

# Evidence to Action

## What we understand, we can change.



We envision California as a place of  
**well-being &  
opportunity for all.**

We commit to advocating  
**evidence-based policy**  
in pursuit of that vision.

We ground our work in  
**truth & facts**  
that illuminate problems, inform  
solutions, and measure impact.



Everyone deserves food, dignity, and meaningful opportunities to thrive. Let's ask and answer the questions that will help pave the best path forward. We can put our California values into action. We can honor the promise and potential of all Californians. We must dismantle the racist and classist structures that perpetuate deep inequities in health, education, poverty, and hunger.

### A Request

Please join us in bringing this work to life. We rely on the partnership of funders, researchers, and Californians with lived experiences of hunger and poverty, among many others, to pursue the facts, perspectives, and understanding necessary to guide policy change that will improve the lives of low-income Californians.

### Food & Shelter

More than 80 percent of low-income households in California are without affordable housing.<sup>1</sup> High housing costs leave many without enough resources to cover other basic needs like food, medicine, and childcare. While the State pursues long-term solutions to the housing crisis, more immediate solutions are needed to help individuals and families make ends meet.

CalFresh provides resources for struggling Californians to purchase food. The program reaches an estimated 3.8 million eligible Californians and should reach many more.<sup>2</sup> Current CalFresh rules are supposed to account for housing costs when determining who is eligible for nutrition assistance and the amount of assistance allotted to those who are eligible. These rules do not reflect California's extraordinarily high housing costs.

With millions of California households affected by food insecurity,<sup>3</sup> we need to better understand

- The relationship between food security and housing security.
- How CalFresh and other programs should best respond to housing costs and true levels of need across the state.

# Evidence to Action

## Food for All: California Immigrants

In 2018, the federal administration proposed changes to immigration rules regarding public charge. Anecdotally, the proposed changes are already leading to a “chilling effect” of misinformation, confusion, and fear about enrolling in public programs.

CFPA was privileged to partner with the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the UC Berkeley Labor Center on a [project](#) to describe the effects that the proposed changes would have on low-income Californians and the economy at large.

The findings of that work indicate the “chilling effect” could impact up to 2.2 million Californians in immigrant families and result in billions of dollars being lost from the state economy.<sup>4</sup> There is a pressing need to better understand

- The short- and long-term impacts of the chilling effect among immigrant Californians.
- The ongoing effects of the proposed rule and the effects of a final rule if it is enacted.
- What a change in administrative rules would mean for immigrant families, their access to the federal nutrition programs, their food security, and their overall health and well-being.

## Our Promise to Children

California has the highest rate of child poverty in the nation.<sup>5</sup> Our public schools enroll more than 3.7 million students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals.<sup>6</sup> Given the high cost of living (particularly housing) in our state, many more children likely need free or reduced-price school meals but don’t meet the eligibility criteria.

Offering school meals free of charge to all students (universally free meals) is one effective approach to providing children with the nutritious food they need to learn, grow, and achieve. State and federal policies help make free school meals a reality for some students. To craft policies that will expand universally free meals to more students in need, we should better understand

- What keeps eligible schools and school districts from implementing universal meals options such as the Community Eligibility Provision.
- The association, if any, between the implementation of universally free meals and changes in state or federal education funding for schools and school districts.
- Education outcomes that arise in California schools offering optimal access to nutrition programs.



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## The Dignity of Food & Work

On the heels of a 2018 Farm Bill that protected the funding and structure of the country's most substantial nutrition assistance program (SNAP/CalFresh), the federal administration proposed a rule to severely limit access to that same program among able-bodied adults without dependents.

Under the unsubstantiated premise of incentivizing employment, able-bodied adults without dependents are limited to three months of CalFresh benefits within a 36-month window unless they can find and maintain work for 20 hours or more per week. The proposed rule change seeks to apply these time limits even in areas where sufficient jobs are not available.

With nearly 475,000 Californians threatened by these proposed federal changes,<sup>7</sup> we need to better understand

- Labor conditions for low-wage workers, including hours worked per week, variation in month-to-month earnings, and volatility of work schedules.
- How these factors manifest across gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and other demographic markers.
- How to best mitigate the harm that results from the existing CalFresh time limits and additional harm that may result from a change in administrative rules.

## Fulfilling the Promise of Policy Change: CalFresh & SSI

For decades, low-income Californians who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – older adults and individuals who are disabled – have been unable to receive basic nutrition assistance. A long-sought, hard-fought policy change is poised to stem that tide. In June 2019, hundreds of thousands of SSI recipients will be newly eligible for CalFresh.<sup>8</sup> We must uphold the promise and potential of this policy change by ensuring that newly eligible individuals are actually enrolled in CalFresh. We need to understand

- The extent to which the State and counties successfully enroll eligible SSI recipients in CalFresh.
- Key system and process changes necessary to better serve SSI recipients through CalFresh.
- The economic effects of enrolling – or failing to enroll – SSI recipients in CalFresh, including implications for food insecurity and healthcare costs.



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## Recognizing True Levels of Poverty & Moving Toward Shared Prosperity

Considering the cost of living throughout California, eligibility thresholds for the federal nutrition programs are not sufficient to identify all who are struggling to make ends meet. We need to better understand the health and food security consequences for individuals and families who fall into the gap.

Because many Californians cannot access the basic programs that serve as bridges out of poverty and hunger, we undermine movement toward upward mobility, economic security, and shared prosperity for all. Let's work to better understand

- How state and federal leaders can best serve individuals and families who are not eligible for existing public programs but are struggling against hunger and poverty all the same.
- How public programs can address true levels of need in our state and better support economic security and prosperity for all.

## Please Join Us!

To share input, ask questions, or otherwise partner on research for change, please contact Tia Shimada at [tia@cfpa.net](mailto:tia@cfpa.net) or 510.433.1122 ext 109.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Kimberlin, Sara. California Budget and Policy Center. *Californians in All Parts of the State Pay More Than They Can Afford for Housing*. September 2017.

Note: the US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines "affordable housing" as housing that costs no more than 30 percent of a household's income. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/glossary/glossary\\_a.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/glossary/glossary_a.html)

<sup>2</sup> California Food Policy Advocates. *Lost Dollars, Empty Plates*. April 2019. Available at: <https://cfpa.net/CalFresh/CFPAPublications/LDEP-FullReport-2019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> California Food Policy Advocates, *Struggling to Make Ends Meet: Food Insecurity in CA*. Available at: <https://cfpa.net/GeneralNutrition/CFPAPublications/FoodInsecurity-Factsheet-2019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ponce NA, Lucia L, Shimada T. December 2018. *Proposed changes to immigration rules could cost California jobs, harm public health*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, UC Berkeley Labor Center & California Food Policy Advocates. Available at: <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2018/publiccharge-factsheet-dec2018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Kids Count Data Center. *Children in poverty according to the supplemental poverty measure in the United States 2015-17*. Available at: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

<sup>6</sup> California Department of Education. *DataQuest – Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Meals 2017-18*. Available at: <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>

<sup>7</sup> California Department of Social Services. *STAT 47 – Non-Assistance CalFresh Work Registrants, Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD), and Employment and Training (E&T) Program Quarterly Statistical Report for calendar year 2016*. Available at: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Research-and-Data/CalFresh-Data-Tables/STAT-47>

<sup>8</sup> California Department of Social Services. *Expanding CalFresh to SSI/SSP Recipients Beginning June 1, 2019*. Available at: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/CalFresh/Supplemental-Security-Income>