

Addressing Barriers to Immigrant Food Access in California

Final Report of the Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup

March, 2020

Legislative Mandate

The Supplemental Report of the 2018-19 State Budget established the Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup to accomplish the following:

DSS shall convene relevant stakeholders, including, but not limited to, immigrant advocates and food security advocates, to identify how the State and local entities can improve current programs and coordinate linkages to community services to strengthen California's food assistance safety net for all low-income Californians, and work to remove barriers that exclude immigrant Californians from the State's food assistance safety net. Stakeholders shall be convened by September 30, 2018 and shall meet at least four times before July 1, 2019.¹

¹ Legislative Analyst's Office (2018). Item 5180-001-0001—Department of Social Services. Number 7. Pg 11-12. <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2018/3883/supplemental-language-2018.pdf>

Executive Summary

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) convened the Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup to identify how the State and local entities can strengthen California's food assistance safety net for all low-income Californians by removing barriers that exclude immigrants. Workgroup membership included state department leadership and advocates of food security, immigrant rights, health access, and child well-being. This report contains a summary of the issues discussed by the Workgroup and identifies four key consideration areas to help guide future state and local actions. From September 2018 through June 2019, the Workgroup convened four times to collectively share data, identify barriers, and discuss potential solutions. Through this process, the Workgroup identified four key consideration areas to help guide future work on these issues.

It should be noted that CDSS served as a facilitator of the process, not a Workgroup participant, and the recommendations in this report do not reflect the opinions of CDSS or the Administration.

Member Organizations:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice CA
California Association of Food Banks
California Immigrant Policy Center
California WIC Association
California Department of Education
California Department of Public Health
California Department of Social Services
California Food Policy Advocates
California Health and Human Services
Agency

The Children's Partnership
California Rural Legal Assistance
California Welfare Directors Association
Jewish Family Services San Diego
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
National Immigrant Law Center
Office of Governor Newsom
Senate and Assembly Staff
Western Center on Law and Poverty

Key Considerations for Policy Planning and Implementation

1. **Mitigate the Chilling Effect of Anti-Immigrant Policy**

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy attacks have created a *climate of fear* in immigrant communities—making it increasingly difficult to connect food insecure immigrants to any one of California's nutrition programs. The Workgroup identified an urgent need for effective messaging and communication focused around three main goals:

- Encourage Continued Participation
Train client-facing staff on issues impacting immigrants and increase outreach and education efforts to prevent disenrollment.
- Address Misinformation
Identify sources of misinformation, including ethnic media and legal providers, and create partnerships and channels to share accurate information.
- Culturally Relevant Messaging
Invest in multicultural, multi-lingual message testing to inform a new approach to marketing nutrition programs that resonate with the state's diverse clientele.

2. **Reduce Barriers to Enrollment & Retention**

Confusing paperwork, poor or non-existent translations, and culturally irrelevant services discourage participation. Removing these and other such process barriers is vital to keeping low-income immigrants connected to nutrition supports. Priority actions include:

- Waive applicant requirements to the furthest extent permitted under federal and state law.
- Adopt user-centered design and promote a culture of eligibility.
- Increase cultural relevance of meals and services provided.
- Improve language access:
 - Review translated materials for understandability.
 - Increase bilingual/multilingual staffing and ensure fair compensation.

3. **Privacy Protections and Data Sharing**

Enrollment in most nutrition programs requires participants to share a significant amount of personal information, which can deter individuals who feel vulnerable to immigration enforcement actions. Paradoxically, data sharing between benefit-issuing agencies also presents an opportunity to **reduce** fear and increase immigrant utilization of programs. The complexity of this issue necessitates further exploration. To begin, stakeholders recommend that benefit-issuing agencies:

- Develop messaging to clients that details privacy rights and protections.
- Take inventory of data linkages and data sharing paths for each program.

4. **Addressing Immigrant Exclusions in CalFresh and the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)**

CalFresh and CFAP are the only state-administered nutrition programs that have immigrant eligibility restrictions. CFAP provides food benefits to some “qualified immigrants” who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits, but still fails to serve all Californians. The Workgroup supports exploring policy options for expanding CFAP eligibility by:

- Examining whether CFAP eligibility criteria meet the needs of California’s current immigrant population.
- Determining whether policy change is needed to modernize the CFAP program.

