

ISSUE

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. In an effort to further the connection between nutrition and health, the link between CalFresh and other health benefits should be strengthened. Moreover, through the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, millions of low-income Californians will soon be newly eligible for Medi-Cal. There is no better time to connect low-income Californians with a comprehensive package of benefits, including CalFresh, that will truly support overall good health.

NEED

Only about half of eligible Californians participate in CalFresh, in part because of stigma, a burdensome application process or misinformation regarding eligibility. Food insecurity continues to be a struggle faced by too many California families. We must work to continue implementing strategies that reduce barriers to accessing nutrition benefits.

Many Californians who are eligible for, but not participating in CalFresh, may be receiving other public benefits, such as Medi-Cal. Efforts to ensure that low-income families receive a package of benefits that includes CalFresh and supports their overall health and well-being are furthered by improved alignment between programs.

A significant number of individuals receiving Medi-Cal may be unaware that their household may be eligible for CalFresh. In addition, some households with a Medi-Cal recipient may be net income eligible for CalFresh, but have a gross income above the current limit. As a result, the CalFresh gross income test is preventing otherwise eligible households with high need and high expenses, such as child care costs, from accessing these benefits.

REQUEST

Improve alignment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal in order to increase the likelihood that low-income CalFresh eligible households with a Medi-Cal recipient also receive nutrition benefits. This will be achieved by making households with a Medi-Cal recipient (with income up to 200% FPL) categorically eligible for CalFresh, therefore removing a CalFresh income barrier. The gross income test would be raised from the current limit of 130% FPL to 200% FPL for categorically eligible households with a Medi-Cal recipient. The net income test would still apply for these households.

HISTORY

In 2008 California passed AB 433 which eliminated the asset test for CalFresh recipients. AB 433 used a similar enrollment strategy to allow applicants and participants to accrue savings and maintain eligibility. With the passage of AB 433, the large majority of CalFresh recipients continue to have a gross income below 130% FPL and a net income below 100% of FPL.

In 2012, as a follow-up to AB 433, CFPA worked with Assembly Member Fuentes to introduce AB 1560, which similarly proposed improved alignment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal. AB 1560 died in committee due to fiscal concerns. While this slowed progress in this area, the need and potential for impact remains and drives efforts to reintroduce similar legislation.

OUTCOMES

Improved alignment between CalFresh and Medi-Cal has the potential to increase CalFresh participation, boost administrative efficiency, and increase the likelihood that low-income households have access to a package of benefits that support their overall health and well-being.