



Food Insecurity and Hunger among
Low- and Middle-Income Californians

Key Findings from Focus Groups
Conducted in October 2023

330-361

Focus Group Methodology

- *Seven two-hour long moderated small group discussions conducted in October 2023.*
- *All participants recruited were eligible for public benefits, specifically CalFresh and WIC.*

Group Topic	Participant Profile	Date
Food4All	LA County/San Gabriel Valley Mandarin-speaking Immigrants	Oct.23
Food4All	LA County Tagalog-speaking Immigrants	Oct.23
Food Access	African American/Black Californians	Oct. 24
WIC	WIC Recipients	Oct. 25
WIC	Spanish Speaking WIC Recipients	Oct. 25



Cautions in Interpreting Focus Group Results

- *While we spoke with several dozen participants, and recruited them to represent diverse backgrounds and perspectives, they do not constitute a random and representative sample of Californians.*
- *As such, their opinions cannot be generalized to the broader population of residents with any kind of statistical precision.*
- *Accordingly, although a number of exercises in the groups attempted to quantify their opinions, the results of these exercises should not be interpreted as precisely representing the opinions of the larger population.*





Food4All Focus Groups

Key Findings of the Food4All Focus Groups

1. The pressures of the **rising cost of living** continue to weigh on participants, affecting their spending choices and ability to afford food.
2. Participants **widely value the help** provided by EBT and WIC.
3. Limitations on the ability to use WIC and EBT in stores create **a sense of shame and embarrassment**.
4. Mandarin-speakers experience consistent **barriers with language when interacting with CalFresh**, ranging from long wait times for interpreters to poorly-translated materials.
5. Tagalog-speakers encounter far **fewer language barriers**.
6. Filipino participants are widely supportive of expanding benefits to be inclusive of all immigrants, while Mandarin-speaking participants were more resistant; but **both groups agreed that those under 18 should take priority**.
7. Participants had **no awareness of CFAP**, but when provided an introduction were able to easily understand the difference with CalFresh and were comfortable with using separate names for the two programs.



Community Context and Experiences with Food Insecurity

- The high cost of living, particularly of food and gas, are the top challenges facing participants.
- Mandarin-speaking participants also raised concerns about crime in their community.
- They use a number of strategies to afford food and rely on:
 - Food Banks
 - Churches
 - EBT
 - Credit Card Debt
- Participants agreed that the pandemic impacted prices, which in turn affected their purchasing habits.
- The impacts of extreme weather were minimal, but participants could imagine interruptions to their income because of these events.

Filipino/Tagalog Group: *Before we buy beef, now we buy chicken because it is cheaper and you eat more—now you have a conscious choice of what you buy to prolong to save or to stretch your money for food and aside from that there was also a change—its like you are not as wasteful.*

Mandarin Group: *Sometimes I will go to church to actually queue up for food and also, I can save up the money and can use that money to pay for the rent.*

Mandarin Group: *For me we have three people at home and we need to control it to the lowest expenses and if we don't go out then we don't go out. We don't eat out. Because the gas costs are too high, everything else is too high. So, it is actually a very tight for us.*



Experiences with Food Benefits

- *Participants found EBT helpful but agreed that it often does not last until the end of the month.*
- *They were divided in whether they used the benefits at the beginning of the month or saved them.*
- *Participants mentioned that Chinese supermarkets don't all accept food benefits.*
- *Participants in the Filipino group felt more comfortable with the availability of options for using EBT.*
- *Those who had experience with WIC found it helpful but in the Filipino group they acknowledged feelings of embarrassment, limitations on what could be purchased, and limits on where it could be used.*

Mandarin group: *I'm happy because it is an assistance. It can be helpful even though it has restrictions it is still helpful.*

Mandarin group: *The Chinese supermarket they do not accept the EBT card. A lot of Chinese supermarkets won't accept EBT cards.*

Tagalog group: *What I noticed and let me add to that, there is a lot of establishments that accept EBT. For the WIC it was limited but now you could see you could see the signs in the front EBT accepted so our choices are more wide. So it is more acceptable. So it's not like before you were kind of*



Applying for Cal Fresh

- *In the Tagalog group, participants felt it was easy to apply; some thought it being online made things easier while others said it was a bit harder.*
- *In the Mandarin group, respondents encountered language barriers when applying for Cal Fresh.*
- *In both groups, participants had positive experiences applying when they did so alongside other programs, like Medi-Cal or through their child's school.*
- *Participants did not experience discrimination in applying for food benefits, but said they have felt judgment and rudeness when using the benefits.*

