

CALFRESH EXPANSION TO SSI RECIPIENTS: *Successes & Opportunities*

A Majority of SSI Recipients Now Benefit from CalFresh

More than 700,000 SSI recipients (61%) in California can now purchase food with CalFresh as a result of the 2019 expansion of the program's eligibility to include Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients, an increase of 20% (~119,000 people) compared to the last time we analyzed enrollment figures in June 2021.* Program participants receive an average of \$146 per person per month. This is a marked increase over previous years' baseline benefits, the result of changes in federal benefit level calculations to better reflect participant needs.



706,130

**SSI recipients enrolled
in CalFresh**



61%

**enrolled out of 1.15
million SSI recipients**



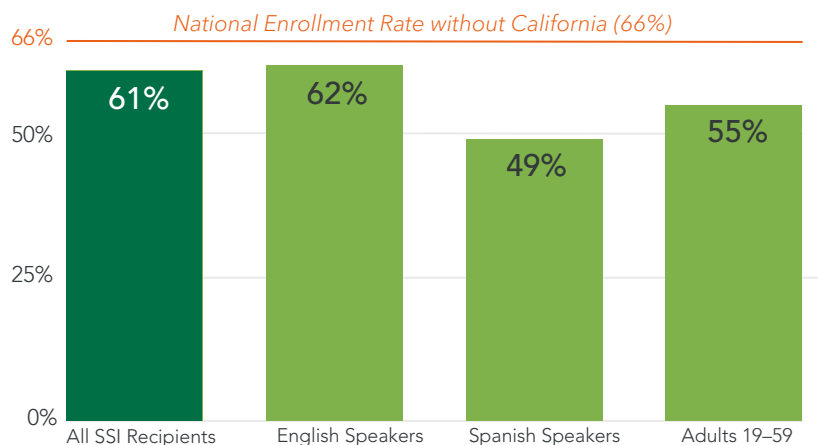
\$1.24B

**in annual food benefits,
\$146 per person monthly**

54,500 or More SSI Recipients Could Still Enroll

California's CalFresh enrollment rate among SSI recipients (61%) is still well below the national average (66%, excluding California). Below, see the potential impact of additional CalFresh enrollment — how many more SSI recipients would benefit and how many federal dollars they would have to spend in their communities — by increasing enrollment numbers to the national average for all SSI recipients and for the largest sub-populations. *Were California to become a top 10 state for CalFresh enrollment of SSI recipients (e.g. 75%+), the impact could be much higher.*

Enrollment Rates of Key Populations in California, February 2023



Additional Impact of Reaching the National Average (66%)

	People <i>(approx)</i>	Total Annual Benefits <i>(approx)</i>
All SSI Recipients:	54,500	\$95,695,000
English Speakers:	25,600	\$44,945,900
Spanish Speakers:	35,210	\$61,825,200
Adults Age 19-59:	41,260	\$72,451,000

*Figures based on February 2023 enrollment and include enrollment in CalFresh, as well as Supplemental Nutrition Benefits (SNB) and Transitional Nutrition Benefit (TNB), the two "hold harmless" programs that the State put in place to protect existing CalFresh households from the negative impacts of the policy change.

A PATH TO FULL ENROLLMENT

Full CalFresh enrollment of eligible SSI recipients will require dedicated efforts in outreach, policy refinement, and operational improvement. These short- and long-term recommendations are largely focused on areas that will need strong leadership from the California Department of Social Services and the California legislature, as well as federal partners at the USDA and Congress, in partnership with county administrators and advocates.



1. Set our sights on becoming a leading state for SSI enrollment in CalFresh benefits.

Currently, 20% of states have enrollment rates of 75% or higher for SSI recipients. Given the rapid increase of enrollment of this population in California over the last four years, the state should maintain momentum and set an attainable but ambitious target.



2. Invest in targeted outreach and support for enrollment of Spanish-speaking SSI recipients.

Enrollment of Spanish speakers has increased over the last year, but remains troublingly low. Successful enrollment of Spanish-speaking SSI recipients will require targeted communications campaigns along with culturally-relevant application assistance.



3. Learn more about the challenges that low-enrollment counties face.

Enrollment rates of SSI recipients vary significantly by county. Some counties have enrollment rates that are 10% or more lower than the state rate. CDSS should work with those counties to address barriers to SSI recipient enrollment.



4. Increase the value of CalFresh so it is worth the effort of applying.

Permanently expand and authorize California's CalFresh Minimum Nutrition Benefit Pilot Program so that all CalFresh recipients receive a minimum CalFresh benefit of \$50. Improve benefit adequacy federally through the Closing the Meal Gap Act: [\(H.R. 3037 \(Adams\)\)](#) / [S. 1336 \(Gillibrand\)](#). Support dignity and choice for CalFresh recipients by allowing the purchase of hot and prepared foods through the federal Hot Foods Act: [H.R. 3519 \(Meng\)](#) / [S. 2258 \(Bennet\)](#).



5. Streamline the application process for SSI recipients

CalFresh application denial rates for the SSI population have often been as low as 15%, but they have climbed as high as 26% in February 2023, with many denials attributed to procedural, not eligibility reasons. Streamline the CalFresh application process for SSI recipients federally by allowing and encouraging states to participate in the Combined Application Project. Prioritize making specific improvements to California's BenefitsCal system for older adults and people with disabilities, who often face the greatest barriers to successfully navigating online application platforms.