Key Recommendations

The Food for All Workgroup’s findings offer a framework for reducing barriers and increasing immigrant participation in California’s nutrition programs. To protect and improve the nutritional health of immigrant Californians, the following recommendations will be critical to pursue:

- Multilevel resistance against federal policy changes that reduce access to nutritious, affordable food for immigrants.
- Promote comprehensive actions to expand program access for immigrants by improving language access, cultural responsiveness, and ease of access into nutrition programs.

- Coordinated strategic communications to dispel myths and fears related to nutrition assistance programs.
- Modernize CFAP by expanding access to the program for immigrants. Food for All stakeholders consistently hear from parents and service providers that access to food is a universal need, and CFAP should reflect this by making all low-income individuals eligible for the program, regardless of immigration status.

Introduction

When every person has the nutrition they need, we build a stronger, more productive California. One way to progress towards a ‘food for all’ California is to ensure the state’s nutrition safety net adequately serves immigrant Californians. Immigrants are deeply rooted in the history and ever evolving culture of California. They contribute billions each year to California’s economy and bring innovation and cultural diversity to our communities. At the same time, California’s low-income immigrants face unique barriers to accessing the state’s nutrition programs. In order to identify barriers and potential solutions, CDSS convened the Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup, comprising stakeholders who advocate food security, immigrant rights, health access, and child well-being. This report contains a summary of the issues discussed and offers a framework for reducing barriers to immigrant food access.

Background

Proposals advanced by the current Federal Administration to restrict and punish immigrants’ use of public assistance—and rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric—have brought renewed urgency to California’s need to address persistent barriers to immigrant food access.

The State administers the nation’s largest and most effective anti-hunger programs, which include federal programs such as:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known as CalFresh in California);
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC);
- The National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Despite many immigrants being eligible for these programs, stakeholders report a declining trend in participation across programs and services. While underutilization of public assistance among non-citizens is not new, this moment highlights the need for California to improve how it administers nutrition programs to better serve immigrant Californians.

Snapshot of Immigrants in California

California is a diverse state with a rich history of immigration. Immigrants make up 13.5 percent of the US population, but in California, the proportion is twice as high (27 percent).² That amounts to about 11 million foreign-born Californians, the greatest shares originating from

² The Children’s Partnership and California Immigrant Policy Center (2018). *Healthy Mind, Healthy Future: Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children in Immigrant Families in California*. Available at <https://childrenspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Healthy-Mind-Healthy-Future-Report-Promoting-the-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-Children-in-Immigrant-Families.pdf.pdf>

Mexico, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and India.³ Immigration status varies among this group and includes, but is not limited to: from naturalized citizens (5.3M), green card holders (3M), refugees (112,000), and the undocumented (2.4M).⁴

Immigrants, regardless of documentation or visa status, provide much more than cultural and ethnic diversity; they also make powerful economic contributions. Immigrants and children of immigrants comprise half of California's workforce.⁵ In 2014, the National Immigration Forum reported that U.S. immigrants paid more than \$328 billion in state, local and federal taxes. In California, their contributions accounted for more than a quarter of all state tax revenue (\$82.9 billion).⁶ The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy further reported that undocumented Californians alone contributed over \$3 billion in state and local taxes.⁷

Despite these strong contributions to the state's overall economy, immigrants are overrepresented in low-wage work, comprising 40 percent of California workers earning less than \$14.35 an hour, on average.⁸ These low wages lead to higher rates of poverty and food insecurity. Among working families in California, the poverty rate for children of immigrants is more than twice that of other kids in working families (24 vs 11 percent, respectively).⁹

Immigrants are invaluable members of our society. They enrich our lives and invest in our communities. Especially in a state as diverse as California, an investment in immigrants is an investment in us all.

Declining Trends in Participation

Workgroup stakeholders shared quantitative and qualitative data indicating a general decline in immigrant participation in nutrition programs. While not causal, some of the data presented suggests that participation among certain populations, including language minorities, may be falling at a faster rate. These trends raise concerns that federal policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric may be driving California's immigrants away from critical programs for which they or their family members are eligible.