Applying for Cal Fresh	Mandarin Group	Tagalog Group
Very Easy	1	0
Somewhat Easy	4	6
Somewhat Difficult	3	0
Very Difficult	0	0

Tagalog Group: *The EBT it wasn't hard to me because it was offered to me when I had my MediCal. When we were under MediCal when we were going to the doctor no matter when we were going for a checkup there were flyers, ads, asking if you want to apply because you have MediCal so for me I was able to obtain it so it was easier.*



Experiences with Language Barriers

- Mandarin speakers were much more likely to encounter language barriers.
- These included long wait times to speak with an interpreter, poorly translated materials, and interpreters who did not speak Mandarin.
- Participants in the Filipino group noted that staff are often rushed and the print on documents is small or gets cut off.

Barriers	Mandarin Group	Tagalog Group
Lack of program interpreters or translated materials	4	0
Poor quality of interpreters or translated materials	2	0
Having to rely on family or friends as interpreters	3	0
Not able to apply or receive help in your preferred language	0	0
Small print on materials, including applications that are hard to read	3	6
Difficult to understand wording on materials	1	1
Staff were unclear when sharing information or providing instructions	1	0
Staff were unclear when describing what personal information is needed to apply for a program/service	1	0
Staff seemed unable or unwilling to help you in your preferred language	0	0



Verbatim Comments on Language Barriers

Tagalog group: Sometimes people are in a hurry or in a rush. For example there is a lot of people you can see are stressed and perturbed now you are afraid to ask they are already in a bad mood and even though you want to follow up why

Mandarin group: I don't understand the English words, right. But then even in Chinese the words probably is in professional terms so I still need to ask people.

Mandarin group: Sometimes I don't understand how to fill whatever form. I don't hear well. I don't understand them well and so I think that there are all kinds of questions. I just don't think I understand what they say.

Mandarin group: I think some interpreters maybe they came from Hong Kong and they don't speak the same language as a Northern Chinese. So, they don't express correctly. So, when I say something the interpreter in a different sense. So, I think that is the difference between the southern culture and the northern culture in China.



Concern About Impacts on Immigration Status

- Participants worried more about how relying on public benefits could impact their path to naturalization than about privacy.
- Several had heard that this could negatively affect them through word of mouth from family and friends.
- In the Mandarin-speaking group participants had heard that you may need to pay back your benefits, while others felt as long as you didn't abuse the system and pay taxes, it would be okay.

Mandarin group: *I worry about it before. I heard that if you have a lot of assistance like CalFresh or EBT it would affect your status.*

Mandarin group: *I heard other people say that if you have a green card in fact, we need to actually pay back the money that I used in assistance.*

Tagalog group: *I was working on a visa and so before I got my citizenship so for me at that time it was a big deal to me because I might not obtain citizenship because they might find out I received WIC and honestly that was a big worry.*



Food4All Policies

- Filipino participants were strongly supportive of expanding food benefits to all immigrants.
- In contrast, most participants in the Mandarin-speaking group opposed the proposal; they worried about financial burden to the state and about encouraging more immigration.
- Those supportive indicated that people were coming to this country to better their lives and that food benefits could help them achieve that goal.
- When asked to choose, most participants favored prioritizing minors, for an expansion of food benefits, because those over 18 were more likely to have an income.

***Mandarin group:** We pay for tax and yet we don't have a lot of assistance for our lives and we have such high pressure for life and we don't get enough assistance and if they have no made taxes and they are able to receive public assistance that is not fair.*

***Mandarin group:** I think that 18 to 26 they are young people they should be able to work. If they are willing to work, they will be able to work and they will be able to make money. But under the age of 18 they are not able to work. So, they cannot work so they need to be the priority group.*



We need a policy that guarantees food assistance for all immigrants because...

Tagalog Group: *To have a similar support to get a head start. It's not judging people, not everybody has the same experiences. If everybody needs*

Mandarin Group: *New immigrants they come to the United States they cannot be as established as the people who were born in the United States. They don't have a skill so in order to survive basically then they need to have access to food.*

Mandarin Group: *Everybody has equal rights.*

Tagalog Group: *Everybody needs to eat and needs food. And giving them food gives them energy to look for*

Tagalog Group: *Every human being deserves food if they*



Reactions to Food4All Flyer

- Participants in the Mandarin-speaking group found the flyer information clear and easy to interpret, although several were vocally opposed to the program.
- Tagalog speakers indicated that the flyer was in “deep Tagalog” and that they are generally more comfortable with Taglish and English.
- They otherwise liked the flyer’s appearance and found the message to be positive.

