

THE IMPACT OF

CALFRESH EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS

A MIXED-METHODS STUDY



May 2024
California Association of Food Banks





THE IMPACT OF CALFRESH EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS

A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

BACKGROUND

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, households enrolled in CalFresh (SNAP) began receiving Emergency Allotments (EAs), which boosted the value of their monthly benefits for food. CalFresh households received their last EAs in March 2023. Researchers at California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) conducted a mixed-methods study from May–September 2023 to document the impact of EAs, including the average value of benefits received in EAs and lived experiences before and after EAs ended from a subset of households.

KEY FINDINGS

CalFresh households received an average of \$184 per month in Emergency Allotments (EAs), representing 38% of their monthly benefit.

The larger the household, the more in EAs received. Single-person households got an average of \$130 in EAs, while households of 6 received an average of \$514 per month. For households with children, EAs represented \$272 per month on average, or about 1/3 of their monthly benefit.

When in place, EAs were an effective safeguard against hunger.

- a. **With EAs, CalFresh recipients were able to cover more of their household's food budget.** They purchased more, fresher, and healthier food, especially fresh fruits, vegetables, and proteins.
- b. **EAs helped households weather income fluctuations.** When CalFresh households experienced income losses, either from the pandemic or another reason, EAs enabled them to keep putting food on the table until they got back on their feet.
- c. **EAs had a stabilizing effect on households.** With EAs helping cover the cost of food, CalFresh households were better able to stay current on rent and bills and make progress toward financial well-being.

Since EAs ended in March 2023...

- a. **Experiences of food insecurity have intensified.** CalFresh recipients are buying and eating less than what they need and relying on cheaper, processed, and fast foods. Those with children or special dietary considerations are especially struggling.
- b. **Households are making tradeoffs between food and other expenses.** Inflation has driven up the cost of living such that despite cutting back on food, some households are still unable to make rent or afford clothing or school supplies for their children. Many have fallen behind on bills and accumulated debt.
- c. **Physical and mental health have declined.** Poor diets, chronic stress, and going without basic needs have led to worsening of health and well-being. People report frequent experiences of sadness, worry, and depression since EAs ended.
- d. **Shopping patterns changed, impacting local economies.** CalFresh households are shopping less because they have less money, not only for food but also for gas and other goods. Accounting for the stimulating effect that CalFresh has on the greater economy, the value of economic activity lost when EAs ended may exceed \$961 million per month statewide.

Food banks have responded to the surge in need.

Many households started using food banks for the first time when EAs ended. While most have found the services extremely valuable to making ends meet, some have experienced challenges accessing food distributions. Food banks have reported serving more people and distributing more food since EAs ended, and most have had to use a disproportionate share of their budget or tap into reserves to provide food to their communities.

Conclusions

CalFresh EAs represented a substantial portion of monthly benefits for CalFresh households. Our findings demonstrate that boosting CalFresh benefits through EAs had a positive and stabilizing impact on households and helped promote physical and financial well-being. Conversely, the ending of EAs led to negative impacts on individuals, households, and the greater community. Recommendations supported by this research are to: 1) Strengthen and expand CalFresh, including permanently increasing benefit amounts to enable recipients to afford more food; 2) Prevent abrupt and harmful benefit cliffs in the future, and 3) Strengthen and invest in food banks to better equip them to address surges in need.



CONTENTS

Research Summary	5
Acknowledgments	6
Glossary	7
Summary of Methods	7
Background	8
Who Received Emergency Allotments?	9
How Did Emergency Allotments Impact Households?	13
How are CalFresh Households Faring After Emergency Allotments Ended?	16
Food Banks: A Vital but Strained System	24
Discussion	26
Appendix 1: Qualitative Methodology	28
Appendix 2: Quantitative Methodology	30
Appendix 3: Regular CalFresh and Emergency Allotment Issuances, by County	32
Citations	34

RESEARCH SUMMARY (ABSTRACT)

BACKGROUND

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, households enrolled in CalFresh (SNAP) began receiving Emergency Allotments (EAs), which boosted the value of their monthly benefits for food. CalFresh households received their last EAs in March 2023. This study aimed to explore and document the impact of EAs, including the average value of EA benefits that different types of households had been receiving, and the lived experiences of a subset of households before and after EAs ended.

METHODS

The study used a convergent mixed-methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately and results combined for interpretation. Quantitative data included CalFresh issuance data from the State of California for February 2023 and data from two pulse surveys of food banks in May and August 2023, respectively. Qualitative data came from three focus groups with CalFresh outreach workers (n=21), in-depth interviews with CalFresh recipients (n=21), and group stakeholder interviews (n=7), analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

On average, CalFresh households lost \$184 per month, or 38% of their total monthly benefit when EAs ended. Qualitative findings highlight that when in place, EAs had positive impacts on household food security and overall economic stability. The ending of EAs led to immediate increases in food hardship (especially in households with children), the need to make tradeoffs between food and other expenses, declines in physical and mental health, and greater use of food bank services.

CONCLUSIONS

CalFresh EAs were an effective anti-hunger intervention. The ending of EAs represented a substantial monthly benefits loss for CalFresh households and had negative impacts on individuals and the wider community. Policymakers can mitigate food hardship by improving CalFresh benefit adequacy and preventing future abrupt cuts to benefits. Investments and support are also needed to better equip food banks to address surges in the need for food assistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the result of collaboration among many colleagues. Becky Silva and Stephanie Nishio contributed to multiple aspects of the study, particularly in the development of the research concept, participant recruitment, key stakeholder interviews, interpretation of findings, and reviews of earlier drafts. Jocelyn Vilchez and Brittany Liu conducted the qualitative research, including the literature review, design of study materials, participant recruitment, data collection, coding, and analysis. Edith Martinez contributed to focus group facilitation and provided content expertise. Lauren Lathan Reid, Liz Kroboth, and Kellie Longo Flores reviewed and gave feedback on earlier drafts of the report. Rachael Lacey provided graphic design for the final report.

We also thank the following for their specific and valuable contributions:

- Study participants, including CalFresh recipients and outreach workers, who generously shared their lived experiences and observations for this study;
- CAFB member food banks and CalFresh outreach partners for their help with participant recruitment;
- Andrea Brayboy, Kathy Yang and Haris Ahmed at the California Department of Social Services for providing summarized CalFresh issuance data and sharing insights during a key stakeholder interview;
- Karli Holkko, Jenny Nguyen and Roshena Duree at the County Welfare Directors Association of California for sharing insights during a key stakeholder interview;
- Miguel Rosales and Andrew Xie from Code for America for sharing insights during a key stakeholder interview;
- Toral Patel and Justin King at Propel for sharing California results from Providers surveys;
- Diane Schanzenbach and Nick Fleming at Northwestern Institute for Policy Research for providing California estimates of food insecurity;
- Caroline Danielson, Tess Thorman, and Patricia Malagon at Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) for feedback on initial findings;
- Andrew Cheyne at GRACE/End Child Poverty California for reviewing a draft of this report and providing feedback;
- Hilary Seligman at UC San Francisco, Wendi Gosliner at Nutrition Policy Institute, and May Wang at UCLA for guidance related to research methods and feedback on drafts of this report.

Suggested citation: May Lynn Tan, Becky Silva, Stephanie Nishio, Jocelyn Vilchez, and Brittany Liu. "The Impact of CalFresh Emergency Allotments – a Mixed-Methods Study." California Association of Food Banks, Oakland, CA. May 2024.