³ Johnson, Hans and Sanchez, Sergio (2019). *Just the Facts: Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California. Available at: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/>

⁴ Public Policy Institute of California (2017) Undocumented Immigrants in California. Available at <https://www.ppic.org/publication/undocumented-immigrants-in-california/>

⁵ The California Budget & Policy Center (2019). *Data Hit: Half of All California Workers Are Immigrants or Children of Immigrants*. Available at <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/half-of-all-california-workers-are-immigrants-or-children-of-immigrants/>

⁶ Kosten, Dan (2018). Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Immigrant Tax Contributions and Spending Power. National Immigration Forum. Available at: <https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-immigrant-tax-contributions-and-spending-power/>

⁷ Wiehe et al. (2017) State and Local Tax Contributions of Undocumented Californians: County by County Data. Available at: <https://itep.org/state-and-local-tax-contributions-of-undocumented-californians-county-by-county-data/#.WQdqr4grKJA>

⁸ UC Berkley Labor Center (2017). *Low-Wage Work in California Data Explorer*. Available at <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/low-wage-work-in-california/#>

⁹ Anderson, Alissa (2019). *Data Hit: Among Working Families, Children of Immigrants Are Far More Likely to Live in Poverty Than Other Children*. California Budget and Policy Center. Available at <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/among-working-families-children-of-immigrants-are-far-more-likely-to-live-in-poverty-than-other-children/>

- **CDSS** used language preference and household composition as a proxy to analyze trends in CalFresh participation among immigrants. This method revealed a steeper decline in participation from households requesting materials in Spanish. A similar trend was observed among “child-only” households that include only citizen children and may be an indicator of a mixed-status immigrant household.
- **California WIC Association** (CalWIC) relayed reports from partner WIC agencies that immigrant participation is declining, noting fear of immigration consequences as a motivating factor. This fear persists despite the fact that WIC benefits are excluded from the finalized public charge law.
- **The Children’s Partnership**, in collaboration with **California Immigrant Policy Center**, surveyed and conducted focus groups with immigrant families who conveyed general confusion and frustration with the current federal administration’s anti-immigrant policies. At the same time, this research uncovered the resilience of these families and their high hopes for their children.¹⁰
- **California Food Policy Advocates** (CFPA) conducted focus groups with Latino immigrant families and direct service providers serving Asian American communities. Participants conveyed a general increase in anxiety when it comes to accessing public programs and services since President Trump took office, but also a willingness to take risks for the health and wellbeing of their children.¹¹
- **California Association of Food Banks** (CAFB) shared anecdotal accounts from their members who observed a decline in immigrant participation in food distributions, as well as immigrant families coming to food banks to express concerns with or to be removed from food assistance programs due to public charge related fears, beginning in early 2017. This pattern has recurred as new public charge proposals have been introduced and garnered news coverage.

Key Considerations: Policy Planning and Implementation

The Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup identified four focus areas where key improvements are needed to strengthen California’s nutrition safety net for immigrants. Each area represents a series of challenges, as well as an opportunity for improvement.

1. Mitigate the Chilling Effect of Anti-Immigrant Policy
2. Improve Language Access and Reduce Barriers to Enrollment & Retention

¹⁰ The Children’s Partnership and California Immigrant Policy Center (2018). *Healthy Mind, Healthy Future: Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children in Immigrant Families in California*. Available at <https://childrenspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Healthy-Mind-Healthy-Future-Report-Promoting-the-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-Children-in-Immigrant-Families.pdf.pdf>

¹¹ CFPA and Perry Undum (2017). *Latino Children and Summer Meal Programs: Insights from Latino Parents in Mixed Status Families*. Available at <https://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SummerMealsImmigration-Report-CFPA-PerryUndem-2017.pdf>

3. Privacy Protections and Data Sharing

4. Address Immigrant Exclusions in CalFresh (CFAP)

1. Mitigate the Chilling Effect of Anti-Immigrant Policy

Increasing hostility towards immigrants, in both policy and rhetoric, has created a *climate of fear* in immigrant communities.¹² From ramping up immigration raids and deportations to the inhumane treatment of migrants at the border to making it difficult for low-income immigrants to obtain legal status by redefining public charge, the current federal administration has so relentlessly attacked immigrants that the fear communities feel is valid.¹³ Given that public charge specifically targets use of SNAP/CalFresh, it and other anti-immigrant policies are creating a chilling effect on immigrant participation in California's nutrition programs.¹⁴ CalWIC shared client stories and local data indicating that immigration-related fears are discouraging WIC participation, despite WIC's exclusion from public charge. Stakeholders who work with CalFresh and child nutrition programs shared similar observations.

