

CalFresh: Refreshed and Reformed

A Checklist for Consumers

June 1, 2012

Background: The State of California, in partnership with the Counties, nutrition advocates, community-based organizations, consumers, and other stakeholders, is seeking to increase California's below-average participation in CalFresh (formerly the Food Stamp Program) through a variety of policy and program reforms. According to the latest reports from USDA, California's participation rate is 53% of eligible people, compared to a national participation rate of 72%. This gap with the national average means 1.6 million hungry people aren't getting the approximately \$147 per month assistance buying groceries for which they qualify; our State's economy is losing out on \$2.3 billion in federal dollars in food spending; and our community food banks and charities are straining to meet needs that should be filled by CalFresh.

A shared priority is to "Refresh CalFresh," both so consumers have an excellent experience -- modern, easy, fast, and standard -- in applying for and utilizing CalFresh, and so the State and Counties have benchmarks to measure that experience. We believe this will boost participation by ensuring a higher completion rate of the application process by individual consumers and, overall, by generating a positive reputation for the program that will encourage new applications, especially from harder-to-reach populations.

To that end, four state groups participating in the Alliance to Transform CalFresh offer the following Consumer Checklist, and possible DSS and County benchmarks, for your consideration:

California consumers seeking CalFresh nutrition benefits can expect the process to be:

1. EASY: Consumers have access to modern technologies and multiple "doors" of entry to apply.

- On-line applications always an option
- Local offices with in-person service always an option
- Both the on-line and in-person applications supported by Service Centers (telephone, fax, e-mail, text, chat)
- Community-based outreach and application assistance
- Targeted outreach to harder-to-reach groups, including seniors and mixed-status families
- Full language access
- Full disability accommodation
- Uniformity across State in consumer experience

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

Majority Applications On-Line

Higher Participation Rates

Higher Participation among targeted sub-groups: working families, seniors, qualified immigrants

2. FAST: Most consumers receive "Same Day Service" – i.e., interview and eligibility determination -- on the same day that they submit a completed application.

- Office Line Management: for example, consumers can check-in and be routed to proper line/caseworker/process depending on particular need, to minimize wait times and speed determination times towards the same day goal
- On-Line Application Processing: same day for most consumers
- Telephone Interviews: Outbound and inbound options to quickly (e.g. same day) and easily connect consumers and caseworkers
- E-Verifications & Self-Attestations, as appropriate and feasible, to reduce additional paperwork burden on consumers and on counties

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

- Majority Interviewed & Approved the Same Day As Apply with Completed Application*
- Faster Determinations*
- Lower Average Office Wait Times*
- Lower Average Office Interview/Processing Times*
- Lower Average Hold Times*
- Lower Average Call Times*
- Fewer Additional Verifications*
- Lower Administrative Costs per Case*

3. SUCCESSFUL: Consumers can count on receiving the full amount of nutrition benefits for which they are eligible.

- Accurate, maximum-allowable benefits determined
- Disaster benefits easily accessed by general and low-income population

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

- Lower Negative Error Rate*
- Higher Payment Accuracy Rate*
- Aligned with National Average for Deduction Rate*
- Disaster Usage Consistent with Projections*

4. RESPECTFUL: Consumers are satisfied with how they are treated throughout the process.

- Clear, timely communication throughout process
- Respectful treatment
- Confidentiality and privacy protections
- Clear feedback and complaint process, including public reports on feedback and complaint resolution
- Protected due process and appeals

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

- High Customer Satisfaction in Surveys*

5. STABLE: Consumers receive continuous assistance from CalFresh, until their food hardship and eligibility ends.

- Streamlined interim reporting and recertifications (e.g. via no wrong door, maximum time periods, aligned time periods with other programs)
- Seamless operations (e.g transfers) between Counties
- Reasonable window to restore benefits if suspended
- Simple replacement benefit process (e.g. food destroyed in fire)

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

Lower Churn Rate

Aligned with National Average for Recertification Rate

6. CONNECTED: Consumers can “tell their story once” and be connected both to nutrition and other health and wellness services.

- CalFresh & health application processes remain integrated now (e.g. Medi-Cal), so that consumers can apply for both programs at the same time, and are modernized through ACA implementation
- CalFresh keeps its connection to CalWORKs and becomes more strongly connected to other wellness supports, e.g. Child Care, WIC, School Meals, Unemployment Insurance, Working Family Tax Credits

Possible DSS/County Benchmarks:

CalFresh Remains Integrated with MediCal & CalWorks

CalFresh & Health Exchange Connected and Modernized

CalFresh Makes Other Programmatic & Policy Connections: Child Care, WIC, School Meals, Unemployment Insurance, Tax Credits

ENDORSED BY:

California Association of Food Banks

California Family Resource Association

California Food Policy Advocates

Catholic Charities of California