

CalFresh Performance Goals and Customer Service Standards

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Opportunity

State and local leaders have taken important steps to improve CalFresh access and participation. Recent changes have focused on enhancing the client experience and more efficiently meeting the growing need for nutrition assistance. Some CalFresh improvements have resulted in statewide change, while others have been adopted by select counties. Such inconsistencies contribute to a fragmented system in which access to CalFresh and the quality of customer service vary greatly by geographic location.

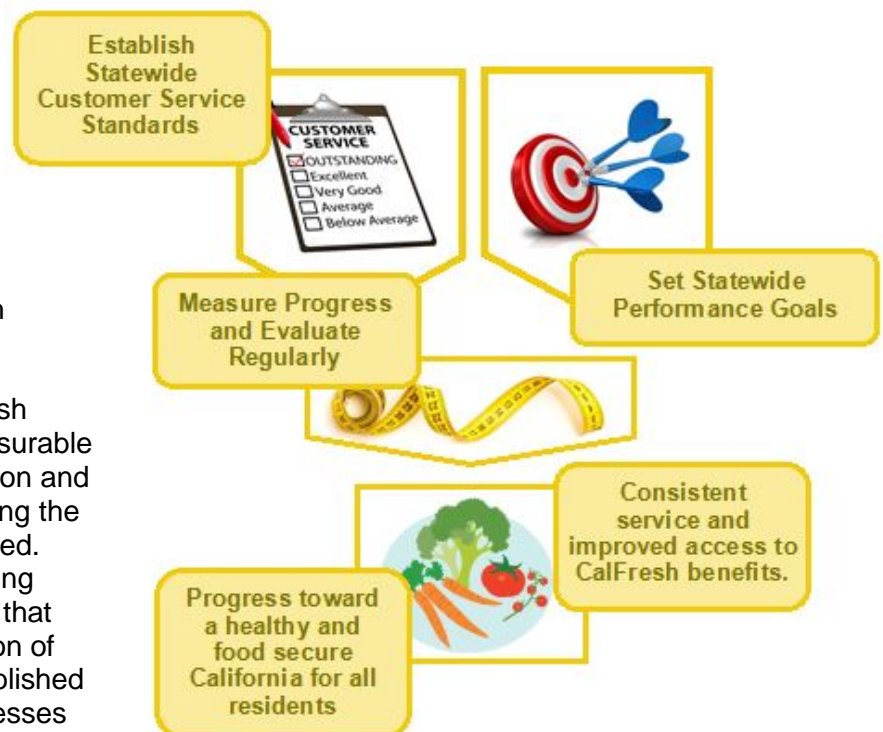
Enrolling and participating in CalFresh should be straightforward, consistent experiences for individuals and families throughout the state. Establishing statewide performance goals and customer service standards would help make CalFresh more effective, efficient, and consistent by setting minimum expectations and holding decision makers accountable for meeting those expectations. Measuring progress towards the performance goals and customer service standards would also provide data to inform future changes to CalFresh. Such data is needed to better evaluate the effects of policy change and outreach efforts for CalFresh.

Action

California should:

- Establish, through a collaborative process that integrates stakeholder input, statewide performance goals and customer service standards for CalFresh.
- Periodically monitor progress towards meeting those goals and standards.
- Make timely, state and county-level measures of performance and service regularly available to the public through a dynamic data management tool.

Performance Goals: California should establish statewide performance goals that include measurable short and long-term targets for the administration and operation of CalFresh. Progress towards fulfilling the performance goals should be regularly evaluated. Measures of progress would supplement existing indicators, such as the state participation rate, that are used to assess the reach and administration of CalFresh. Tracking progress towards the established goals would allow the State to recognize successes and identify areas for improvement.



For more than 20 years, CFPA has been the state's trusted food policy advocacy organization dedicated to increasing low-income Californians' access to healthy food at home, at school, and throughout entire communities. CFPA's advocacy agenda draws on the anti-hunger, nutrition, and health movements. Working as both a policy leader and supportive policy ally, CFPA continues to build on its long history of success.

Customer Service Standards: California should establish statewide customer service standards that clearly articulate expectations for administrators with respect to serving current and potential clients. Standards may include commitments such as the provision of timely, accurate, and quality service. Defining and publicizing the established customer service standards would allow administrators, clients, advocates and other stakeholders to determine whether applicants and participants are receiving a consistent, high-quality service across the state.

Increase Availability of State- and County-level Data: California should develop a dynamic data management tool that provides timely information specific to the reach, administration, and operation of CalFresh in individual counties and the state at large. The management tool should include data describing multi-program enrollment, applications received through multiple channels, application and recertification outcomes, and reapplication rates, among other measures. The data should be used to assess progress towards meeting the established performance goals and customer service standards.

Why This Matters

CFPA and SF-Marin Food Bank envision a healthy and food secure California for all residents. Too many Californians struggle to meet their most basic needs. For instance, at least 4 million low-income adults faced food insecurity in 2011-12¹. At the same time, California continues to grapple with low CalFresh participation. The latest data indicates that over 40 percent of all eligible Californians are not enrolled in this crucial safety-net program.

CalFresh benefits help protect vulnerable individuals and families from food insecurity and hunger. In doing so, CalFresh benefits help ensure overall health and well-being. What's more, CalFresh benefits do more than help individual Californians. USDA has shown that every dollar in SNAP expenditures generates \$1.79 in economic activity. In addition to helping households meet their nutritional needs, CalFresh benefits exert a multiplier effect that stimulates the economy.

We must do all we can to boost CalFresh participation. California can set the expectation for statewide performance and customer service in order to help ensure consistent CalFresh access and customer service quality regardless of geographic location.

HISTORY

Recent improvements to CalFresh, such as the move to semi-annual reporting, eliminating the finger-imaging requirement, and allowing CalFresh households to retain savings, have been implemented with the goal of reducing barriers to participation and increasing benefit retention. Technological innovations have provided clients with new, faster methods of applying for and maintaining benefits, as well as communicating with their county CalFresh offices. These improvements are meaningful and should be commended. Much work remains to increase CalFresh participation and ensure equitable access throughout the state.

California uses the USDA-issued CalFresh participation rate and the Program Access Index, along with data collected for federal reporting requirements, as key measures of program performance. Additionally, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) collects county-reported information on program operations and access. While these data points and information are useful, there are significant limitations in terms of their ability to measure county-by-county progress over time.

Recently, CDSS released a "data dashboard" for CalFresh. The dashboard centralizes existing data in a county-by-county format. The dashboard also includes two previously unpublished data points. The first measures churn, or the number of participants who leave and return to the program within thirty and ninety days. The second identifies the number of CalFresh recipients enrolled in Medi-Cal and vice-versa. The release of the dashboard is an important step forward. However, the extent of data included on the dashboard should be expanded and tied to the measurement of statewide performance goals and customer service standards.

More information about SB 1147 can be found here: <http://cfpa.net/SB1147>

¹ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research's California Health Interview Survey