Tagalog Group: *It’s like an announcement. Intriguing, other captions, other paragraphs. Even the food for all. It’s intriguing because you are more open, even then, you can click on that link. There are some catchy phrases.*



ANO ANG IBIG SABIHIN NG FOOD4ALL PARA SA AKIN??

Magandang balita! Ang California ay malapit nang magin unang estado sa bansa na magbibigay ng tulong sa pagkain sa mga nasa hustong gulang na 55 at mas matanda, anumang katayuan sa imigrasyon. Matuto pa tungkol sa kung ano ang ibig sabihin nito para sa iyo at sa iyong pamilya.

ANO ANG CALFRESH? Nagbibigay ang CalFresh ng mga benepisyo sa pagkain upang makabili ng mga pagkaing kallangan mo. Kapag nagpupalit para sa CalFresh, makakatanggap ka ng Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card na maaaring gamitin na tulad ng debit card sa mga kalahok na tindahan n grocery at farmers market.

ALAM MO BA? Sa ngayon, ang mga sambahayan na kinabibilangan ng mga hindi dokumentadong tao ay maaari ding tumanggap ng CalFresh para sa anumang sa sambahayan na may karapat-dapat na katayuan sa imigrasyon, kabilang ang mga bata. Kung gusto mong mataman kung kasalukuyang kwalipikado ang iyong mga anak, maaari mong bisitahin ang CalFresh.org

55+

PAGPAPALAWAK NG PARAAN PARA MAKAKUHA NG CALFRESH Kamsikalan, isinama ng California ang pera sa budyet ng estado nito upang magbigay ng CalFresh sa mga imigrante sa California na 55 at mas matanda, anumang katayuan sa imigrasyon. Ang benepisyo ng ito ay hindi pa magagamit. Sa sandaling ito ay magagamit, ipaalamin namin sa komunidad. Mangyaring manatiling konektado para sa impormasyon at mga huling pagbabago. Contact: *“insert organization name here”*

PUBLIC CHARGE Hindi isinasalang-alang ng pederal na pamahalaan ang CalFresh bilang bahagi ng desisyon ng public charge. Ang pag-apply o pagkuha ng CalFresh ay hindi makakaapekto sa katayuan ng imigrasyon para sa iyo o sa iyong pamilya.

Ang **FOOD4ALL** ay isang kampanya ng estado na nagsusulong na magbigay ng CalFresh para sa mga taga-California sa lahat ng edad, anumang katayuan sa imigrasyon. Makilahok sa kampanya! Bisitahin ang bit.ly/food4all_2022 para matuto pa.

Insert CBO contact info here

Last Updated Feb 2023

Reactions to CFAP

- No one had heard of CFAP but they assumed it related to supporting low-income people with access to food.
- Most in the Filipino said they would open mail from CFAP, but those in the Mandarin-speaking group expressed fear about scams.
- When comparing descriptions of CalFresh and CFAP they understood that CFAP was more inclusive of immigrants, but they did not know this prior.
- After receiving an introduction participants were comfortable with separate names for the programs.

Tagalog group: *With CFAP it seems like the immigration status is more relaxed because it is coming from the state instead of coming from the federal.*

Mandarin group: *If it is mail, I may open it up or maybe my husband will look at it but we may just tear it up. If it is e mail since I haven't heard about the name, I probably would just close the e mail.*

Program Name	Mandarin Group	Tagalog Group
CalFresh and CFAP	5	4
State CalFresh and Federal CalFresh	1	2
CalFresh for both programs	0	1



Trusted Sources of Information

- In the Filipino group social media was an important source of information; multiple participants said they get information from TikTok, Facebook and YouTube.
- Participants in both groups indicated they would pay attention to cable news like CNN, flyers and mail.
- Mandarin-speakers also said they would pay attention to radio and Chinese news and trust the government as a source of information.

Tagalog group: Facebook, YouTube, TikTok.

Mandarin group: I rely on word of mouth from friends and also some of the Chinese news actually, news from China.

