

CFPA's 2014 Policy Development Survey: Summary of Results

Contact: Alexis Fernández (alexis@cfpa.net; 510.433.1122 ext.111 109)



Overview

In August 2013, we surveyed our partners to learn more about the nutrition challenges facing California communities and to explore potential solutions to those challenges. This document summarizes the survey results by topic. The complete set of survey questions is also available. [PDF](#)

We will consider the survey results, along with key informant interviews and review of current work plans, as we develop our policy priorities for 2014. In the coming months we will share these priorities in the form of a legislative agenda, an administrative advocacy agenda, and a research agenda.

Survey Respondents

In total, 89 partners took the survey, though respondents were not required to answer each question. The majority of respondents (70%) identified themselves as advocates. Administrators, community leaders, community members, and service providers also responded to the survey.

Major Food and Nutrition Challenges

Several respondents cited inadequate access to affordable, nutritious foods as a major challenge facing low-income Californians. In particular, respondents named the affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables as a barrier to healthy eating. Affordability was identified as a challenge for individuals and families, as well as service providers and program administrators.

Respondents also mentioned the overwhelming presence of unhealthy food options in their communities and the overconsumption of sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) as primary challenges. Some respondents highlighted the need for effective nutrition education and training among benefit recipients, service providers, and program administrators.

Finally, ongoing high rates of food insecurity are a primary concern for many respondents. Other food and nutrition challenges identified by our survey respondents are presented on the following pages.

Policy Issues and Potential Solutions

Generally, respondents agree that efforts aimed at increasing access to and participation in the federal nutrition programs (like CalFresh and school meals) must continue. Respondents are also in strong support of efforts to streamline program enrollment and alleviate the burden of maintaining nutrition benefits.

Respondents noted the need for adequate resources to support nutrition programs and nutritious eating. For instance, a common suggestion was to increase resources, including staff education and training, to help improve school meals. Many respondents also cited a need to revisit the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Thrifty Food Plan as the basis for determining CalFresh benefit allotments.

Finally, respondents offered potential solutions specifically related to nutritional quality and appeal. For example, respondents mentioned the importance of increasing the capacity for scratch cooking in schools with the overarching goals of increasing fresh fruit and vegetable consumption, improving meal quality, and increasing healthy options. A significant number of respondents also recommended efforts to reduce the consumption of SSBs, including a SSB tax.

Other potential policy solutions offered by our survey respondents are presented in the sections below.

CalFresh

Describing Challenges

When asked to identify challenges to initiating a CalFresh application, completing the application process, and/or maintaining benefits, respondents reported barriers such as:

Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligibility due to CA's SSI cash-out policy • Fluctuating income causes frequent changes in eligibility
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty completing application tasks during the allotted business hours • Lack of transportation and/or internet access • Language barriers • Difficulty communicating with local offices
Paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burdensome paperwork requirements • Completing multiple applications/paperwork across programs • Difficulty collecting required documentation
Customer Service and Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not understanding paperwork requirements related to maintaining benefits • Experiencing poor customer service • Lack of knowledge or awareness of potential eligibility • Stigma and myths surrounding program participation

When asked to identify policy changes to address barriers to initiating a CalFresh application, completing the application process, and/or maintaining benefits, respondents recommended solutions such as:

- Move to annual recertification of CalFresh benefits
- Revisit and/or eliminate the SSI cash-out policy
- Simplify the application process overall
- Increase funding for outreach activities
- Improve data sharing between departments
- Integrate the CalFresh application process with other public benefits
- Reduce the required paperwork and verifications

When asked to identify specific challenges faced by eligible immigrants and/or mixed status households in accessing CalFresh, respondents reported issues including:

- Fear, stigma and cultural challenges among potential participants
- Mistrust of government agencies and sharing of information
- Lack of awareness that they or their children may be eligible for benefits
- Eligibility rules not applied consistently
- Concerns around impact on immigrations status
- Language barriers
- Trusted community partners, such as notarios, providing inaccurate information about CalFresh

Exploring Solutions

When survey respondents were asked to identify state-level solutions to ensure that clients applying for health coverage are simultaneously enrolled in CalFresh, answers included:

- Develop an automatic, presumptive eligibility process
- Use an opt-out vs. opt-in strategy
- Implement horizontal integration
- Create shared databases
- Streamline data and procedures across counties
- Develop a single application for both programs
- Align eligibility requirements

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which strategies would be useful in achieving the goal of simplifying the CalFresh application process. Responses are show in the table below.

Strategy	Responses		
	Very Useful or Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
Improve CBO capacity to follow-up on CalFresh cases	56	11	3
Establish CalFresh/Medi-Cal dual enrollment as the default	69	3	0
Streamline eligibility requirements across programs	72	1	0
Verify applicant information through electronic records/sources	65	6	0
Simplify and clarify statewide guidance on policy implementation	62	7	0
Provide same-day service to applicants	67	4	0
Allow CalFresh applications to be completed entirely by phone	63	5	3

Over 90% of respondents agreed that statewide CalFresh standards would improve overall performance. Survey respondents were asked to identify which statewide standards would be most effective for improving performance. Responses are show in the table below.

