

Sounding the Alarm: Californians Are Losing National Food Benefits and Are Facing Greater Hunger & Costs

Community Update on CalFresh/SNAP EBT, September 2026

Our North Star: Everyone should be able to afford the food they need to be healthy and thrive.

- National food benefits, known as CalFresh or SNAP, are the foundation of local and state progress towards our mission: a healthy, well-nourished community for all. **About 1 in 7 Californians get help to buy groceries from CalFresh/SNAP EBT benefits.**
- Help from food benefits is critical to many families' strapped budgets: **5.5 million Californians received an average of \$192 per person per month to buy groceries with their CalFresh EBT benefits in 2024-2025.**
- Food benefits deliver for our state economy too: **California's farm, grocery, and farmers' market sectors receive almost \$13 billion in federal dollars from Californians spending their CalFresh EBT benefits.**

The Urgency of the Moment: Right now, a major rollback is happening to our national food program, CalFresh/SNAP - families are already losing the food they need and even more people will soon, at the same time as the state is facing steep new costs in the billions.

1. Hundreds of thousands of people have already lost food benefits. Compared to a year ago, **500,000 fewer people in California are receiving food benefits each month, nearly half of whom are children** - a 7% drop so far. And, given the rising cost of living, it's not because fewer people need help affording food.
2. **Another 655,000 Californians are projected to lose their food benefits entirely in the coming months.**
3. **The amount of the monthly food benefit will be cut for Californians still able to participate** - even as food costs are up - putting adequate, healthy food even further out of reach.
4. This sharp drop in food aid comes on top of the fact that California already has a smaller share of people getting help (**7 out of 10 eligible people get enrolled in CalFresh/SNAP), compared to other states (more than 8 out of 10)**. Now even more Californians won't get help from CalFresh/SNAP to afford food.
5. Making matters worse still, states are facing massive new costs from the national government to participate in CalFresh/SNAP, through newly created penalties and first-ever cost sharing. **California's new costs are projected to be between \$2.3 billion and \$5.1 billion annually. More costs for less help is a terrible deal for the state.**

Time for New Solutions: In this crisis, there are opportunities to protect and help seniors, families, and all people. Californians can act to:

1. **Make food benefits easy to access.** Help all eligible people receive national food benefits. Enrolling 500,000 eligible people in CalFresh would bring almost \$1.5 billion in federal dollars to California for food spending. For example, one-stop Senior Centers in other states have increased help to this growing population. And new customer service standards for people with Medi-Cal health insurance could also be used for people with CalFresh, to help people get and keep help.
2. **Provide a more adequate food benefit for good health.** Provide at least enough food benefits for basic human needs: seniors and other adults living alone currently can receive \$23 per month - hardly enough for good health.
3. **Help those left behind.** Provide a state-funded food benefit to the growing numbers of people in need cut off from federal aid - including many adults without young children and legal immigrants of all ages. Food banks and other charities cannot make up the loss of federal aid through CalFresh/SNAP.
4. **Avoid costly new federal penalties.** Lower the state's risk of penalties by standardizing the key operations that drive them: staff training, quality control, and IT governance. Currently, these are distributed across the 58 counties.
5. **Always streamline.** Right-size shared services across counties, regions, and the state to save administrative costs and redirect funds to food benefits. Currently, CalFresh's partnership between the state and the 58 counties is more localized than any other state operating SNAP with counties.
6. **Keep innovating.** New technology tool "breakthroughs" are rolling out now to make automatic connections with college students and food benefits; the same can be done with health, senior, and children's services too.

Sources:

- [Timeline of Funding Cuts to Medi-Cal and CalFresh in California](#)
- <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5126>
- [Many eligible Californians aren't using CalFresh to improve food security](#)