In this climate of fear, connecting food insecure immigrants to any one of California's nutrition programs becomes increasingly difficult. To mitigate the chilling effect of the federal administration's anti-immigrant actions the Workgroup identified an urgent need for effective messaging and communication focused around three main goals: encourage continued participation, address misinformation, and adopt culturally relevant messaging.

Encourage Continued Participation

- Increase effective outreach and education efforts to ensure families have accurate facts to make an educated decision for themselves.
- Train client-facing staff on immigration issues relevant to public benefits.
- Increase "you are welcome here" or "you are safe" messaging across agencies.
- Develop an internal process for advising clients with immigration concerns. Consider designating a "navigator" that can advise clients considering disenrollment, without having to refer to an outside legal provider.

Address Misinformation

- Develop a simple and easy-to-communicate message—a single campaign shared across multiple agencies.
- Work with CA state leadership (Governor's Office, State Agencies), to ensure messaging is streamlined among government, media, advocates, and direct service providers.
- Work with ethnic media partners (e.g. Univision, Telemundo) to ensure their channels share correct information.

¹² Gorod, Brianne. (2019). *Countering Trump's Anti-Immigrant Attacks*. Constitutional Accountability Center. Available at <https://www.theusconstitution.org/blog/countering-trumps-anti-immigrant-attacks/>

¹³ On January 27, 2020 a U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowed the Department of Homeland Security to implement its public charge rule, while litigation against the regulation plays out in district courts. The changes are set to take effect February 24, 2020. For updates see: <https://protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/>

¹⁴ Ponce et al. (2018). *How Proposed Changes to the Public Charge rule will affect health, hunger and the economy in California*. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. Available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N4bgIFHSmpm7YUkHiNRAXlqn_8oxbN9m/view

- Work with the legal professional associations (i.e. CA Lawyers Association, the American Immigration Lawyers Association) to ensure immigration attorneys are sharing accurate information through a united messaging front.

Adopt Culturally Relevant Messaging

Just as WIC and school meal programs have expanded food choice to better serve a multicultural client base, stakeholders urge state and local administrators to also apply a culturally responsive lens to communications about these and other nutrition programs.

- Make sure translated materials convey the intended message.
 - Partnering with community groups who represent currently underrepresented cultures is an effective way to field test communications.
- Be intentional about visual representation. A lack of diversity might lead some immigrants to think a certain program is “not for them.”
- Partner with effective messengers to help deliver the message.
- Invest in effective statewide ethnic media campaigns to increase awareness of and enrollment in nutrition programs.
 - Sample case: Massachusetts invested \$1 million in an ethnic media campaign to increase health insurance access among minority groups and saw an increase in enrollment, new and returning, from hard to reach populations.¹⁵

2. Reducing Barriers to Enrollment & Retention

Lessening the burden of enrollment and benefit maintenance can greatly increase the likelihood that low-income immigrants stay connected to nutrition assistance. Knowing that fear and mistrust of government motivates non-participation, it is important to ensure that the experience of seeking public assistance is a pleasant one. Confusing paperwork, poor or non-existent translations, and culturally irrelevant services diminish the value and perception of public programs. Removing these and other such process barriers is vital to keeping low-income immigrants connected to nutrition supports.

The following were identified as barriers to immigrant participation that arise after an individual decides to apply for or receive a benefit:

- Confusing and burdensome application and reporting requirements
- Poor language access (written translations and interpretation services)
- Lack of cultural competence
- Privacy concerns (*see section 3: Privacy Protections and Data Sharing*)

Burdensome Program Requirements

Confusing and negative experiences can reinforce in immigrants the notion that public programs are, “*not for them*”. Although many enrollment requirements are mandated by federal law, there is room for flexibility. For example, CDSS has taken steps to better accommodate Supplemental Security Income recipients by encouraging them to enroll in CalFresh without visiting their county office in-person.¹⁶ Likewise, implementation of the WIC Electronic Benefit

¹⁵ MA Health Connector. (2017) Report to the MA Legislature Implementation of HealthCare Reform(p.15). Available at [pro](#)