Mandarin group: If it's government news of course I would trust the government. For example, big organizations I would trust them too. If what they say is the same as my friend said, of course, I would not doubt them.





WIC Focus Groups



Key Findings of the WIC Focus Groups

1. The pressures of the **high cost of living**, food, and has weighed heavily on parents of young children.
2. Participants **prioritized their children's needs** over theirs.
3. WIC is very helpful; while the food benefits are most helpful the nutrition counseling and education and the breastfeeding/formula feeding supports were highly valued.
4. Participants agreed that including **water for formula feeding** and **extending breastfeeding benefits** to all parents would be very helpful.
5. A common concern was the **limitation on the types of food or specific packaging** to meet WIC requirements.
6. Spanish-speakers experienced **few language barriers**, but reported having **negative experiences at WIC offices** while English-speakers did not.
7. Cuts to the fruit and vegetable benefit and the introduction of wait lists would **negatively affect their ability to provide for their families** and to expose them to nutritious foods.
8. Those whose child receives meals at childcare **were satisfied with the quality of food and communications** regarding meals.



Community Context and Experiences with Food Insecurity

- Safety and the cost of living were participants' top concerns in their communities.
- Virtually all participants struggled to afford food.
- Participants mentioned relying on food banks and WIC for help, as well as money lending.
- Participants work long hours to provide for their families, try to save and spend smartly, and prioritize their children over themselves.

Spanish language group: *Well, when I can't buy something for my grandchildren, I feel sad. All you want to do it buy your children and grandchildren give them what they want. If I go shopping and I have enough for the groceries and they want a toy or, like all children, chocolate or something, what am I going to say?.*

English language group: *My son is only in pre-K. He just started this year. So, I do save my plastic bottles and cans and I take those in every, you know, couple months or so when I have a full car load, I'll bring them all down and cash those in. That helps a little bit.*



Enrolling in WIC

- All participants in the English language group said it was very easy to enroll in WIC; those in the Spanish language group were divided between very and somewhat easy.
- Most enrolled through their doctors office, which made the process seamless.
- One Spanish-speaking participant noted that they don't ask for your immigration status.
- Most participants enrolled in person, although a few used online and said they'd prefer to have online and phone as an option for renewal when they can't make it in person.
- The dads in the group were unaware that they could enroll their child in WIC directly.

Spanish language group: *If your wife is pregnant with the referral from the doctor you go to WIC and give them the paperwork that the doctor gave you. It was easy because they just asked for your ID or a bill that shows where you live.*

English language group: *It was just pretty much as simple as 1, 2, 3. Provide check stubs, basic information, the only hassle that may have occurred is just the long line but other than that it was very simple. All in one shot.*



Experiences with WIC

- Participants had widely positive experiences with WIC.
- Those in the Spanish language group emphasized how it helped them buy more food than they would otherwise be able to.
- Those in the English language group focused on both the financial and educational aspects of the program.
- They enjoyed having access to a wider variety of produce through WIC and felt that it was good for their families.

English language group: *I really have nothing but great experiences with WIC. I really like the farmer's market coupons. Those are really nice and then they get the kids out for the day and you have like 30 dollars to spend. I do enjoy the food choices; well, the baby does. He enjoys the food choices.*

Spanish language group: *It helps. With \$100 you don't come home with anything. Of before you would come home with five or six bags and now you come home with less because everything is too expensive. But with the help of WIC, you can come home with two and a half bags.*

English language group: *They give foods that are very important like peanut butter, and eggs and bread. You can even if you don't want bread, you can get corn tortillas. So, that just things that are filling and very important is for nutrition. I also really like how they educate you and they give you information.*



Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding

- Participants felt supported by WIC in their breastfeeding and formula feeding journeys.
- Those who needed a pump were able to borrow one from WIC and they accessed lactation consultants as well.
- Participants felt it would be helpful to extend benefits regardless of how a parent feeds their baby.
- Those who formula fed predominantly used bottled water to prepare formula because they felt more confident about its safety; some had had negative experiences with contaminated water.