For more information, contact maylynn.tan@cafoodbanks.org.

GLOSSARY

CAFB:	California Association of Food Banks
CalSAWS:	California Statewide Automated Welfare System
CDSS:	California Department of Social Services
CF:	CalFresh
CFA:	Code for America
CWDA:	County Welfare Directors Association of California
EA:	Emergency Allotment
FPL:	Federal Poverty Level
HH:	Household
SNAP:	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
USDA:	United States Department of Agriculture

SUMMARY OF METHODS

For this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were implemented separately, and findings were combined to describe the overall impact of Emergency Allotments (EAs) at individual and community levels. Quantitative methods were used to determine the monetary value of EA benefits for different types of households and to assess changes in food bank operations after EAs ended. Qualitative methods were used to assess the impact that EAs had on individuals, households, and the wider community.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

- Administrative records from CDSS on CalFresh Program Participation by household size and demographics for February 2023
- CAFB “pulse” surveys of member food banks in May and August 2023

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Three focus groups with 21 CalFresh workers
- In-depth, private interviews with 21 CalFresh recipients
- Group interviews with 7 stakeholders from 3 organizations

Details about data collection and analyses are provided in the Appendix.

BACKGROUND

EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS

CalFresh (federally known as the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), provides monthly electronic benefits to low-income households to purchase groceries. Normally, the amount that each household receives depends on a combination of household size and income.¹

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, allowing states to issue an additional monthly benefit — known as an emergency allotment (EA) — to CalFresh households who had been receiving less than the maximum, bringing their total benefit to the maximum for their household size.² In April 2021, after litigation by the Western Center on Law and Poverty, all CalFresh households began receiving a minimum EA of \$95,³ providing households who were at or near the maximum benefit level additional food resources. Monthly issuances continued this way, with periodic increases in baseline benefits, until the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 terminated EAs in February 2023.⁴ CalFresh recipients received their final EAs on March 26, 2023.^a

To date, EAs represented the largest-ever increases in CalFresh benefit amounts and formed a substantial expansion of California's safety net.⁵ In February 2023, the last month EAs were issued, their value exceeded \$537 million statewide. In a single year (2021), EAs alone helped Californians purchase 1.32 billion meals, or approximately 14% of the meals provided through all public and private food assistance programs in the state combined.⁶

Food Assistance Sources for Californians, 2021

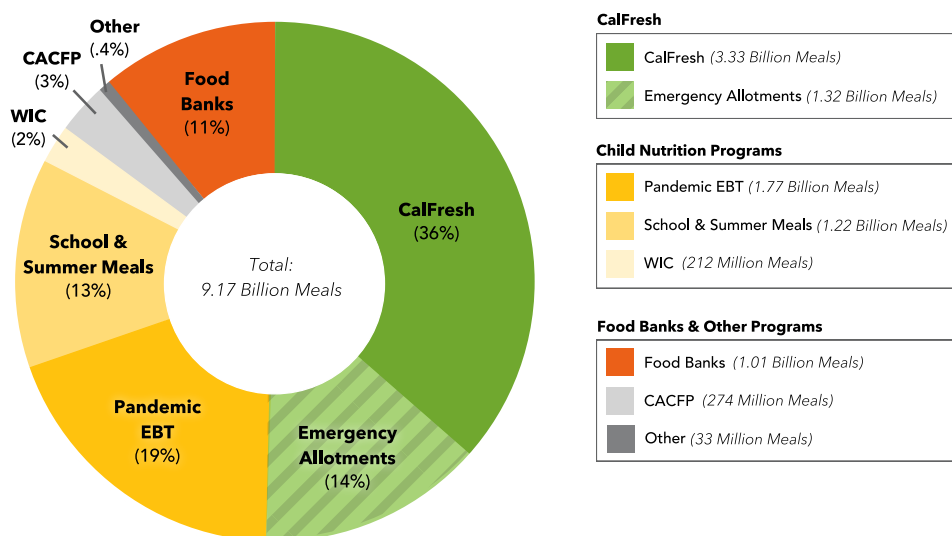


Figure 1. WIC: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, & Children. Food Banks: Food banks, pantries, & other charitable food assistance programs. CACFP: The Child & Adult Care Food Program. Data Source(s):

Research provides strong evidence that EAs reduced food hardship and improved well-being for SNAP recipients. Studies on states that ended EAs early show that after EAs ended, SNAP households in those states had higher overall and child food insufficiency,^{7,8} increased hospitalizations,⁹ and more difficulties paying for other expenses.¹⁰ Service providers and advocates in California expressed concern that the abrupt ending of EAs in early 2023, which coincided with a period of high inflation, increasing poverty, and the expiration of other pandemic-era supports, would have a severe impact on low-income households and exacerbate a “hunger cliff.”¹¹

This report documents multiple experiences surrounding the termination of EAs in California. It starts by summarizing administrative data from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide an overview of the amounts in EAs received by different types of households. Next, it shares perspectives of a subset of

a. CalFresh recipients received EAs in the form of electronic benefits in the month following each issuance.

CalFresh participants, outreach workers, and other stakeholders involved in the administration of CalFresh benefits on the effects that EAs had on households and communities, both while they were in place and after they ended. Data from food bank “pulse” surveys are included to provide additional insights about household and community impacts. Drawing from these findings, it concludes with recommendations on how food hardship can be mitigated by strengthening CalFresh and the food bank safety net.

“We are really thankful we have such a good relationship with all of our advocate partners, CBOs, and county partners that we were able to move quickly in the early days of the Pandemic. And our CalSAWS automation partners, too. So I think it just took a very big collaborative approach from everyone to get those benefits out.”

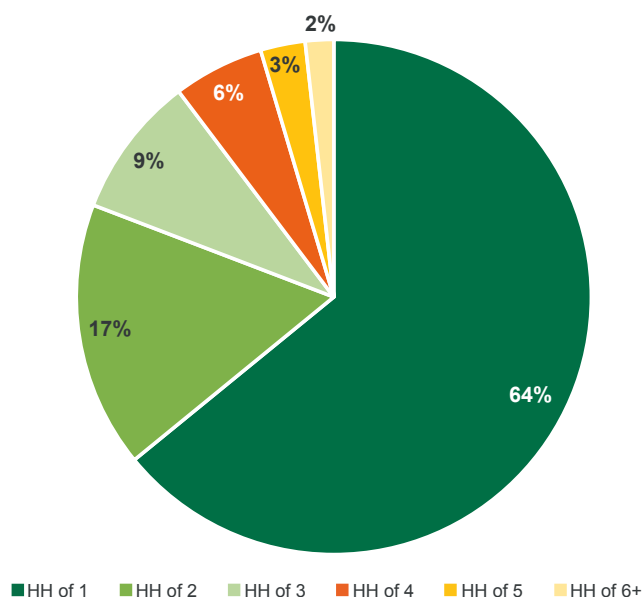
–Kathy Yang, CalFresh Policy & Employment Bureau Chief, California Department of Social Services

WHO RECEIVED EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS?

AVERAGE EAs BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE

In February 2023, the last month that Emergency Allotments were issued in California, there were over 2.9 million households receiving CalFresh. Around 90% of these households had three or fewer people, with 64% of households consisting of one person, 17% two people, and 9% three people. Households of four and five made up 6% and 3% of the February CalFresh caseload, respectively, and households of 6 or more people represented 2%.

