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Overview of Recent Changes to Major Nutrition Access Programs

PRESENTED TO: Senate Committee on Human Services
Hon. Melissa Hurtado, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

California's Major Nutrition Access Programs

Several Federally Supported Programs Promote Nutrition Access

- **CalFresh.** Provides about 4 million Californians with a cash-like benefit to purchase groceries (average monthly benefit in 2019-20 was about \$130 per household).
- **Free and Reduced-Price School Meals.** Provides up to 3.6 million California K-12 students with free or subsidized meals at school as of 2019-20.
- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program.** Provides about 900,000 Californians (consisting of pregnant women, new mothers, and young children) with cash-like benefit to purchase groceries (average monthly benefit in 2019-20 was about \$65 per household).
- **Variety of Food Bank Programs.** Multiple state and federal programs support local food banks. For example, The Emergency Food Access Program (TEFAP) typically provides a network of California food banks with about \$50 million annually.
- **Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Programs.** Provides about 200,000 older Californians with home-delivered and congregate meals (about 18 million total meals per year) as of 2019-20.

Some State-Only Programs Also Support Nutrition Access

- **California Food Access Program.** Provides 35,000 Californians who are ineligible for CalFresh due to their immigration status with a cash-like benefit to purchase groceries (average monthly benefit in 2019-20 was about \$105 per person).
- **Supplemental and Transitional Nutrition Benefit (SNB/TNB) Programs.** Provides about 50,000 households with at least one Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) recipient with a cash-like benefit to purchase groceries (average monthly benefit in 2019-20 was about \$105 for SNB households about \$180 for TNB households).



Recent Policy Changes

State Has Made Recent Efforts to Expand Nutrition Access

- ***Increased CalFresh Participation Rate From 51 Percent to 71 Percent.*** Since 2009, the state has rebranded the program, eliminated asset requirements, promoted online and telephone applications, and reduced the amount of paperwork necessary to remain enrolled in CalFresh. These changes have increased the number of eligible CalFresh recipients who choose to participate in the program by more than 500,000 per year.
- ***Expanded CalFresh Eligibility to SSI/SSP Recipients.*** Prior to June 2019, SSI/SSP recipients were ineligible for CalFresh benefits (instead, they received an additional \$10 to their monthly SSI/SSP benefits). This prior policy was referred to as the “SSI cash-out.” The state ended the SSI cash-out as part of the *2018-19 Budget Act*. As of August 2020, about 440,000 households with SSI/SSP were approved to receive CalFresh. For a number of reasons, reversing this policy could have resulted in some existing CalFresh households experiencing a reduction in CalFresh benefits. To prevent this, the state simultaneously created the SNB/TNB programs to hold all affected households harmless.
- ***Augmented Funding for OAA Nutrition Programs.*** As part of the *2019-20 Budget Act*, the state provided \$17.5 million ongoing to supplement OAA nutrition programs. This funding was estimated to provide an additional 1.7 million meals (an increase of about 7 percent).



Recent Policy Changes

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- ***Made Efforts to Increase Purchase of Locally Grown Food.*** In 2014, the state created the Office of Farm to Fork to, among other things, encourage WIC and CalFresh recipients to purchase more products at farmer's markets. As part of the *2018-19 Budget Act*, the state provided \$9 million for a three-year pilot study on further incentivizing CalFresh recipients to purchase locally grown foods.
- ***Various Other Augmentations to Nutrition Access Programs.*** The above list is not exhaustive, and the state has made other augmentations to various nutrition access programs in recent years. For one notable example, the *2018-19 Budget Act* provided \$5.5 million one time to improve food bank infrastructure.



Actions in Response to COVID-19

- **Cash-Like Benefits for Students Affected by School Closings.** The federal H.R. 748 (the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES, Act) allowed states to provide increased CalFresh benefits to families impacted by school closings. California’s plan (which was approved by the federal government) has already provided a total of \$1.4 billion to the families of 3.7 million K-12 students, with average benefits of about \$350 per student. This program was recently extended for the months of August and September.
- **Increased CalFresh Benefits Since March.** The CARES Act also allowed California to increase CalFresh benefits to their maximum amount by household size to all households throughout the duration of the state’s declared public health emergency. To date, more than \$1 billion in these CalFresh “emergency allotments” have been awarded, with average benefits of more than \$200 per month per household.
- **New Meal Delivery Service for Older Adults.** In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, cities, counties, and tribes, the state launched the Great Plates Delivered program which provides home-delivered meals from local restaurants to seniors and older adults at high risk from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). This program is authorized to run to December 8, 2020.
- **Augmented Federal Funding for Several Programs.** Federal coronavirus relief bills notably increased funding for WIC, TEFAP, and OAA nutrition programs, with California receiving more than \$100 million in augmented assistance across these programs.
- **Augmented State Funding for Several Programs.** In the *2020-21 Budget Act* (and in related pandemic relief efforts), the state provided augmented funding for CalFresh administration (by about \$100 million) and for food banks (\$125 million).
- **Direct Relief Assistance for Immigrants.** Because undocumented individuals were ineligible for most federal pandemic relief assistance, the state provided \$63.3 million for one-time cash assistance of up to \$500 for these individuals.



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