English language group: *It was helpful because then they understood it is like you would go to coaching when you would transition in to formula feeding and they would say “how is the baby” – you know, coaching, coaching all the way through.*

Spanish language group: *WIC helped me a lot. A lot of times they have meetings where a group of people that are breastfeeding and they share their experiences. Like she says they lent me a machine and a machine that was portable that they give you so you can continue to stimulate for milk. The meetings are very helpful. They are groups of women. There is someone who comes from a clinic or a hospital and they show you how to hold the baby, all those types of things.*



Barriers to Participation

Barrier	English Group	Spanish Group	Observations and Comments
Confusion about who is or is not eligible	0	3	
Transportation and other costs to reach WIC clinics to apply and continue to receive services and benefits	2	0	Some participants felt it would be helpful if WIC provided transportation.
Language and cultural barriers	0	1	Few experienced barriers because information is readily available in Spanish.
Negative experiences at a WIC clinic	0	4	Participants in the Spanish group felt talked down to and experienced long waits.

English language group: I had trouble where my car just doesn't start and I had an appointment and I missed like three or four already or I don't have enough gas in the car to move my car sometimes that was before getting a loan of course.

Spanish language group: There were a lot of people so there was a long wait. Then they would take a long time to help you. They would wait until there were a certain number of people to create a group and then they would take you where they are going to give the nutrition classes. You would have to wait until there were enough for a group so that they were at capacity. Then you would have to wait again so they give you your card with your benefits.



Barriers to Participation

Barrier	English Group	Spanish Group	Observations and Comments
Taking time away from work to apply for WIC and maintain eligibility (lost wages, risk of losing a job, etc.)	1	0	A participant noted that WIC office hours overlap with work hours so he and his family try to do things online.
Dissatisfaction with the food that can be purchased with WIC benefits (such as the WIC food package for children, the food selection, and the quantity of food).	3	3	The dissatisfaction with the food mostly related to having to buy specific types, brands or sizes.
Difficulty finding formula	2	1	
Difficulty using benefits (for example, limited selection of WIC foods available at your local store and negative experiences trying to use benefits at check out)	8	3	Participants experienced challenges finding products that met WIC requirements. Some noted how helpful WIC stores are.

Spanish language group: *It can be difficult because for example here in the area where I live there isn't a store well, Walmart will take WIC. But there are a lot of products that they sell in Walmart that aren't covered by the card. They have to be specific to WIC.*



WIC Food Packages

- Participants rated the WIC food package positively.
- However, some noted they wished there was meat included in it, more variety in cereal, as well as water for formula.
- One participant mentioned wanting to be able to buy premade healthy foods like salads.
- While most said the WIC package meets their needs, they also tend to run out by the end of the month and strategize to conserve their budget and make their benefit go farther.
- At the same time, some participants wanted the ability to have benefits roll over in case they'd been unable to use some of their benefit in time.

Spanish language group: *I think if you know how to budget right then the products from WIC should cover us and not only our children. I say myself because I've made Chili Relleno with what WIC gives me. You have the egg, cheese, and with the vegetables, \$30 buys the chilis. It is a great help.*

English language group: *I try to space it out so that it fills those gaps. I'm usually looking ahead, like, what my month is going to look like. How many weeks, how many paid days, and there have been times when I will try my best not to use it until like the last couple of days and then knowing that a couple of days after that it renews.*



Impact of Cuts to the Fruit and Vegetable Package

- Participants were asked about cuts to the expanded fruit and vegetable benefits.
- This benefit allowed families to purchase produce and expose their children to new nutritious flavors.
- By reducing the benefit to \$11, participants would have to purchase smaller quantities and less variety for their kids.
- They noted that as prices have gotten even higher, cuts would pose an even greater challenge.

Spanish language group: *If they take it away it will be less produce coming into the house in fruits and vegetables for the children. We would have to spend a lot more than what we were spending before.*

Spanish language group: *With the benefits that they give me I buy fruits like watermelon, pineapple, strawberries, what my children consume most. That is what I try to buy with those benefits.*

English language group: *I was able to go to a farmer's market with my son and pick out, like, different fruits that he is not used to like cantaloupe. They had like that star fruit and then they had samples so that was nice to just try different fruits, exotic ones. And that was neat for him to try that. And turnips we saw turnips there, carrots, so he liked those. It was nice to go and see things, you know, fruits and vegetables that you usually don't see.*



Impact of WIC Waitlists

- Waitlists would also pose a notable challenge for participants.
- Participants budget carefully and plan their spending, so an unexpected interruption to their grocery budget would be stressful.
- Those who work seasonal jobs commented that cuts would be especially challenging in the off-season.
- Participants in the English language group noted that they do not rely solely on WIC for their shopping; it would create difficulty to be placed on a waitlist but they would find a way to manage.