¹⁶ CDSS (2019). CalFresh Ending SSI Cash-Out Framework. [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalFresh%20SSI%20Cash-Out/SSI%20Cash-Out%20Implementation%20Framework-Final%20\(002\)%20Accessible%20312019.pdf?ver=2019-03-04-145752-150](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalFresh%20SSI%20Cash-Out/SSI%20Cash-Out%20Implementation%20Framework-Final%20(002)%20Accessible%20312019.pdf?ver=2019-03-04-145752-150)

Transfer card will make WIC participation simpler and more dignified. In addition, high-poverty schools can eliminate the administrative burden of school meal applications and still serve breakfast and/or lunch free to all students by using Community Eligibility Provision or Provision 2 options. Expanding these and other administrative initiatives will help encourage immigrant participation by taking the hassle out of the process.

Cultural Responsiveness

California's great diversity in both ethnicity and language necessitate cultural proficiency and responsiveness in public services. Stakeholders shared that immigrant participants are sometimes unfamiliar with the food items at food pantries, or other meal programs. Encouraging diverse participation necessitates intentional program design which honors that diversity. For example, and according to the California Department of Education (CDE), school districts across California have used student taste testing of menu items to better suit student preferences. Food service directors also conduct surveys to see what students want to eat. This helps to support more culturally appropriate food items.

Language Access

California is rich in language diversity. There are at least 220 spoken languages, and 44 percent of residents speak a language other than English at home, though most California immigrants are bilingual.^{17,18} Still, nearly seven million Californians are considered Limited English Proficient meaning they cannot speak English fluently.¹⁹ Therefore, in order to serve all Californians with dignity, language access must be made a priority. The Workgroup discussed the importance of language access in two tiers: staffing needs and structural change.

Statewide and local improvements to language access could be driven by:

- Increasing bilingual/multilingual staffing and ensure fair compensation.
 - Increasing language capacity at call centers.
- Ensuring translations are accurate and understandable:
 - Emphasizing transadaptation over direct translation.²⁰
 - Engaging *promotoras* (community health worker) to test translations.
 - Creating a taskforce on translation access and quality control.
- Increasing cross-departmental/cross-agency access to translation services.
- Creating more nuanced systems for tracking language needs.

3. Privacy Protections and Data Sharing

Amid federal proposals to restrict immigration based on income and use of public benefits, immigrant families are increasingly concerned that the information they provide to program administrators may be used to enforce immigration laws. Under federal law, personal

¹⁷ Johnson, Hans and Sanchez, Sergio (2019). *Just the Facts: Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California. Available at: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/>

¹⁸ Dolan, Maura. (2017). *With 220 languages spoken in California, courts face an interpreter shortage*. Los Angeles Times. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-court-interpreter-20170905-story.html>

¹⁹ Language Line. (2017). *Report: More than 40 Percent of California Residents speak a language other than English at home*. Available at <http://blog.languageline.com/report-california-limited-english-proficient>

²⁰ *Transadaptation* combines translation and adaptation to produce more coherent and culturally relevant translations. The content in the source language has to be both translated and adapted to fit the need and or cultural and linguistic requirements of the target language.

information collected from applicants may only be used to administer benefit programs and may not be disclosed to federal agencies or officials for other purposes.²¹ CDSS, CDE, and the California Department of Public Health currently instruct program administrators to record only what is required by each program. Still, fear of immigration enforcement actions deters immigrants from engaging with these systems.

Paradoxically, data collection and sharing between benefit-issuing agencies also presents an opportunity to **reduce** fear associated with navigating the enrolment process and can increase program utilization through cross-enrollment. If this path were to be pursued further, it is vital to ensure that appropriate information be shared as permissible by federal program requirements, with consumer consent, between agencies to ease enrollment and recertification burdens, while protecting an individual's personal information from unwarranted or unauthorized disclosure.²² In addition, assessment and evaluation of state confidentiality requirements are needed to assess alignment with federal regulations.

The Workgroup agrees that while this is largely a messaging problem, there are also measures State and local agencies can take to better communicate with participants and each other. To further explore this issue, stakeholders recommend benefit-issuing agencies:

- Develop client messaging that explains what data is collected, who receives it, and which data sharing agreements and linkages can have maximum benefit to the client.
- Take inventory of data linkages and data sharing paths for each program.
 - *What is required by law?*
 - *Who shares data with the federal government for reporting?*
 - *Who shares data for immigration-related purposes?*
 - *Who is sharing data with each other, between which agencies?*

4. Addressing Immigrant Exclusions in CalFresh and CFAP

CalFresh and CFAP are the only state-administered nutritional programs that have immigrant eligibility restrictions. CalFresh is the first line of defense against hunger and an effective anti-poverty program. The program kept an average of 806,000 Californians out of poverty from 2009-2012, including 417,000 children. The legal exclusion of immigrants from CalFresh and CFAP stands out as a barrier to food security.

