

## **What WIC staff should know about Food Stamp benefits**

Food stamps, our most important and neglected nutrition program, constitute the largest and most comprehensive part of the hunger-prevention safety net for California's poor children, families, and individuals. Over 1.8 million Californians in 740,000 households receive food stamps; about half are children. Eligible people whose income is no more than 130% of the poverty line, receive monthly coupons which can be used as cash at most stores for the purchase of most non-prepared food items. The benefit level depends on income, household size, and expenses like rent and child care costs.

### **Food stamps are underutilized in the midst of growing need.**

- Despite reports of a strong economy, the wage-based incomes of the poorest fifth of California families fell 22% between 1979 and 1997.
- Statewide 17% of people are eligible for Food Stamps.
- Just 57% of all eligible Californians receive food stamps.
- A national survey revealed that 72% of eligible non-participants didn't know they were eligible.
- Just 17% of WIC clients in California receive Food Stamps - nationally, 69% are income-eligible.

### **Food stamps can help families stretch tight food budgets.**

- The average food stamp monthly benefit per person is \$70.
- For a family with one person working full time at the minimum wage, only by receiving food stamps and the earned income tax credit do they reach the federal poverty level.

### **WIC works better with Food Stamps.**

- The health potential of WIC is enhanced by increased access to food among WIC families. WIC is designed to supplement core food purchases, while food stamps are designed to enable families to purchase their basic food needs.
- Most WIC packages don't include foods like fresh fruit and vegetables. Food Stamps can help families purchase nutritious foods encouraged by WIC's educational program.
- Food Stamps can be used for any food item, enabling families to choose culturally-appropriate foods.

### **WIC staff can play a crucial role in expanding access to eligible families.**

- WIC is mandated by the federal government to provide information on the food stamp program to WIC participants.
- WIC is already a trusted agency in many communities; providing food coupons and nutrition education to over 1 million people. This makes it an ideal location for low-income people who are not accessing the food stamps they need, to get program information and referrals to help them feed their families.