

SSI Cashout Reversal: Opportunities to Improve the CalFresh Enrollment Process



Opportunity

Since 1974, California's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) "cashout" policy has made SSI recipients (people over age 65 and/or living with a disability) ineligible for CalFresh, our state's largest and most impactful food assistance program for low-income residents. Due to new state policy enacted through the 2018-19 State Budget, the "cashout" policy will formally come to an end in summer 2019. At that time, approximately **500,000 SSI recipients will become eligible for CalFresh** food assistance overnight.



- SSI is cash aid that helps supplement the income of nearly **1.3 million** low-income California seniors and people with disabilities.
- The maximum monthly SSI grant amount is below the federal poverty level- which is far below the cost of living in California. Most SSI recipients still **struggle to afford their basic needs** like rent, medicine, and food.
- In summer 2019, CalFresh can help alleviate these burdens. However, due to many factors including lack of mobility, a complicated application process, and persistent stigma associated with CalFresh, the newly-eligible population will face many **barriers to successful enrollment**.
- The state has set an ambitious target of enrolling 75 percent of these newly eligible households. In order to achieve this benchmark, the state and county welfare departments will need to establish a **simplified, streamlined enrollment experience** leveraging the effective use of all available data, technology, and community partnerships.

500,000 Low-Income Households with Elderly and Disabled Members Will Be Newly-Eligible for CalFresh

Administrative Action

- The California Department of Social Services and County Welfare Departments should design and advance a **standardized, uniformly excellent CalFresh enrollment process** for SSI recipients by May 2019.

Why This Matters

California SSI recipients, some of our state's most vulnerable residents, are forced to live on limited income that is less than the federal poverty level—they struggle to make ends meet every day. For 44 years, they have been ineligible for federal food assistance through CalFresh, and rates of poverty and food insecurity are not improving for this population. Access to CalFresh is proven to reduce food insecurity, poverty, and health care visits and costs.

SSI Recipients Face Additional Barriers Accessing CalFresh

500,000 SSI recipients will need a simple, streamlined system to enroll in CalFresh. Now is the time for bold and effective state leadership to ensure equitable access to CalFresh, no matter where SSI recipients live.

Human services technology and safety net systems must work best to serve those who need it most.