

CFPA's 2016 Policy Development Survey: Summary of Results

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Overview

In August and September 2015, we surveyed the CFPA network to solicit input on nutrition issues affecting California communities- and potential policy solutions to those issues. This document summarizes the survey results by topic. The complete set of survey questions is also available. [PDF](#) An additional outreach survey was conducted with potential new partner organizations to understand their perspectives and intersections with the federal nutrition programs. The outreach survey questions are available as well. [PDF](#)

We will consider the survey results, input from stakeholder interviews, and a review of our strategic plan, among other factors, as we develop our 2016 state policy priorities. In the coming months we will share our priorities in a legislative agenda, an administrative advocacy agenda, and a research agenda.

Survey Respondents

In total, 122 stakeholders participated in these surveys. Respondents were not required to answer each question. The majority of respondents identified themselves as advocates (50%) and/or service providers (32%). Administrators, community members, community leaders, benefit recipients, and researchers also responded to the surveys.

Nutrition Challenges and Potential Solutions

Respondents believe that efforts aimed at increasing access to and participation in the federal nutrition programs (e.g. CalFresh, school meals) must continue. Respondents also voiced support for new, innovative approaches, such as Summer EBT, should be pursued. Respondents strongly support improvements to modernize program enrollment, improve program quality, ease the process of maintaining benefits, and alleviate administrative burdens for providers.

Respondents note the need for more resources to support nutrition programs, particularly to support improvements to the nutrition of food served. Many cite needs for training, improved facilities, and innovative procurement practices. Another common suggestion is to increase funding to support program improvements and to ensure that providers are adequately compensated.

Food Insecurity

Identifying challenges

Most respondents (71%) thought the historic California drought has had a negative impact on food security, or that food security has remained unchanged (27%). Those who believe that food security has gotten worse cited higher food costs as the main driver (51%), followed by increased unemployment and underemployment (24%), decreased availability of food from charitable sources (14%), and the inability of public nutrition programs to respond to the need (8%).

Exploring solutions

When asked what is needed to mitigate the effect of the drought on food security, responses included:

- Increased collaboration between government and community agencies in the communities most impacted by the drought
- Responding to needs of migrant farmworker families
- Expand food benefits, such as SNAP or WIC coverage, to other family members
- Increase CalFresh outreach
- Federal emergency policy tools, such as D-SNAP
- Better retention of water resources and more sustainable agricultural practices

Respondents believed the following actions would be needed to expand food insecurity screenings in health care settings:

- Dedicated staffing to address food insecurity needs, such as direct referrals to dietitians
- Better training of providers about community needs and assistance programs
- Disseminate models of food insecurity screenings that are already happening at some hospitals and clinics, including data about effectiveness
- Develop and disseminate protocols and train medical staff to use them.
- Provide MediCal billing codes and reimbursement for screenings
- Integrate into well child exams and preventative care, as well as emergency intake forms

Respondents were asked what is needed to promote and expand outreach and enrollment for nutrition assistance programs in healthcare settings:

- Better coordination between assistance program agencies and health care providers
- Training medical staff to identify issues and provide direct referrals or “prescriptions” for CalFresh and other programs
- Streamline the interface between the medical setting and assistance agencies to facilitate direct enrollment in programs
- Provide billing and reimbursement codes for referrals, such as utilizing Medicare for “medically tailored meals.”
- Dual enrollment in CalFresh & MediCal

Afterschool Nutrition

USDA released a proposed meal pattern changes for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) that would impact the nutrition standards of CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Suppers. Respondent reactions to the proposed changes for At-Risk Afterschool Suppers included:

- Updates to the current standards are much needed
- The changes will improve nutrition
- Stricter guidelines are good, but it is challenging for sponsors to select healthy foods the children will eat
- More attention should have been paid to the 13-18 year old age group
- Specific guidance on the impact of changes upon popular menu items is needed

Identifying challenges

What barriers should be addressed to help more afterschool sites serve students CACFP supper meals?

