



## State Legislative Agenda 2021

**This agenda identifies opportunities the California State Legislature can seize now to connect Californians to the food they need to thrive.**

### Food for All—No Exceptions, No Exclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have hit our immigrant communities hard. So many immigrants are essential workers who risk their health and well-being to provide basic necessities to others. When everyone has the nutritious food they need, we'll be a stronger and more productive California.

Critical federal nutrition programs and federally funded COVID relief leave immigrants behind. California must live up to its values and support those who are being shut out. We believe in food for all — no exceptions, no exclusions. We must make sure that our immigrant friends, families, and neighbors have the food they need to continue striving toward the California dream.

**ACTION:** Modernize the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to provide state-funded nutrition benefits to all Californians ineligible for CalFresh due only to their immigration status.

Everyone in California should have the food they need to thrive.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes it even harder for many Californians to meet their basic needs. The crisis exacerbates deeply entrenched inequities in well being and opportunity, with Black and Latinx households and households with children bearing a disproportionate share of burdens.

We need policies that mitigate hardship and harmful inequities by creating new, inclusive resources for food, improving existing supports, and minimizing barriers to both.

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## Invest in School Meals for All

All California kids deserve the nutritious meals they need to learn, grow, and achieve at their fullest potential. Federal rules for school meal eligibility and funding do not reflect true levels of need across our state. That means many California students who could and should benefit from free school meals go without this basic resource.

Offering school meals free of charge to all students helps protect kids from food insecurity and stigma. School meals are an educational tool that help give students a fair shot at success. Let's make sure all California kids are well nourished and ready to thrive.

**ACTION:** Make targeted State investments that allow all students to access meals free of charge in schools where federal rules would otherwise make such programs unachievable or unsustainable.

## Simplify CalFresh Applications and Reduce the Burden on Clients

When the COVID-19 crisis hit and need surged, CalFresh applications skyrocketed. In response, federally authorized waivers allowed state and county administrators to simplify the complex application process and streamline other burdensome requirements. The resulting changes helped connect more than 500,000 additional households with vital nutrition assistance in just a few months.

When the federally authorized waivers expire in 2021, we cannot afford to go backwards. Before the pandemic, an estimated 30% of eligible Californians were not reached by CalFresh. That means we miss out on more than [\\$2 billion](#) in federally funded nutrition benefits that could help struggling families buy the nutritious food they need. California can take two immediate steps to simplify the CalFresh application process and close the participation gap.

**ACTION:** Simplify the CalFresh application for older adults and people with disabilities. Make it easier to complete the application and other forms by phone.

## Help Feed Our Youngest Learners Who Have Been Left Out of State Relief

The families of our youngest children face disproportionately [high rates](#) of food insecurity. Keenly aware of need, California's preschool and child care programs continue to work on the front lines, trying to nourish young children. Reopening preschools and child care increased costs, and the cost of food itself has risen dramatically. Many programs [do not have enough funding](#) to pay for food amid myriad financial pressures. State leaders should invest in our youngest learners, protect our preschool and child care systems from financial collapse, and fill the gaps left by federal COVID relief.

**ACTION:** Increase state funding for providers to compensate for the increased cost of food and foodservice during the pandemic and during the recovery.