Household (HH) Size as Percent of CalFresh Households



CALFRESH & 1-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS

The relatively large share of 1-person households in the overall caseload likely resulted from a combination of factors that have made it easier over time for eligible single-person households to get CalFresh. In 2017, California began implementing a state option, the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) to better assist people such as those 60 or older to enroll.¹² The expansion of CalFresh benefits in 2019 to people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) has increased enrollment by over 700,000 SSI recipients, among whom average household size was 1.2.¹³ Moreover, certain pandemic-era provisions, such as a waiver of the time limit rule for able-bodied adults without children (ABAWDs)¹⁴ and a rule expansion allowing more college students to qualify,¹⁵ allowed more low-income single adults to receive CalFresh benefits in recent years.

Figure 2. The majority of CalFresh households have three or fewer people. Data source: CDSS.

Figure 3 shows average CalFresh regular benefits and EAs by household size. As household size increased, the average value of both CalFresh and EA benefits increased, while the share of benefits made up by EAs remained relatively consistent between 33–40% across all household sizes.

Average CalFresh Regular Benefit & Emergency Allotment (EA), by Household (HH) Size

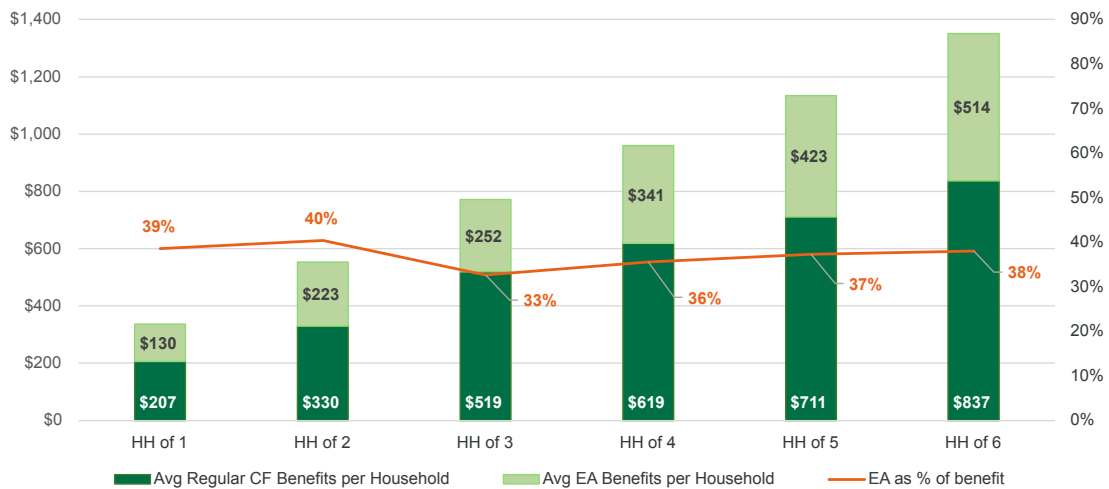


Figure 3. The value of EAs increased by household size, but proportions did not. Data source: CDSS.

AVERAGE EAs BY INCOME

Over one quarter (26%) of CalFresh households had no income, and 77% had annual incomes at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which in 2023 was \$30,000 for a family of four.¹⁶ The remaining 23% had income between 100–200% of FPL (between \$30,000–\$60,000 for a family of four).^b

Income Levels of CalFresh Households, February 2023

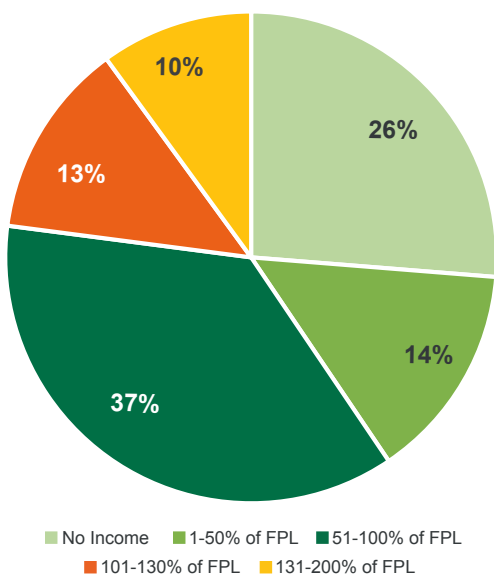


Figure 4. Most CalFresh households had income, yet the majority were living at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Data source: CDSS.

b. Less than a quarter percent of households were above 200% of FPL and not shown in this chart.

Across all households, the average CalFresh regular benefit was \$305, and the average EA was \$184, for a total of \$489 per household per month — with EAs representing 38% of total monthly benefits. Average amounts varied widely by household size and income level, as illustrated by Figure 5. Households with no income, who were already receiving close to the maximum (an average of \$341 per month) got an additional \$105 on average in EAs, which represented 23% of their total monthly benefit. Households in the highest income category of 131–200% of FPL were receiving \$116 on average in regular benefits and got an average EA benefit of \$381. The orange line shows how — since benefit amounts are based largely on income — EAs represented a greater share of the total benefit for households in higher income categories. However, only 23% of CalFresh households fell into the top two income categories combined.

Of households enrolled in CalFresh in February 2023, 40% were at the maximum regular benefit level for their household size and were receiving an EA of \$95 per month. All other households received EAs equivalent to the amount needed to bring them to the maximum (or \$95, whichever was more). Eight percent of households were at the minimum benefit level and would have received the largest proportional increases in total benefit levels from EAs.

Average CalFresh Regular Benefit & Emergency Allotment (EA), by Household (HH) Income

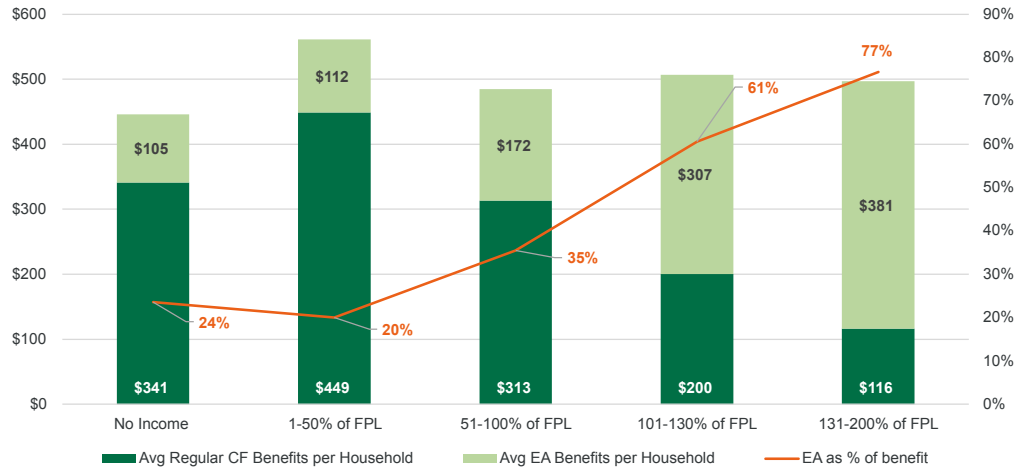


Figure 5. The amount of EAs received differed by income level. Data source: CDSS

HOUSEHOLDS WITH KEY POPULATIONS

Thirty-six percent of CalFresh households consisted of a single adult between 18–59. Nearly one-third of households had an older adult (60 or above). Thirty percent of households had at least one child, and over a quarter had a person with a disability. Percentages do not add up to 100% because households could belong to more than one category.