- Lack of guidance on successful replicable models of afterschool meal service
- Insufficient facilities for food preparation and storage or prepping on-site
- Lack of input from students and afterschool site staff
- Labor and union issues
- Limited sources of affordable healthy foods
- Administrative burdens
- Local logistical issues, such as transportation, locations, timing and safety
- Poor quality of food served, with many pre-packaged items
- Insufficient reimbursement rate
- Not enough sponsors to serve sites

Exploring solutions

Respondents suggested the following actions to improve the quality of afterschool supper meals:

- Education and training for sponsors, site staff, children and families
- Disallow juice as meeting the fruit requirement and flavored milk as a beverage
- Increase reimbursement and funding for facilities and equipment

- Develop methods of coordination and food sourcing for rural sites
- Provide model resources, such as cycle menus and a variety of recipes
- Adjust the time the meals are served to best meet community needs
- Improved procurement practices

Federal and state laws governing the types of snacks and "competitive foods" sold on school grounds do not apply 30 minutes after the last school bell rings. Respondents largely believed that competitive food regulations should extend through after school programming.

Should competitive food rules extend through afterschool on school grounds?	Responses
Yes, through all afterschool programming	34
Yes, if the afterschool programming serves food through a child nutrition program	11
No	4
Total	49

Early Childhood Nutrition

The specifics of the final new meal pattern for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) are not yet known, but respondents had varied opinions on the potential impact of the expected changes for providers. In addition to the responses below, multiple respondents believed that providers would be resistant to change at first, but that the changes would improve nutrition over time.

Potential Impact of New Meal Pattern	Responses
Providers will be impacted positively and nutrition will improve	27
Providers will not have the capacity to implement new meal pattern changes	22
Providers will not know a new meal pattern is being implemented	7
Providers will be impacted negatively	6
Providers will not be impacted at all (neutral)	2
Total	46

Identifying challenges

When asked about the major challenges to serving healthy foods in child care, most respondents believed that the biggest challenge was the high cost associated with buying healthy foods.

Challenges to serving healthy foods in child care	Responses
Cost associated with buying healthy foods are too high	26
Providers do not have enough information about how to serve healthy foods in child care settings (e.g., menu planning, meal preparation)	14
There is not a standard for what healthy foods should be served in child care settings	8
There are limited food access points to buy nutritious food (e.g., grocery stores)	5
Total	53

When asked what supports are needed to establish and increase child care provider capacity to serve healthier foods, respondents cited:

- Training
- Facilities
- Financial support (reimbursements, incentives, food donations, etc)

- Access to healthy, affordable food
- Licensing standards
- Nutrition and cooking education for providers, children and parents
- Reduced administrative burdens

When asked what supports would help CACFP providers meet the upcoming new meal pattern, responses included:

- Well-trained sponsors who can coach and guide providers
- Education and training on new meal pattern
- Means of purchasing affordable healthy food

Exploring solutions

Respondents expressed support for the following policy concepts to improve early childhood nutrition in licensed child care:

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Neutral	Somewhat Opposed	Very Opposed	Total
Establishing minimum nutrition standards for meals and snacks served to children in family child care homes	40	9	1	0	1	51
Establishing a statewide rating system of child care quality that includes measures of nutrition	34	13	3	2	0	52
Extending the state law that requires centers to follow the CACFP meal pattern, regardless of participation in the program, to licensed family child care homes	30	15	3	3	0	51

In regards to the broader licensed child care environment, respondents identified the following issues as top policy priorities:

- Understanding the impact of rates on families ability to obtain care and work
- Health-promoting policy and practices in nutrition, physical activity and screen time
- Increasing reimbursement rates for providers
- Quality care indicators
- Increasing CACFP participation

Beyond additional reimbursement, respondents suggested strategies that could better support CACFP child care providers to serve more nutritious food. These strategies included:

- Availability of peer training and resources
- Participation in CDE Preschools Shine
- Procurement of low-cost, healthy foods, such as a cooperative buying program
- Farm-to-preschool and local food procurement
- Education of providers, children and families
- Reduced administrative burdens
- State agency should provide support and training, rather than just compliance monitoring

School Meal Quality & Appeal (REAL School Food)

Respondents want information about the quality of school meals in California. They would use this information to work directly with schools (67%), to build parent and student advocacy in schools (63%), and to inform school district decision makers (63%). About half of respondents (45%) would use school meal quality data to inform regional and statewide decision makers.