Statewide Standard	Responses		
	Most Effective or Effective	Somewhat Effective	Least Effective
Participation benchmarks	16	9	14
Same-day eligibility determination	34	8	1
Customer service standards	21	12	5
Standardized procedures for administrative practices	34	7	5

Afterschool Nutrition

Describing Challenges

When asked to identify the challenges that providers face in improving the quality of afterschool meals and snacks, respondents reported barriers such as:

- Inadequate funding via reimbursement
- Lack of infrastructure and capacity to improve quality
- A need for stricter guidelines to prevent dependency on convenience foods and other less nutritious food items
- Competition with vending machines, corner/convenience stores and fundraisers selling less nutritious food items.
- Concern over the timing of the afterschool snack and/or meal in relationship to other meals

Exploring Solutions

Respondents were asked to recommend solutions to address afterschool meal quality while continuing to focus on increasing the number of after school providers. Responses included:

- Improve Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) nutrition standards using a strong evidence-base, such as that provided by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and/or the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), to inform improvements
- Increase the reimbursement or offer incentives to improve the quality of meals served
- Share best practices and move toward improvement on a case-by-case basis

Respondents also identified best practices that would support high quality, nutritious afterschool meals, such as:

- Partnerships between AS and SNAP-Ed or other nutrition education providers
- Increase Farm-to-School, garden programs and farmer’s markets
- Increase support and training on improving quality of CACFP suppers Improve nutrition standards provided by the California Department of Education (CDE)
- Ensure that meals served are culturally-relevant
- Encourage providers to serve afterschool snacks and/or meals with sufficient time between a previous meal to ensure that a child does not experience hunger later in the day

Child Care

Describing Challenges

Respondents reported several challenges to improving child care nutrition, including:

- Ensuring that providers have the resources necessary to meet any additional requirements or standards, for example increased reimbursement and/or additional training.
- Ensuring that additional requirements or standards do not impact access to child care by inadvertently decreasing the number of providers.

Exploring Solutions

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which strategies would be useful for improving child care nutrition. Responses are show in the table below.

Strategy	Responses		
	Very Useful or Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
Reinstate the CACFP state meal reimbursement	49	4	0
Implement nutrition standards in in all licensed child care	37	10	6
Align the provision of CACFP with other child care subsidies	39	8	2
Allocate CCD funding for a R&R Nutrition Advisor position	31	11	4

Overall, respondents indicate broad support for prioritizing the child care nutrition strategies mentioned above. Respondents also emphasized the impact and importance of nutrition in the early years of a child's life.

Mobile Vending

Describing Challenges

- Over 40% of respondents report that mobile food vending occurs near schools in their communities when students are present while 36% are unsure about the presence of such vending.
- Nearly 75% of respondents are concerned about mobile food vending that occurs near schools.

Exploring Solutions

- Over 65% of respondents are unsure if their communities have local policies that address mobile food vending near schools while 20% report there are no such policies in their communities.
- Just over half of all respondents (55%) think CFPA should make mobile food vending a priority in efforts to improve food environments on and around school campuses.

Respondents suggested a range of possible solutions to address mobile food vending near schools. These potential solutions included:

- State and local policies to limit the presence of mobile food vending near school campuses
- State and local policies to establish nutrition standards for foods offered by mobile vendors near school campuses
- Efforts to educate mobile vendors about providing healthy options

Respondents also mentioned:

- The need to ensure that small businesses, immigrants, and communities of color are not unduly harmed by efforts to address mobile food vending near schools
- The need for adequate enforcement of existing or future mobile food vending policies
- The potential for mobile food vendors and school nutrition services to collaborate
- The benefits of closed campuses with respect to decreasing students' access to unhealthy foods

School Breakfast

Describing Challenges

Forty-five percent of respondents reported that the primary barrier to increasing school breakfast participation is when and/or where breakfast is served.

When survey respondents were asked to identify the primary barrier to using alternative, after-the-bell breakfast models, which have been shown to increase school breakfast participation:

- 18 identified "lack of awareness about alternative models for serving breakfast"
- 18 identified "inadequate funding for equipment and other start-up expenses"
- 14 identified "the need for technical assistance around implementation and operation"
- 13 identified "a lack of interest and/or support among stakeholders"

Exploring Solutions

Over 80% of respondents support an expansion of the state's school meal mandate to make two meals per day available to students in need (instead of one meal per day).

A majority of respondents think schools and/or school districts should be accountable for serving a minimum number or percentage of low-income students with the breakfast program.

Over 75% of respondents think schools that have low breakfast participation should be required to utilize more effective service models.