Percent of CalFresh Households Consisting of Key Populations

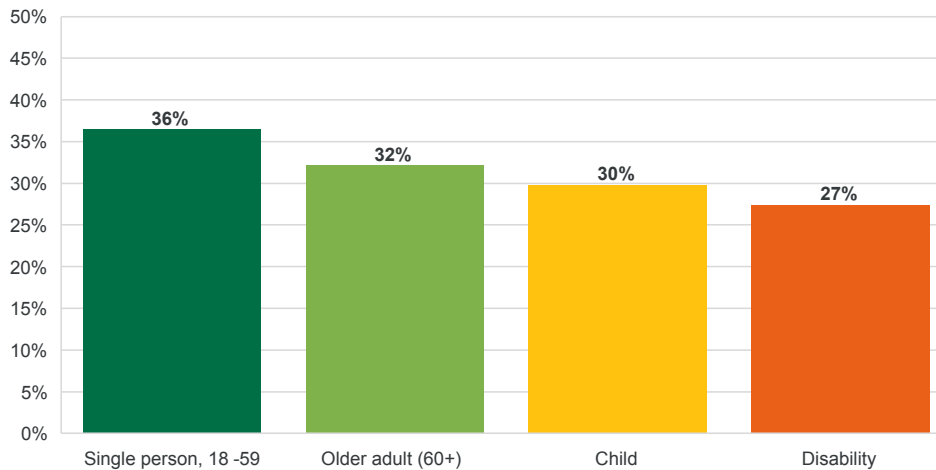


Figure 6. A large share of CalFresh households had an older adult, child, or someone with a disability. Percentages do not add to 100% because households could belong to more than one category. Data source: CDSS.

Figure 7 shows the average value of CalFresh regular and emergency allotments for these four types of households. On average, for households comprised of a single person 18–59 and households with at least one child, EAs represented about one third of total CalFresh benefits. In households with an older adult or someone with a disability, EAs represented about half of the total monthly benefit.

Throughout this report, the value the February 2023 EA issuance is used to approximate the average monthly amount of CalFresh benefits “lost” after EAs ended, when households began receiving only their regular benefit amounts.

CalFresh Benefit Amounts in Households with Key Populations

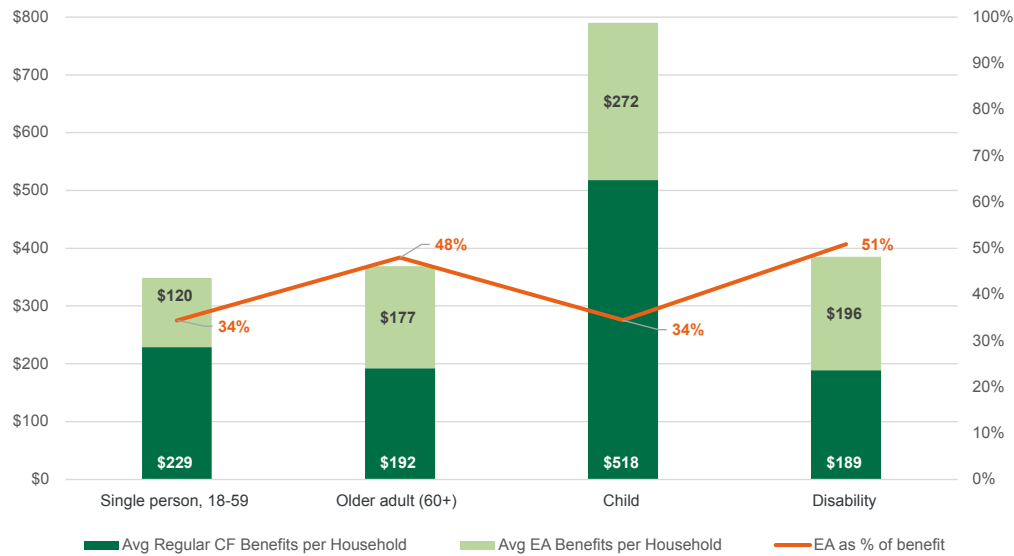


Figure 7. Data source: CDSS.

QUALITATIVE METHODS OVERVIEW

The following sections present qualitative findings about CalFresh households' experiences before and after EAs ended. Data come from three collection methods: focus groups with CalFresh outreach workers, conversations with stakeholders involved in administering CalFresh, and in-depth interviews with CalFresh recipients.

CalFresh outreach workers were employees of organizations such as community service agencies, food banks, and other non-profit organizations, who provided application assistance and case management for people enrolling or re-certifying for CalFresh. They worked closely with community members, including non-English speakers and groups that faced heightened barriers to applying for benefits.

Stakeholders worked for the California Department of Social Services, which administers the CalFresh program; the County Welfare Directors Association of California, which represents county welfare departments; and Code for America, a non-profit tech organization which maintains an online application system for CalFresh (GetCalFresh.org). These organizations were each selected based on their ability to provide insight into various aspects of the implementation and outcomes related to issuing EAs.

CalFresh recipients were selected for interviews from a group of respondents that volunteered to participate in a research study. All had been enrolled in CalFresh at least some time during the preceding 3 years. Of the 21 interview participants, one-third had been enrolled for more than 3 years, and another third between 1 and 3 years. They came from 12 counties throughout California and represented a mix of rural and urban settings. Three-quarters had at least one child in the household.

Full details on study methods are provided in the Appendix.

The themes presented here highlight important insights shared by informants. Due to the relatively small sample, each theme may not be comprehensive or generalizable to all CalFresh recipients. However, themes do reflect common and relevant experiences reported by a diverse subset of CalFresh outreach workers and households. Representative quotes from interviews and focus groups are included to help illustrate each theme. Quotes from focus groups and interviews have been de-identified, and some have been lightly edited for clarity.

HOW DID EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS IMPACT HOUSEHOLDS?

MORE & GREATER VARIETY OF FOOD

The most direct and immediate impact of EAs was to enable CalFresh recipients to spend more money on food and better meet their household's nutrition needs. EAs helped households afford greater quantities of food, as well as fresher foods of higher quality, variety, and nutritional value — especially fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats or other proteins. Parents specifically referred to the ability to purchase fresh and nutritious foods, such as strawberries and other fruits, as snacks for their children, which were otherwise cost-prohibitive. With EAs, CalFresh benefits were enough to cover a substantial portion of the household food budget each month, easing the worry of whether they would be able to feed themselves and their families.

“It was a tremendous, huge weight off my shoulders, because I was actually getting groceries and I was getting a healthy meal, and stuff that I find difficult to get on a normal basis.”

—CalFresh Recipient

It helped me [be] more proactive with buying healthy foods, and not just quick foods that I can just make. Because usually, I buy stuff that's kind of like what I make, you know, something quick. But with the help [of EAs], it was more focused on getting like veggies and you know, more healthy stuff.”

—CalFresh Recipient

A more flexible food budget also enabled them to enjoy food-related activities, participate in family gatherings, and stay connected to their communities during the fraught years of the pandemic and its aftermath. These activities reduced social isolation and created a greater sense of well-being.

“We would go to the park and take hamburgers, we would go to the lake... [from [EAs]] I could buy more food, juices, everything. Then we could go to the park, to the beach, to take [my kids] out in the open air.”