English language group: *The wait list would affect me negatively especially if I'm used to receiving WIC every month and then I go to renew and have to be put on a wait list to receive benefits that I'm used to receiving, you know, every month.*

Spanish language group: *It would be serious because you wait for those benefits and it is a big help. So, three gallons of milk last me all month and right now a gallon is \$7. So, it would affect me a lot.*

Spanish language group: *In the county that I live in it is pretty much fields and that is what people do for a living. So, it is concerning because these are the months that there is the least amount of work. Then, like she said milk, eggs, you can feed your children. But without benefits and no work...*



WIC Shopping Experience

- Participants generally found it easy to find a store where they can use WIC, although those who shopped at WIC-specific stores thought those were most convenient.
- The convenience of being able to use WIC to shop online was very appealing.
- Those who had experience with the WIC app liked being able to check their balance , scan products, and check their appointment times.

English language group: *The scanning thing for sure. I like the food balance that you can see without trying to find like your old receipt and be like okay, what's left. You can just look at the app and be like okay, this is what I got left. And then lastly for me it's for getting my appointment and being able to look and say okay, it is next Tuesday at whatever and just being more prepared with my life.*

Spanish language group: *Sometimes when you go to the new mother's store, they do everything for you, but when you go to a regular store and you get the wrong product and you are in line, you have to go back, so with the app you can know which product qualifies.*



Childcare Meals

- Among parents with a child in childcare, there were a range of experiences: some provided their child's lunch, some paid for meals, and some didn't pay.
- Those whose child was in fully subsidized care did not pay for meals.
- Most were satisfied with the quality of food and said a menu is posted so they know what their child is eating.
- One participant in the English language group recognized the Child and Adult Food Care Program from the forms she signs for her child's meal program.
- They agreed access to childcare and school meals is helpful financially.

English language group: *They get paid. I have just got to sign a paper every year and then they only get paid whenever my child is there and actually has a meal with them for that meal.*

Spanish language group: *It helps us save some money knowing that someone can help us by feeding our child and know that it is healthy. They are not giving them junk. They are giving them fruit, vegetables, it could be milk. They are not going to be giving them soda. They are not giving them Cheetos. I know that it is going to something healthy for him and I feel comfortable in that aspect.*





African American/Black



Key Findings from African American/Black Californians Group

1. Several participants were currently experiencing or had recent **experiences with homelessness**, which impacted their physical and mental health negatively.
2. Several acknowledged wanting to buy healthy and nutritious foods but faced **limitations due to cost and storage**.
3. These limitations placed a **greater barrier to accessing the foods** they need and want than did an inability to find those foods.
4. Participants relied on **family and friends**, along with educational institutions, case managers and public programs for support.
5. While many felt **gratitude for public benefit programs**, they also associated **negative emotions** with them.
6. They were very **cognizant of stereotypes** of Black Americans and how their use of benefits could create social stigma.
7. This concern appeared to motivate a **preference for media that featured people from diverse backgrounds**.



Experiences with Food Insecurity and Getting Support

- Several participants had direct experience with homelessness and poverty.
- These experiences were harmful and hurtful and hurt their sense of worthiness.
- Participants rely on family and friends for support, but sometimes they're unable to offer help.
- Some participants referenced their case managers as a source of information and help.
- One student commented on how their school helps students get back on their feet.
- Participants also noted that when experiencing homelessness, it can be challenging to use EBT as it is difficult to cook foods.

If I'm in need definitely [I ask family] without a doubt. But sometimes they be struggling, too, and they don't have it. There are other programs out here they have got other programs like they got general relief, and they got general assistance. That is usually in various counties in California. So, besides EBT they got different other programs that offer cash to indigent people.

I live in my car. I can't afford no rent. I'm struggling as it is to be an independent contractor, working those two jobs. I did have a job for 17 years before they laid off the whole department. And ever since I lost that job it was like I became depressed. I was trying so hard to get back on my feet and I lost my home, everything.



Shopping and Food Preferences

- Participants shopped at a range of stores from grocery stores like Safeway and Trader Joe's to budget options like Dollar Tree and Grocery Outlet.
- While many liked eating nutritious foods like meat, fruit, and vegetables, the expensiveness limited their ability to get these foods.
- Several shop infrequently, only 1-2 times a month – they noted that space and storage were limitations for them.
- They did not have difficulty finding foods from their cultural background; cost was a bigger barrier.
 - The foods participants mentioned associating with their cultural identity included, red beans and rice, mac and cheese, chitlins, gumbo, and collard greens and fresh greens.