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) curtailed many immigrants' eligibility for Food Stamps (SNAP/CalFresh).²³ California, along with several other states, responded by founding a state-funded nutrition program for immigrants who had lost eligibility, known as CFAP. Since 1997, the population of Californians participating in the program has gradually declined as Congress restored federal eligibility for some non-citizens. Today, CFAP serves about 32,000 "qualified immigrants" who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits.

²¹ National Immigrant Law Center. *Privacy Protections in Selected Federal Benefits Programs*. Available at https://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/privacy-protections-in-selected-federal-benefits-programs/#_ftn1

²² Social Interest Solutions (2019). *Maximizing Linkages: A Policymaker's Guide to Data Sharing*. Available at https://www.socialinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SIS_MaximizingLinkages_041919.pdf

²³ USDA FNS (2011). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Guidance on Non-Citizen Eligibility*. Available at https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/Non-Citizen_Guidance_063011.pdf

At an average of just \$1.54 per person per meal, CalFresh benefits are extremely modest but can be a significant addition to a low-income household's budget. When families are not as worried about putting food on the table, they are better able to pay for the basics like rent to keep a roof over their head, and car repairs and transportation to help them get to work. Studies show that adults who received SNAP (CalFresh) as a child have higher high school completion rates and lower rates of stunted growth, obesity, and heart disease than non-SNAP counterparts. The benefits of participation are well-evidenced, but unequally distributed.

Now may be the time to re-examine who CFAP serves to create closer alignment with California's other social safety net programs, especially Medi-Cal health coverage. The Workgroup supports exploring policy options for expanding CFAP eligibility as a means of mitigating the harm of anti-immigrant policy and better serving Californians.

State administrators and policymakers can address the immigrant exclusions in CalFresh by:

- Examining whether the CFAP eligibility criteria meets the needs of California's current immigrant population.
- Determining whether policy change is needed to modernize the CFAP program.

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The Food for All Stakeholder Workgroup believes that California's immigrants lack adequate access to the services and programs that help families meet their nutritional needs.

With the housing crisis and high cost of living stretching resources thin, many immigrants struggle to afford the healthy food they need and want. While some acknowledge suffering consistent hunger, more report problems affording fresh vegetables, meats, and culturally appropriate foods. Food banks and other charitable resources alone cannot meet the need. Research shows that immigrant families—especially children in immigrant and mixed-status households—are disproportionately vulnerable to hunger. Immigrants may be especially vulnerable to hunger due to low-wage employment, job insecurity, language barriers, or barriers to educational attainment. Further, only lawfully present immigrants with certain immigration statuses are eligible for CalFresh—excluding a large group of people who stand to benefit from the program but lack the appropriate immigration status.

To protect and improve the nutritional health of immigrant Californians, the following recommendations will be critical to pursue:

- Multi-level resistance against federal proposals and regulatory changes that reduce access to nutritious, affordable food for immigrants.
- Comprehensive actions among policymakers and community partners to expand access to food for immigrants, by improving language access, culturally responsive programs, and ease of access into public benefits programs.
- Coordinated strategic communications between state agencies, local administrators, schools, community outreach campaigns, and direct service providers to dispel myths and fears related to nutrition assistance programs.

While many of these recommendations are program improvements, there is a key state policy change that should be explored to benefit immigrant Californians: **modernizing CFAP by expanding eligibility.**

Food for All stakeholders consistently hear from parents and service providers that access to food is a universal need, and CalFresh should reflect this by making all low-income individuals eligible for the program, regardless of immigration status. CalFresh has been shown to improve health, mitigate and prevent poverty, and alleviate food insecurity. If we expand eligibility to state-funded CalFresh (CFAP), more immigrant households will be better resourced to purchase the food they want to eat—food that is fresh, culturally appropriate, and nourishing. This will translate to more low-income Californians benefiting from the positive health and economic outcomes of CalFresh participation.