—CalFresh Recipient

A SAFEGUARD AGAINST HUNGER WHEN INCOMES FELL

For many CalFresh recipients interviewed, EAs were a critical support when they experienced income losses, which happened for different reasons, including pandemic closures, medical issues, and other life events. COVID-19 was catastrophic for many. In the six months after pandemic shutdowns began, California lost 1.7 million jobs,¹⁷ including some held by study participants. Social distancing and disrupted supply chains led to the shutdown of restaurants, retailers, factories, and other places they had been employed. Small businesses were forced to close and their owners to lose their only source of income. For months and even years, many struggled to find jobs.

By the time they were interviewed for this study, most respondents had regained work or had at least one member of the household working either full- or part-time, with some working multiple jobs. Yet consistent with national trends,¹⁸ they still experienced financial instability due to the precarious nature of their work. For example, agricultural workers had reduced earnings for part of the year due to weather-related or seasonal work stoppages. Other CalFresh households experienced a temporary or long-term drop in income resulting from an injury, chronic illness, or caring for children with special needs. EAs helped during these difficult times by enabling them to have steady access to food while they recovered, fulfilled their caregiving duties, went to school, or looked for employment.

“During this time, it was really tough. And then I didn’t even have a stable work. I was learning web development back then. So it was really, really tough. Sometimes we ate once a day.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“Well, [getting EAs] was like, a blessing on my finances... a great relief for me... You know, it was a dire moment, in the moment where I sought out ways to survive with my family. So it was a blessing to have that assistance coming in.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“Being able to immediately alleviate that food insecurity is huge, and really shows the power that the federal government has to remove those barriers.”

–Roshena Duree, Deputy Director of Self Sufficiency, County Welfare Directors Association of California

“EAs proved their worth through the pandemic when people were experiencing not only a communicable disease, but also an economic downturn that was quick and unprecedented. And I think we saw that especially in the workforce that weren’t deemed ‘essential.’”

–Andrea D. Brayboy, MBA, CalFresh and Nutrition Branch Chief, California Department of Social Services

A STABILIZING EFFECT ON THE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET

With the high costs of living in California, the incomes of CalFresh recipients often did not cover basic expenses. Respondents consistently named inflation and the rising costs of non-food expenses, including housing, transportation, and utilities, as major financial stressors. They had little wiggle room in their budgets if their car broke down or there was an unexpected expense. In this context, EAs helped cover much of their food budget, allowing them to focus on making other payments such as rent and bills. With EAs helping to cover the cost of food, some were able to use their limited earnings to pay off debts, weather emergencies, and make progress toward overall financial well-being.

“The maximum benefit of CalFresh alleviated some of the pressure of paying other bills, because they had the money to spend on food, and they could focus on buying more nutritious food, versus saving up and having to spend it only on less expensive food, which tends to be the less nutritious food.”

–Karli Holkko, Senior Self-Sufficiency Policy Analyst, County Welfare Directors Association of California

“That was a very good chance for me to take good care of my kids and myself too, and also be able to catch [up on] bills that I had to pay and ... not worry about where to get rent or how to take care of the kids, and how to put up some small meals.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“Well, at that time I was helping myself with what they gave me for food. So from there, then I used what I saved on the food — it was enough to pay the electricity bill, the water bill, and so I tried to compensate some things for others.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“It helped me a lot, at least that month to be able to put that money towards the bills. And food-wise, I was getting food that was gonna last me two weeks that I was gonna be able to cook at home and be able to eat at home and not just be eating out.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“...with the emergency allotment, it was enough to almost make it where they were succeeding a little bit.”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

HOW ARE CALFRESH HOUSEHOLDS FARING AFTER EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS ENDED?

INCREASE IN FOOD HARDSHIP

CalFresh recipients described in their own words experiences and behaviors that changed for them after EAs ended. Many of their descriptions reflect conditions of food insecurity as assessed by the USDA.¹⁹ After EAs ended, CalFresh recipients had to buy and consume less food and ran out of food faster. In addition, there was a large decline in the quality of food they could afford. People cut back on purchasing more costly items — such as meat and other proteins, fresh fruit and vegetables, snacks, and ingredients they could use to prepare meals from scratch — resulting in less balanced and nutritious meals. They switched to cheaper products to save money, most commonly fast food or ready-to-eat meals. Respondents talked about worrying about food, spending more time looking for bargains at stores, going from store to store, and often going without preferred items or key parts of their normal diet because they couldn't afford them. Many were even more limited in what they could purchase because they also couldn't afford the cost of transportation to get to stores that had deals or to the farmer's market to use incentive programs.

"I can't afford to just buy anything that's not going to be in my next meal. I have to really stick to what's going to be made into a full meal, or what's going to be filling on its own."

—CalFresh Recipient

"What has changed is that I'm living on shelf-stable items, for the most part.... I have less variety in what I'm eating. I pretty much have what I have. And that's what I have."

—CalFresh Recipient

"Well, yeah, I mean, I buy whatever's cheaper now. It's trying to stretch the money as much as possible."

—CalFresh Recipient

"I can't really eat as much, or just eat like chips and things like that, like how I used to before."

—CalFresh Recipient

BENEFIT INADEQUACY

CalFresh recipients received their last EA in March 2023 — a time at which food prices in the Western United States were 8% higher than March of the previous year.²⁰ Similarly, the costs of transportation, housing, and other goods had been increasing at double to triple pre-pandemic rates.²¹ As described earlier, the ending of EAs represented an average reduction of between 33–40% of households’ food benefits between March and April.

CalFresh benefit amounts are based on the USDA Thrifty Food Plan, which estimates the cost of a healthy diet for different people by age and sex for food that is exclusively prepared at home and at the lowest costs available.²² Additional USDA food plans, such as the Low-Cost and Moderate-Cost Food Plans, calculate food budgets at more generous but still reasonable price points, and both provide larger quantities of and more options for food compared to the Thrifty Food Plan.²³ All USDA food plans reflect national averages, which underestimate the true costs of food in expensive states like California. The United Way’s Real Cost Measure,²⁴ on the other hand, is calculated to estimate the costs of food specific to regions of California.

Figure 8 shows these various monthly food budgets by household size, compared to the average CalFresh monthly benefits (without EAs) for that household size. The gap between the benefit amount and each food budget represents the shortfall that households must make up to afford enough food according to that respective plan.

*The example provided in the chart is for the greater Los Angeles region for 1–4 person households; costs for other regions can be found on the Real Cost Measure in California 2023 dashboard. Details on how each food budget was calculated are available in the Appendix.

Average Monthly CalFresh Benefits by Household (HH) Size, Relative to Food Costs



Figure 8. CalFresh average benefits do not cover monthly cost of food. Data sources: CDSS, USDA Thrifty, Low-Cost, and Moderate-Cost food plans, and the United Way’s Real Cost Measure