I like to eat fresh greens. I can't buy it so I got to do what is in the plastic bag thing. I do eat the cabbage. You can kind of find that reasonably. And then again, my fish. I like to eat salmon sometimes. I know it is healthy but salmon is expensive.

I usually go for like the cheap foods. So, anything that is easy to make. So, like stuff to make spaghetti or tuna or just regular chicken, rice, with frozen vegetables. I prefer frozen foods typically because it is easier to make. I'd rather have more fruits and vegetables but since I share food stamps with my family, I have to ration what I get so that they have enough to eat for the rest of the month.



Community Experiences

- Participants were not surprised to hear that Black Californians experience hunger at higher rates than White Californians but were surprised by the magnitude.
- This information was upsetting to participants as they felt like everyone deserves equal access.
- At the same time, they had firsthand experience living in food deserts and mentioned specifically living in Oakland and traveling out of the city to get groceries.
- One participant underscored the importance of the awareness of resources, something she didn't feel is the same in every community.

Black and African American Californians are 3 times more likely to experience food insecurity than White Californians, even when they are accessing food benefits.

I would say the zoning and the red lining is the two things that I think messed us up.

I lived in Oakland my entire life. The closest thing to me was a liquor store. Now, I live in Turlock a totally different community, totally different group of people and the closest thing to me is a farmer's market.

I think it is upsetting because it should be equal.



Experiences with Public Benefits and CalFresh

- All participants had experience using public benefits and associated a range of emotions with the use of benefits.
- Despite these conflicting feelings participants widely agreed that benefits like CalWorks, P-EBT, school lunches and EBT were very helpful.
- They had learned about EBT mainly through word of mouth.

I used to be embarrassed but then I see so many people in the store using that card I'm like fine with it. But I will say I might feel judged if I decide to get something that is like expensive, especially from some white people. "Why is she getting a steak?" Mind your business okay. It is none of your business.

Emotions Associated with Public Benefits

Appreciative

Embarrassing

Grateful

Happy

Sad

Encouraged

Optimistic

Overwhelming

I am really thankful for it but there is embarrassment specifically the stigma associated with it.



Negative Perceptions Associated with Public Benefits

- Participants frequently cited experiences with social stigma, including instances motivated by racism or because of their gender.
- A male participant indicated that he could be seen as “less of a man” for using EBT.
- Others referenced stereotypes about “welfare queens” and judgment from their own family and friends.
- They feel like they might be judged if they used their benefits for expensive items like crab or steak – and did feel like there could be judgment for using benefits in general.

Many white people have been conditioned to think that, you know, especially black people are lazy and living off the government. I mean in the 1980's that's how Reagan got into office talking about welfare queens.

Barrier to Participation	Times Chosen
Social stigma and the judgment of others for using food assistance	4
Not wanting to ask for help	4
Not feeling like you really need help	3
Not having enough information on how to apply	3
Wanting to leave the benefits for others who need them more	2
Not having enough information about how food assistance can help	2
Bad experiences with public benefit programs	-

I was wondering if it was worse for men who are on EBT because people think oh, it is EBT for the women and the children and you are not a man.



Reactions to CalFresh Videos

- Participants reviewed two videos on CalFresh and were asked to rank how much they liked each on a scale of 1 to 5 (where a 1 was negative and a 5 positive).
- The Goodbye Sugar video featured a Black family preparing a healthy drink together; the Food Benefits for Today's Families video provided information on CalFresh.
- Participants had a slight preference for the Food Benefits video featuring people from a variety of backgrounds.
- They felt like issues of hunger and nutrition impact everyone, and it was inappropriate to single out only one group.

Videos	Average Rating
Goodbye Sugar, Hello Flavor	3.6
Food Benefits for Today's Families	3.7

Food Benefits: *It definitely gives you information on how to apply, very fast so apply now, the farmer's market takes it, that's great, a variety of people, lets people you can apply long term, short term, yeah.*

Goodbye Sugar: *That you should use your food stamps to buy real food instead of soda because I guess all black people drink Kool Aid and pop.*

Goodbye Sugar: *They are promoting a new type of drink or you can use this instead of buying soda you can make your own doing it this way.*





For more information, contact:

Lucia Del Puppo

Lucia@FM3research.com