School Meal Quality/REAL School Food Initiative

Describing Challenges

Just over 65% of survey respondents report that ensuring students have enough time to eat during the school day is challenge in their communities. When asked for solutions to this challenge, respondents recommended:

- Longer breakfast and lunch periods and/or a minimum amount of time dedicated to eating
- Scheduling recess before lunch
- Making cafeterias more efficient and streamlined
- Multiple breakfast and lunch periods to stagger students
- Increased points of sale in the cafeteria

When asked whether school districts have encountered problems with serving fresh fruits and vegetables (at salad bars or elsewhere):

- Nearly 25% of respondents reported that this is problem in their communities.
- 30% of respondents report that this is not a problem
- Just over 45% of respondents were unsure.
- Over 25% of respondents agree that if this is a problem it should be addressed at the state level.

Exploring Solutions

Nearly 70% of respondents agreed that ensuring the transparency of results from Administrative Reviews would be helpful. Respondents suggested a range of strategies for ensuring transparency, such as:

- Posting administrative reviews online
- Allowing School Food Authorities to post reactions and/or corrective actions in response to the administrative reviews
- Providing school-based parent groups with access to the administrative reviews

Most respondents were not aware of youth-focused organizations championing efforts such as a student bill of rights for school food. Those who did know of such work mentioned the youth engagement efforts of the Network for Healthy California, Health Corps, and Network Youth Engagement.

When survey respondents were asked to identify, in addition to new USDA school requirements, what California should do to ensure competitive food policies support healthier school campuses:

- 22 identified “set standards around school fundraising”
- 26 identified “designate accountability among school/district leaders for competitive foods sold outside the cafeteria”
- 26 identified “disclose how competitive food revenue is used within a district”
- 25 identified “establishing additional nutrition standards for competitive foods”

School Meal Eligibility

Exploring Solutions

- Over 90% of respondents agreed that CFPA should prioritize the use of Medicaid data to directly certify students for free school meals.
- Just over 90% of respondents agreed that CFPA should prioritize efforts to support the use of the Community Eligibility option.
- Over 75% of respondents also support the utilization of Provision 2 to expand access and eliminate paperwork associated with school meal applications.

Summer Nutrition

Describing Challenges

When asked to identify the primary barrier to reaching more children & youth through the federal summer meal programs, the definitive majority of respondents cited:

- “Children and youth lack transportation to meal sites” and
- “Children and youth do not know about the summer meal program and/or meal sites”

When asked to identify the primary barrier to sites serving more summer meals:

- Over 50% of respondents cited the “expense of operating and/or administering summer meal programs”
- Nearly 25% cited the “administrative burden on sites and/or sponsors”

Exploring Solutions

Nearly 65% of respondents agree that CFPA should prioritize the expansion of recent demonstration projects that provided summer nutrition benefits for households to purchase food independent of the summer meal programs. Just over 10% of respondents do not support this strategy while nearly 25% are unsure.

Respondents also mentioned:

- The importance of having summer school and other types of programming available to children when school is out
- The need for resources (staffing and funds) to offer higher quality summer meals, including fresh fruits and vegetables
- A desire to serve caregivers and parents who accompany children to meal sites (federal reimbursement is only available for meals served to individuals 0-18 years of age)

Water Access

Describing Challenges

Over 70% of respondents agree that CFPA should prioritize access to free drinking water outside of schools in an effort to improve water consumption.

When asked which publicly-funded spaces, programs and/or agencies (beyond schools) that should assess the accessibility and appeal of fresh, free drinking water sources, respondents suggested:

- Recreational facilities, including parks and playgrounds
- Community centers
- Libraries
- Public buildings and government agencies
- Universities

Exploring Solutions

Respondents suggested a range of possible solutions to persuade schools to assess whether current water sources meet the intent of the law to provide students with ready access to free, fresh drinking water where meals are served. The potential solutions included:

- Provide or incentivize water filtration systems
- Provide additional resources or mini-grants to complete the assessment
- Create a standard survey tool that schools can use to assess their current water sources
- Consider drinking water quality in communities where this is a problem and provide necessary resources to address the problem

Respondents also reported that the following factors should be considered when assessing the accessibility of fresh, free drinking water:

- Drinking water quality
- Infrastructure needs
- Quality of available filtrations systems
- Appeal of current drinking water sources
- Location of current drinking water sources

Respondents were asked to highlight steps that districts have taken to promote water consumption or make fresh, free drinking water accessible to students. Respondents reported that districts have:

- Installed hydration stations
- Provided infused water
- Provided students with cups
- Limited other beverages on campus
- Improved the appeal of existing water fountains

When asked to identify non-traditional or unexpected partners that may help advance the implementation of the drinking water requirements, respondents identified:

- Local water departments, water boards, and public health departments
- Private financial supporters to address capital improvements
- Celebrities and/or athletes engaged in a PR campaign
- Sierra Club, Rotary Clubs, and other locally-engaged groups
- Dental community and dental associations
- Environmental justice organizations and international water access organizations

Conclusion

Thank you to all of our partners who took the time to complete the survey. Your feedback has already proven useful as we begin to identify our policy priorities for 2014. In the coming months we will share those priorities in the form of a legislative agenda, an administrative advocacy agenda, and a research agenda. For more updates, please subscribe to our nutrition action alert. [link](#)

Questions?

Contact Alexis Fernandez at alexis@cfpa.net or 510.433.1122 ext. 111