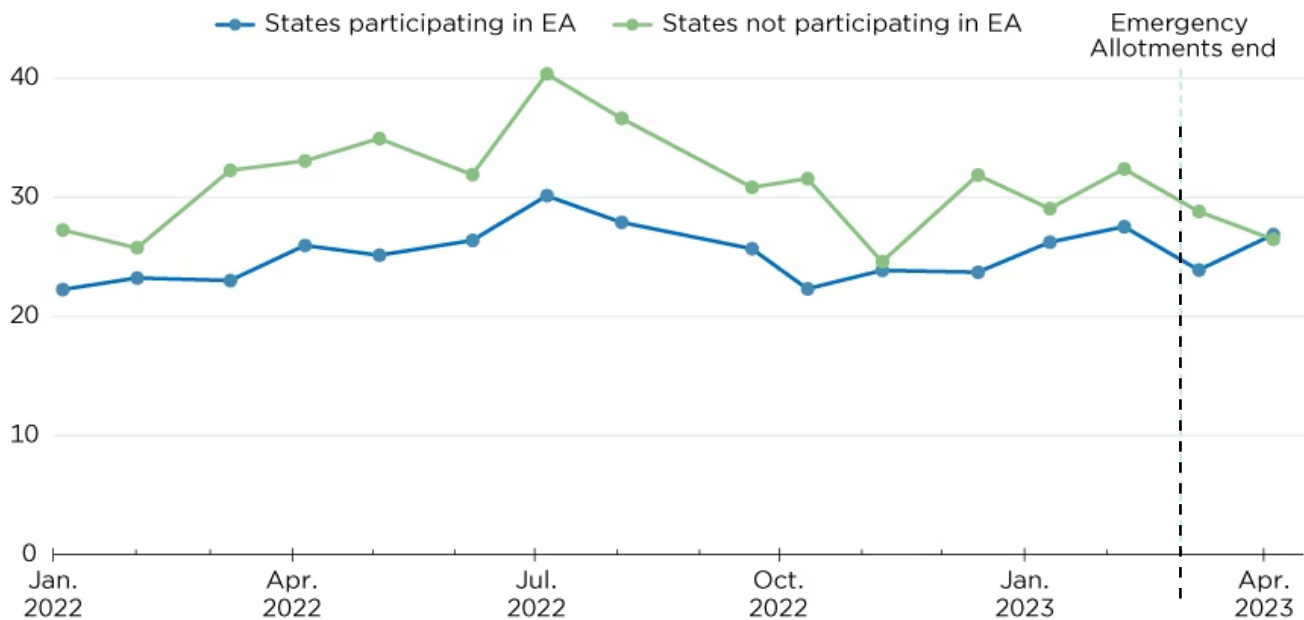
“I would say you have to spend like three quarters of my income [to cover food costs without EAs].”

–CalFresh Recipient

“It’s enough to buy, you know, like, maybe two packs of ramen and two boxes of Ritz crackers.”

–CalFresh Recipient

Percentage of SNAP Households that Reported Food Insufficiency by State EA Participation: 2022–2023



Note: Each time point represents the midpoint of the data collection period. The composition of states in each group changes over time as states opt out of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Emergency Allotment (EA) benefits provided during the pandemic. Though the last two time points represent data collected after all states ended EA, the “states participating in EA” includes those in states that participated until the end of the program. Differences for February 2022, November 2022, January 2023, and April 2023 are not statistically significant.

Figure 9. The original source of this graph is the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey public use files, 2022–2023. Minor modifications (such as color) have been made for this report for readability purposes.

National data show that the impact of EAs ending was almost instantaneous; in the first full month after states like California ended EAs, the rates of food insufficiency — or not having enough food in the previous seven days, an extreme measure of food hardship — in those states jumped up to match the rates of states that had stopped issuing EAs earlier.²⁵

"I would add that [EAs] definitely helped to supplement for a lot of households. There were a lot of clients that were able to purchase a lot of different foods that they may not have always been able to, given that they had more power to purchase healthier foods, more nutritious foods that we know tend to cost more, like fruits and vegetables. With inflation especially in California, it showed that what clients were receiving before Emergency Allotments was just not enough."

–Miguel Rosales, Sr. Program Manager, GetCalFresh, Code for America

MORE PRESSURE IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN OR SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS

National and state-level surveys consistently show that households with children experience higher rates of food insecurity than the general population,^{26,27} and findings from this study support this trend. Parents and outreach workers alike emphasized that trying to adequately feed children without the help of EAs was both financially and emotionally distressing, because of the high nutrition needs of children. It was especially difficult when kids were home during summer months or school closures. Parents described strategies they used to try to shield their children from experiencing or being aware of food shortages. These included seeking additional food resources, taking on another job, and reducing their own eating or personal care to allow their children to have more food. Despite these measures, some parents still had no choice but to cut back on portions or quality of their children's food.

"I feel like when my son goes through a growth spurt...he does not stop eating, and it lasts for like three days. And I feel like I feed him the entire fridge and he's like, I'm hungry, I'm hungry.... And I usually get nervous around those times. Sometimes I tell him, you know, let's wait another hour. I feel like I have to try to hold him off. Which sucks. I don't like doing that. But I just don't have much to give him during those times."

–CalFresh Recipient

"It's a little bit sad as a mom, because as a mom you want to have, well, the best food, the healthiest food for your children."

–CalFresh Recipient

“Kids — [when] they’re hungry, you can’t actually veto the idea to give them food. So that is why most of our expenses are actually going to groceries, when the benefits ended. And that is one of the reasons why I actually got a second job.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“Now that the children are on vacation, I had an increase of families coming to apply or maybe to see if we could increase the amount, because the children...well, these are the words of my clients: ‘The children eat a lot.’”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

Some respondents struggled to manage chronic diseases or health conditions like diabetes, because without EAs it was difficult to purchase appropriate foods that were inherently more costly. This has implications for more serious illness, because households that have trouble affording food also frequently have poor medication adherence due to the same resource constraints.^{28,29}

“A gentleman who has diabetes was just telling me all the stuff he can’t afford, but he can get like a loaf of bread or some pastries, and that’s what he’s surviving off of.”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

TRADEOFFS BETWEEN FOOD & OTHER EXPENSES

Households were already burdened by the costs of housing, utilities, fuel, and other necessities, and EAs had made it easier to manage these expenses month to month. Once EAs ended, recipients had to decide between paying bills and buying food. Some used credit cards to defer expenses, but worried about how to pay their balances. Strategies they used for getting by included buying less of everything, going without basic household necessities, and/or falling into debt.

“The ending of EAs did not end inflation. And so, you know, we know that many of our clients may have to face tough decisions on deciding whether to use their income to purchase more food or paying for other critical expenses, once they’ve exhausted their CalFresh benefits.”

–Jenny Nguyen, Deputy Director of Budget and Fiscal Policy, County Welfare Directors Association of California

“My biggest expenses right now is all my money goes to the utilities, gas and light. I don’t have money to get school clothes for my kids, and school shoes. Like, everything is going to the utilities and not towards the day-to-day needs.”

–*CalFresh Recipient*

“I have four kids in school and I’m buying clothes [for them one at a time], because practically I can’t buy [clothes] for all four at once.”

–*CalFresh Recipient*

“They are deciding, ‘Am I going to eat or am I going to pay my bills?’ So that’s something that’s very big right now.”

–*CalFresh Outreach Worker*

“I’m a financial coach.... people were kind of working towards becoming self-sufficient, slowly getting there. And now they have to use the funds that they earned from their job, they have to use the funds that were previously used to move further ahead, for groceries. So they’re more behind now, especially families that have a lot of young children.”

–*CalFresh Outreach Worker*

DECLINES IN PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Food insecurity has well-documented linkages with poor health,^{30,31} and unsurprisingly, the end of EAs led to self-reported, rapid worsening of physical and mental well-being. These directly resulted from a combination of material hardship, stress, and necessary lifestyle changes. Physically, people reported feeling worse off because they were eating more processed and less nutritious food. Others experienced negative repercussions from working through injuries or recent surgery, but felt they had no choice because they needed the income.

“When we went back to eating a lot more fast food, I noticed that we all feel just thicker in a way. The food feels different in your stomach with all the grease. You can definitely feel that in your body.”