When asked what they would want to know about the quality of school meals in California, responses included:

- Prevalence of scratch cooking and fresh preparation
- Availability of salad bars
- Source of ingredients, including farm-to-school
- Staff training
- Food safety and sanitation
- Measures of plate waste
- Analysis of nutritional value
- Availability of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Use of antibiotics and hormones in meat and poultry
- Actual costs per meal
- Student and staff perceptions of meal quality
- Use of commodities
- Sugar content in meals
- Cultural diversity of meals

Respondents were asked what information that would want to know from school district Administrative Review reports. Most respondents want to know about school district compliance with federal nutrition standards (89%), compliance with state laws governing school meals (78%), and areas of excellence (74%). Less than half wanted information about technical assistance received by the state agency (48%) and student enrollment and identification errors (41%). Additional desired information included student evaluations, farm-to-school participation, and replicable best practices.

Identifying challenges

When asked to identify the biggest challenge related to food waste in school meals, respondents identified the following issues:

Causes of school food waste	Responses
Inadequate school facilities	13
Insufficient staff training	12
Lack of student involvement in menu design	7
County health department regulations	1
Other: insufficient funding (3), lack of time to eat (1), lack of outreach and marketing at the local level (1), whole grain requirement (1)	6

Exploring solutions

When asked what solutions were needed to address the causes of school food waste, responses included:

- Increase students' time to eat school meals
- Utilize student input and feedback
- Allow more flexibility in menus and student choice of foods
- Improve the quality and taste of the food served
- Serve foods in ways more likely to be eaten, such as cut fruit instead of whole
- Eliminate competitive foods on school campuses
- Provide nutrition education for students
- Allow for reuse of uneaten school food (cooking classes, food sharing tables, donations, school garden compost, etc)
- Schedule recess before lunch
- Utilize strategic serving strategies, such as placing fruits and vegetables first

Other solutions to overcome challenges to quality school food service included:

- Improve school food equipment and facilities with the capacity to prepare and serve healthy meals
- Provide education and training in food preparation for food service staff
- Change the culture of school food service
- Secure buy-in from staff and district leadership to support school food changes
- Innovate food procurement systems
- Provide nutrition and cooking education for students
- Ensure that food meets student preferences
- Allow for effective, non-traditional food service models

Respondents were asked to suggest strategies to leverage the success of high-quality school food service to improve the lowest-performing districts. Ideas included:

- Offer peer mentorship to replicate successful models and share best practices
- Better integrate student feedback and menu selection
- Provide adequate funding for all districts
- Pair small and large districts for joint purchasing
- Provide low-performing districts a dietitian or chef consultant to improve quality
- Require farm-to-school
- Increase community involvement in school food programs
- Develop a set of tested, best practices that can be implemented with limited resources

School Nutrition Environment

Competitive Foods

Implementation of the federal Smart Snacks rule, along with California's already existing state laws, have further regulated the types of snacks and "competitive foods" sold on school campuses. Respondents identified additional changes they would like to see with foods sold on school campuses:

- Removal of all competitive foods for sale
- Greater parent and student involvement
- Fresh fruit provided throughout school campuses
- Greater attention to marketing of food on school campuses
- No sugar-sweetened or artificially-sweetened drinks

Respondents recommended incentives or restrictions to improve the nutrition environment on and around school campuses:

- Grants and funding opportunities to support healthy nutrition at schools
- Improved education, training and communication
- Better mechanisms for enforcement of current regulations
- Elimination of highly processed, convenience foods
- Water stations at all schools
- Incentives for farm-to-school

Local School Wellness Policies

Respondents had mixed opinions on the effectiveness of Local School Wellness Policies (LSWP) to bring improvements to school nutrition. Out of 31 responses, 13 people thought they had resulted in improvements. Five said they did not result in improvements, while 7 said maybe, and 6 did not know.

When asked how LSWPs could be more effective for improving school meals or the school nutrition environment, responses included:

- Designated wellness coordinators oversee implementations
- Prioritization by principals and superintendents
- Advocating for more time to eat and alternative meal service models that reach more students
- Inclusion in district Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP)
- Strengthening implementation and evaluation
- Include school wellness in school ratings

Most respondents (86%) thought it would be helpful if the state provided a tool for districts to evaluate their progress towards attaining wellness policy goal. Two respondents thought a wellness policy implementation tool would be most helpful.

