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Access to Proper Nutrition Equals College Success

Making CalFresh Work for Students

Presented by:

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Agenda

- Background
- Overview of the Workgroup
- Student's Needs are Differential and Complex
- Recommendations

Among California's postsecondary students, it is estimated that between 400,000 and 750,000 are eligible for CalFresh. Yet only 127,000 students receive food benefits through CalFresh.

Background

- California's students have struggled for over a decade to afford a multitude of expenses associated with pursuing higher education.
- Students strugglingly with hunger have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Surveying suggests that as high as 7 in 10 students lost some or all their income during the pandemic – key source for basic food needs.
 - California has responded, in part, through the allocation of new funding support.
- Federal SNAP, known as CalFresh in California, is a vastly untapped service to support up to 750,000 eligible students.

Background: Criteria for Exemption

The SNAP was initially designed to exclude college students from program eligibility, unless they meet one of the following exemptions:

Demonstrated Working Status

- Employed 20 hours a week based on reasonable anticipated monthly avg.
- Receiving federal or state work-study money
- Enrolled in Extended Opportunities Programs and Services

Individual/ Family Circumstances

- Approved for a TANF-funded Cal Grant A or B
- Students with children under 12 or receiving CalWorks
- Does not intend to register for the next normal school term

Employment/ Training Program

- Enrolled in a CalFresh employment and training (FSET) program
- Enrolled in a program to increase student's employability, including programs for low-income or foster youth students
- Enrolled in a Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act program
- Enrolled in Extended Opportunities Programs and Services

Background: Agencies Engaged in this Process



There is a multitude of state and local agencies involved in the administration and coordination of this benefit including:



281 colleges and universities

Overview of the Workgroup

Made up of a cross-section of representatives: Legislature, various state agencies, students, researchers, county practitioners, post-secondary institutions, and local practitioners with the goal:

Increase the number of California postsecondary students currently enrolled and receiving CalFresh benefits measured by year over year changes in dispersed benefits by streamlining the process and raising awareness.

The workgroup's investigation took a user-centered design approach that anchored the assessment of challenges in accessing CalFresh benefits from the experience of students.

Student's Needs are Differential and Complex

Several key barriers were identified to accessing CalFresh benefits:

- Limited awareness & navigation support
- Outdated modes of communication
- Complex processes
- Processing delays
- Gaps in benefits

Recommendations:

Short-Term Pilot Programs

1. Establish regional hub pilot program that provides a central online portal for students to apply for/ be approved for CalFresh.
 - County eligibility workers would be trained to review and approve student applications.
 - Counties could opt in by entering a consortium to support concentrated focus on these applications in a manner not impacted by students moving across county jurisdictions.
2. Establish a Pilot Food Support Program for undocumented students who have completed the California Dream Act application.
 - The program would be supported by the state General Fund.

Recommendations:

Short-Term Policy and Regulation

1. Use FAFSA data to pre-populate the CalFresh application – **State policy change**
2. Enhance data sharing agreements with CDE to identify all K-12 students who were on FRPM program – **State policy change**
3. Maintain permanent use of \$0 EFC status as a metric that determines eligibility to apply for CalFresh benefits – **Federal policy change**
4. Eliminate interview requirement for students – **Federal policy change**

Recommendations:

Short-Term Policy and Regulation

5. Expand CDSS communications to County Offices directing them to accept client statements of verification in lieu of Student Rule exemptions -- **State policy change**
6. Create a reporting and tracking system to collect data on students estimated to be eligible for CalFresh benefits -- **State policy change**
7. Provide funding allocation assistance to local counties to keep pace with surge in CalFresh applications in general and student applications, specifically -- **State policy change**

Recommendations:

Short-Term Policy and Regulation

8. Direct California colleges and universities to require local campus food service venues to accept EBT cards from Cal Fresh students for food purchases -- **State policy change**
9. Allow county office eligibility workers throughout the state to view, transfer and process all BenefitsCal/ CalFresh applications via CalSAWS to allow students to be able to apply in their home county before moving -- **State policy change**
10. Develop a Statewide Student Portal within the MyBenefits/Cal system -- **State Policy change**
11. Develop a coalition of other states and organizations to advocate for changes to SNAP at the federal level -- **State activity.**

Recommendations:

Long-Term Policy and Regulation



12. Eliminate permanently the federal Student Eligibility Rule -- **Federal policy change**
13. Verify SNAP recertification for students through the annual FAFSA submission thereby eliminating six-month eligibility status checks -- **Federal policy change**
14. Provide presumptive eligibility for students who are \$0 EFC eligible, FRPM, from a CalFresh household or household with SNAP benefits -- **Federal policy change**



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