–*CalFresh Recipient*

“Definitely I feel we’re not doing too good in terms of being healthy, because we’re eating more processed food, more fast food, food with more preservative[s], more additives, and stuff like that. We are lacking the essential nutrients of fresh foods. So I think in my family, we actually miss the nutritional benefits in food by choosing to buy processed food. And we know this, and ...there’s nothing we can do about it, because we’re actually working [within] our own budget. It’s not as if we can afford the fresh food [that we got] before, but we just switch over to what [we] can actually afford.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“For a while, I felt like my, like my hair was falling out. And it was because I didn’t have enough protein intake.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“I haven’t been able to work because I have a temporary disability right now — an injury on my foot. So I can’t walk around for a long period of time. I can’t stand for a long period of time. So I haven’t been able to do the jobs that are around here... But I have been thinking like okay, I need to get back into it. Even if my foot hurts like even if it gets worse because I mean, there’s nothing else I can do.”

–CalFresh Recipient

Mental health impacts were experienced in two ways. First, there was immediate, acute distress upon learning that EAs were going to end. Some had heard about it a few months in advance, but many did not find out until it was imminent or benefits had already been reduced. Regardless of their lead time, respondents consistently described feelings of surprise, panic, frustration, disappointment, and general stress upon discovering that the changes would happen, and once they took effect.

In addition, some experienced a more drawn-out, sustained mental toll from chronic worry about finances and having to continually make tradeoffs between food and other needs. This is sometimes referred to as toxic stress.³² They became more isolated from friends and family from not participating in visits or social gatherings because of budget constraints. Several parents also described stress in not being able to adequately provide for their children’s needs, and sadness among their children who could no longer participate in sports programs or other extracurricular activities due to the lack of money for food.

“Another thing that we heard is that people were stressing out, because now that food is getting so expensive. And with that cut it’s like, how are we going to make ends meet? It really impacted them.”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

“My clients are many families I’m working with. They’re doing multiple jobs. And they’re spreading themselves really thin. But that’s the only way they’re able to survive.”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

“I definitely feel much more stressed. And I just feel constantly worried. I feel like these changes just happened. So I don’t know how bad the changes are gonna hurt until, like, maybe next month... like, my credit card debt, it’s gone up. And I think right now I’m trying to ignore it. But obviously, I’m gonna have to start payment, and maybe seeing that it’s going up and I’m not able to keep up.”

–CalFresh Recipient

RIPPLE EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY

California lost over \$537 million in federal food benefits per month when EAs ended, but the true economic loss was likely far greater than this base amount, because dollars spent on purchasing food stimulates economic output by generating income across multiple sectors and industries. CalFresh benefits spent in stores support not just the grocers but the growers, manufacturers, transporters, and their respective employees — who in turn have more money to spend on other goods and services. Using multipliers provided by the USDA, the value of economic activity lost when EAs ended may be more than \$961 million in economic activity each month.³³

CalFresh recipients described how their shopping habits changed abruptly when EAs ended. They did less shopping at stores like Trader Joe’s and more at discount stores. They went grocery shopping less frequently, cutting back from multiple times per week to just once or twice per month. They looked for sales and bargains, used coupons more, and switched to less expensive brands. Some had to limit the distance they could drive to shop due to high gas prices. Some tried to use farmers markets more than before to use their market match incentives, while others found farmers markets still too costly to get to or buy food from.

“Well, I try to go [grocery shopping] at least once every 15 days, I buy everything I need to make the meals of the day and I try to go every 15 days, because if I go more often, then I spend more.”

–CalFresh Recipient

“I’m not spending money on anything. I don’t have it to spend right now. I put gas in my car to go [to work]. I don’t go other places.”

–CalFresh Recipient

FOOD BANKS: A VITAL BUT STRAINED SYSTEM

MANY NEW CLIENTS

Throughout California, the need for food assistance from food banks, pantries, meal programs, and other service providers increased sharply after EAs ended. Two “pulse” surveys fielded by CAFB found that nearly all (88%) food banks who responded had received more calls from community members seeking food in both April and July 2023, compared with the months prior — signaling that worry about food was steadily increasing in communities across California. In July, which is typically a month of lower demand for many food banks, over 2/3 of respondent food banks reported serving more people and distributing more food compared with prior months. To cope with increased demand since EAs ended, 86% of food banks have had to use a disproportionate share of their budget or tap into their reserves to provide food to their communities.

Data from interviews and focus groups confirmed that many CalFresh recipients started visiting food pantries or food distributions for the first time once EAs ended.

Third-party surveys conducted by Propel, creators of the Providers app, also support these findings. According to Propel, in summer of 2023, 28% of surveyed CalFresh recipients had visited a food pantry in the previous month, compared to 20% in summer of 2022.³⁴

Service Trends for CAFB Member Food Banks, July 2023

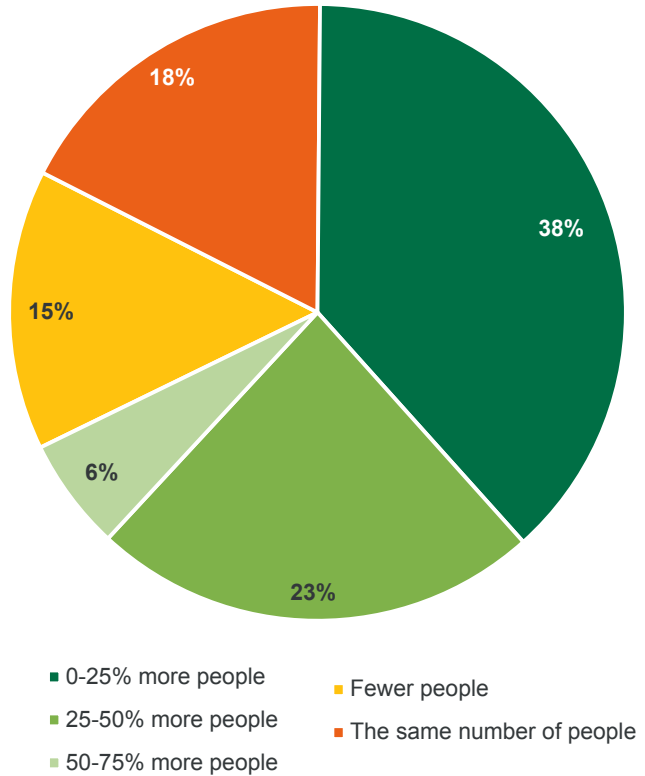


Figure 10. Two-thirds of CA food banks were serving more people in July compared to previous months.

“I’ve heard comments of people saying like, I’ve never had to do this, like I’ve never had to go to a food pantry. I’ve never had to, you know, think about the food that I’m buying. So just comments like that... We have noticed an increase in our partner food pantries; they have noticed since the end of the emergency allotments, that there has been an increase.”

—CalFresh Outreach Worker based at a food bank

“We were hearing quite frequently from County Directors concern about the ending of EAs. There were many that knew that they needed to quickly reach out to their local food banks because they knew that there was going to be a flow from those that have received the benefits and the EAs that would potentially not be able to feed their families like they were when the EAs were being issued.”

—Jenny Nguyen, Deputy Director of Budget and Fiscal Policy, County Welfare Directors Association of California

HELPED AUGMENT THE HOUSEHOLD FOOD SUPPLY

Food bank services included direct food distributions, home deliveries, food pantries, school backpack programs, and prepared meal programs. Respondents described a range of strategies they used for combining these services with their CalFresh benefits to meet their household food needs.