Most respondents wanted to be able to access the results of the wellness policy assessment from individual school sites (79%), school districts (79%), and the state as a whole (63%).

Respondents hoped to view the results of progress towards wellness goals in multiple ways:

Would you like to know...	Responses
How districts across the state compare to one another	17
How results compare across multiple years	17
How district results compare to the county or state	16
How schools within a district compare to one another	15
How school results compare to the district	14
Total	21

Summer Nutrition

Identifying challenges

Respondents identified the primary barriers to reaching more children and youth through the federal summer meals programs. These barriers included:

- Lack of summer school or enrichment programming at meal sites
- Lack of transportation to meal sites, particularly for working families
- Working families' inability to bring children to meal sites
- Sites not able to serve adults along with children
- Poor outreach and promotion (statewide and local)

- Excessive administrative red tape
- Inadequate number of sites at apartment complexes and community centers where children congregate during the summer
- Crime, bad weather, or other safety concerns near sites
- Stigma associated with receiving free meals or visiting meal sites

Exploring solutions

When asked to identify actions or changes needed to improve the reach and quality of summer meal programs, responses included solutions such as

- Increase summer school and other forms of programming
- Improve statewide promotion and outreach
- Map available meal sites to show availability and identify gaps
- Increase sites at schools, housing complexes, and high-traffic community locations
- Serve fresh produce and higher-quality, more appealing food
- Serve meals through mobile food trucks in high-poverty communities
- Implement the [Summer Meals Act](#) provisions

Respondents also identified solutions outside of the summer meal programs:

- Implement [Summer EBT](#)
- Give food directly to families to prepare themselves

Of the respondents who were familiar with Summer EBT, over 90% would like to see the program implemented in California. When asked which model of Summer EBT was preferable, most respondents favored the CalFresh/SNAP model.

Potential Summer EBT Models	Responses
The SNAP/CalFresh model	15
The WIC model	2
I have no preference between models	6

Those who favored the CalFresh/SNAP model preferred it because:

- It is the most cost effective
- It is more realistic and easier to utilize than WIC
- It addresses the barriers posed by traditional summer meals
- CalFresh is more familiar, widely used, and accepted
- SNAP provides more dignity for families to make their own food choices
- Parents of school-age children are not trained in the WIC program.

Those who favored the WIC model cited the following reasons for their support:

- Providing guidelines for allowable foods seems in line with the child nutrition programs
- WIC is easier to work with in some communities

CalFresh/SNAP

Identifying challenges

Respondents were asked to identify barriers that prevent eligible households from (1) initiating a CalFresh application, (2) completing the application process, and (3) maintaining benefits. These barriers included:

- Lack of understanding or misperceptions about eligibility and the process to apply
- Stigma associated with public benefits
- Completing the application interview

- Semi-annual reporting and recertification to maintain benefits
- Language barriers
- Immigration status fears
- Small benefit amount is not enough of an incentive
- Bureaucratic language and confusing income reporting process
- Lack of customer service and negative attitudes from DPSS and case workers
- Lack of awareness of the program
- Ineligibility of those receiving SSI/SSD
- Lack of electronic signature

Respondents were asked to identify barriers to accessing CalFresh for specific populations:

- Challenges that eligible immigrants and/or mixed-status household face included:
 - Misinformation or lack of knowledge about the program
 - Not understanding eligibility criteria
 - Immigration and deportation fears
 - Language barriers
 - Sponsorship information and confusing regulations
 - Lack of trust
 - Stigma and cultural notions around receiving aid
- Challenges that seniors face included:
 - Difficulty applying due to transportation, health issues or isolation
 - Lack of knowledge about CalFresh or eligibility
 - Unavailability of default dual enrollment with MediCare/MediCal (Medi-Medi)
 - Stigma of “food stamps” and pride
 - The asset test, net income limit and medical deductions often result in limited benefits - a senior-specific application would be helpful
 - SSI ineligibility
 - Technological improvements to CalFresh are not as beneficial to seniors

Exploring solutions

Respondents identified potential solutions to (1) initiating a CalFresh application, (2) completing the application process, and (3) maintaining benefits, such as:

