*Management Lead:* Mario Velasco

*Chairs:* Eloise Aguillon & Dennis Tivey

*Stakeholders:* Community partners including County Education Office, Foodbank, People Helping People, and Public Health Department

*Team:* Diana Aguirre, Susie Gomez, Patty Manriquez, Inez Ortiz, Oscar Palma-Ornelas, Carmen Rodarte, Lupe Salinas

#### Inreach (Horizontal Integration & No Wrong Door)

*Management Lead:* Pam Powers

*Chair:* Jose Clemente

*Team:* Eloise Aguillon, Sandra Ayala, Diana Diaz, Leticia Estrada, Ruben Fuentes, Guillermo Garcia, Rosa Gonzalez, Ariana Ochoa, Eva Ochoa, Raina Osterbauer, Lea Patague, Martha Pulido, Patricia Salcedo, Lupe Salinas, Patty Teniente, Claudia Velazquez

#### Retention (Negative Actions & Restorations)

*Management Lead:* Lina Bickel

*Chair:* Marian Acosta

*Team:* Esmeralda Corona, Maria Dwyer, Leticia Gamboa, Janet Harrison, Jessica Lemus, Alex Navarro, Julisa Sahagun, Martha Sanchez

#### Quality Assurance (Case Review Process)

*Management Lead:* Christina Groppetti

*Chair:* Margery Gallegos

*Team:* Marian Acosta, Araceli Camarena, Margie Cuellar, Elizabeth Eulloqui, Brenda Finnerty, Sheila Goodman, Monique Iriarte, Lourdes Kraft, Maidet Saucedo

#### Data (Data & Target Populations)

*Management Lead:* Heather Gardner

*Chair:* Veronica Alvarez

*Team:* Mitch Kawatachi, Farrell Kisio, Paul Mills, Dennis Tivey

### PHASE 3—ONGOING: STEERING COMMITTEE

*Team:* All Phase 2 leads & chairs, meeting quarterly

*Implementation:* Thanks to our outstanding line staff, who have diligently implemented the solutions.