- Modernizing the application and renewal process, including electronic and telephonic signatures, e-verification, allowing interface between government databases, texting or emailing clients when documents are due, or allowing for automatic online renewal.
- Streamline reporting intervals
- Index shelter deduction for high cost-of-living areas
- Increase publicity of program, its positive benefits, and eligibility requirements
- Link to the success of MediCal enrollment and allow for default direct enrollment
- Extend benefits to SSI/SSD recipients
- Increase public outreach and application availability in community settings
- Implement [AB 69](#)
- Simplify and communicate the eligibility rules for seniors and immigrants

The vast majority of respondents categorized the following strategies to simplify the CalFresh application process as “very useful” or “useful”:

Strategy	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful	TOTAL
Improving CBO capacity to follow-up on CalFresh cases/track progress	27	12	1	40
Establishing CalFresh/Medi-Cal dual enrollment as the default option throughout application	37	6	0	43
Streamlining eligibility requirements across programs	36	6	1	43
Verifying applicant information through electronic records/sources	31	5	3	39
Simplifying and clarifying statewide guidance on policy implementation	31	8	0	39
Providing same day service to applicants (including expedited service and/or regularly processed applications)	35	4	2	41
Allowing applicants to complete a CalFresh application entirely over the phone including telephonic signature	34	6	3	43

When asked what state-level solutions are needed to ensure dual enrollment between MediCal and CalFresh, the majority of respondents recommended establishing default dual enrollment.

Other suggestions included:

- Aligning all eligibility requirements, especially around income and household
- Integrating processes in outreach, applications and data verification
- Outreach to all MediCal patients in medical settings
- Requiring CalFresh enrollment as a goal of Covered California

Respondents believed that establishing statewide CalFresh performance standards in the following areas would be helpful:

- Customer service expectations
- Ease of application
- Performance
- Incentives for healthier consumption

Water Access

Identifying challenges

When asked to identify what CFPA’s top priority in water access, water quality or water affordability should be in 2016, 53 respondents specified the following issues as their top priority:

Water funding to address water access, quality, and affordability	19
Water access in schools	14
Water affordability for Californians with limited access to potable water	9
Water quality for disadvantaged communities in the Central Valley	8
Water access in public spaces	3

Exploring solutions

Survey respondents ranked the following potential actions in terms of importance:

	Very Important	Fairly Important	Neutral	Slightly Important	Not Important	Total
Water is made more readily available to students in school	44	8	0	1	0	53
Water is made freely available in public spaces that host feeding programs, such as parks and libraries	41	10	2	1	1	55
Drinking water is subsidized for CalFresh recipients living in areas without free, potable water	33	10	10	0	0	53
Drinking water availability is incorporated into new design standards and construction projects funded by public monies	35	11	7	0	0	53
Water is incorporated into wellness policies to help build a culture of drinking water in schools	38	12	4	0	0	54
Future state policies strengthen drinking water access and quality standards	38	12	4	0	0	54
State funding is allocated to increase water availability in schools or other public settings	36	13	5	0	0	54

Respondents identified additional opportunities to incorporate water into the federal nutrition programs:

- Increase technical assistance and funding for child nutrition programs to make water more readily available
- Shift accountability for water access in schools to district leadership, not nutrition services
- Make free water available at all summer meal sites
- Include water as an alternative to milk in reimbursable meals for children
- Add water to the USDA MyPlate icon to reinforce messages around water consumption

Respondents recommended strategies to support drinking water in disadvantaged communities where tap water is not safe to drink:

- Tax soda or bottled water to pay for water subsidies in CalFresh
- Draw dollars from the [Greenhouse Gas-Reduction Fund](#) to improve community drinking water infrastructure to avoid trucking water into rural areas
- Provide water purification/filtration systems to affected households
- Educate affluent California communities about the lack of drinking water in rural and low-income areas
- Utilize state funds for interim solutions such as providing bottled water, community hydration stations or water trucks
- Leverage school bonds or LCFF funds to improve drinking water in schools
- Promote the safety of tap water in communities where water quality is good to mitigate misperceptions about the safety of tap water in general

Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey. Your feedback has already proven useful as we begin to identify our 2016 policy priorities. 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 updates, please subscribe to our Nutrition Action Alert. [link](#)

Questions?

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