Because the inventory and variety are inherently limited at food banks and their partner agencies, families often did their “shopping” sequentially — first visiting a distribution or pantry, and then using CalFresh benefits to purchase additional items they needed. Some had to visit multiple distribution sites to obtain enough food — particularly those with larger families.

Food bank clients were appreciative of all the products provided, but meat, chicken, eggs, vegetables, and other cooking staples were particularly valued, because they were expensive to purchase in stores. Non-food items like diapers and toiletries were also extremely useful.

“I go to the food bank, I look at what they give me and then I go from there, I don’t buy what they gave me, and then I go to the store and then I pay for what I can afford with [CalFresh], and then I have to pay for it myself. In that way I try to manage myself as well.”

–*CalFresh Recipient*

“Clients are looking for another second place where they can go to pick up the food or maybe a third place...moms looking formulaically for other methods of being able to receive additional benefits because they don’t have the same amount as before.”

–*CalFresh Outreach Worker*

“We used to go to where they gave food because they also gave us soap and shampoo. They gave things, yes, they gave a lot of help too....They even gave us packets of toilet paper. Soap and all that, well, I didn’t have to buy them anymore, I just bought the food.”

–*CalFresh Recipient*

DEEP APPRECIATION DESPITE CHALLENGES

Respondents express deep appreciation for food bank services, workers, and volunteers. At the same time, they considered these programs a supplemental food supply — a temporary stopgap that helped ensure they did not completely run out of food. They did not prefer to use food bank services over purchasing food from stores with CalFresh benefits; nor did they consider using food banks to be a permanent or long-term solution.

Some clients reported difficulties using food programs due to transportation, distance, or schedule conflicts. Long lines and large numbers of people waiting for food at some sites also deterred people from going. Those without transportation struggled to access food distributions because of the distances they would have to walk or ride public transportation — made even more difficult if they had a disability or language barrier.

“We’ve seen more people at our food distributions, you know, they’re not missing it. They’re really like counting on it. In the past, they had enough food on the table. Now they’re really, you know, showing up to all the distributions...”

–CalFresh Outreach Worker

DISCUSSION

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide a comprehensive view of the impact that EAs had on CalFresh households and how households experienced the ending of EAs. On average, nearly 40% of a household’s CalFresh benefits were lost when EAs ended, and this loss coincided with reports of increased food hardship, negative physical and mental health impacts, and an undermining of the financial stability many households had begun to establish while EAs were in place.

Despite most CalFresh recipients having at least one form of income, administrative data show that the vast majority of them lived at or below the federal poverty level (FPL). The FPL is a national guideline based on income alone and not adjusted for the high cost of living in California; incomes at this level are in fact substantially less than what is needed to afford living in California.^{35,36} According to the United Way, the minimum income needed to sustain a basic standard of living is over \$93,000 a year for a family of four,³⁷ compared to the FPL of \$30,000. Interviews with CalFresh recipients provide additional insight into the struggles faced by households living near or below the FPL. Even for those working one or more jobs, the costs of housing, transportation, and food, combined with the pressures of inflation, far exceeded their earnings, leaving a gap that had been partially mitigated by EAs. Without EAs, these households have fallen further behind.

Findings about households with children who lost EAs are especially noteworthy, given the current context around child poverty in California. These households lost an average of \$272 per month in EAs, with larger households — which likely have more children relative to working adults — losing even more. The value of EAs alone was estimated to have prevented poverty for 350,000 Californians.³⁸ Yet in March 2023, even with EAs in place, 14% of children in California were estimated to be living below the California poverty line,³⁹ and around 27% of households with children were food insecure.⁴⁰ While the full impact of EAs ending has yet to be quantified, the loss of one third of the food benefits in households with children was expected to drive the rates of both child poverty and food insecurity even higher in the later months of 2023 and beyond. This is supported by qualitative findings confirming and detailing how food hardship intensified for families with children once EAs ended.

Food insecurity has well-documented linkages with physical^{41,42} and mental health.^{43,44} Experiences shared by CalFresh recipients in the wake of losing EAs confirm these relationships and shed light on several pathways. These include having to shift from fresh and healthier foods to processed and lower-quality foods, reducing their overall food intake, working through physical injury to earn income, foregoing self-care to afford food, spending more time searching for affordable foods, becoming more socially isolated, and feeling constantly stressed and worried from lack of food. Parents reported changes that may have impacted their children’s well-being, including not being able to afford clothing and school supplies, cutting back on portions and snacks, and reducing extracurricular activities. Many of these experiences overlap and interact with each other, likely compounding health impacts. These data were provided by a subset of households and may not represent all potential pathways linking food insecurity to health; future research should continue to explore these and additional pathways to support approaches that increase health and well-being by reducing food insecurity.

Food banks played a vital role in mitigating food hardship among families that had lost EAs. Despite their own financial and capacity constraints, food banks have been striving since the beginning of the pandemic to meet the surge in need among their communities; and they have provided a stopgap since the loss of EAs to supplement the food supplies of individuals and families. Food banks require additional resources and investments to continue to bridge gaps in food access, especially during economic shocks such as sweeping changes to

safety net programs or increases in food costs — both of which impacted Californians in 2023. At the same time, findings from surveys of food bank staff and interviews with food bank clients highlight that food banks are not a comprehensive solution, given inherent resource constraints, logistical challenges, and the limited nature of food bank inventory. In contrast, increasing CalFresh benefits enabled households to purchase adequate foods with greater choice, and not only improved physical and mental well-being but had a stabilizing impact in other aspects of their lives.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides evidence that EAs had a positive effect on CalFresh recipients, helping them cope with income losses and cost of living increases, improve their physical and mental health, and build toward financial well-being. Conversely, the ending of EAs has led to negative impacts on individuals, households, and the greater community. These findings support recommendations to strengthen and expand CalFresh, including permanently increasing benefit amounts to enable recipients to afford more food; prevent abrupt and harmful benefits cliffs from happening in the future; and in the meantime, strengthen and invest in food banks to better equip them to address surges in need.

APPENDIX 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

LITERATURE REVIEW

We first conducted a review of academic and non-academic literature for main themes surrounding food insecurity, focusing on understanding what is known about the impact of food insecurity on mental, physical, and behavioral health, and the role that SNAP benefits play in household economic security. In addition, we surveyed literature that described experiences of key populations including older adults, individuals with disability, households of color, and households with children.

FOCUS GROUPS

We conducted focus groups with CalFresh Outreach workers in July 2023. The purpose was twofold: 1) to learn their observations of how the end of EAs was impacting their clients and communities, and 2) to surface issues for deeper exploration through in-depth interviews with CalFresh recipients. We developed focus group questions in collaboration with the CAFB Policy and Programs teams and field-tested the questions with a CalFresh Outreach worker. After receiving feedback, we developed a semi-structured focus group guide in English which was later translated into Spanish.

The CAFB Programs team recruited focus group participants through emails sent to CAFB's CalFresh outreach network across the state. Outreach workers who were interested in joining a focus group filled out an online form, from which we purposively sampled participants for two English-language virtual focus groups. Participants were offered a \$10 beverage gift card for participating. In addition, we recruited for 1 Spanish-language in-person focus group, for which we offered a gift card of \$50, to account for the potential burden of attending an in-person focus group. Due to initial low enrollment in the in-person group, it was later changed to a virtual format to allow more to participate, while keeping the incentive the same.

In all, we conducted 3 focus groups (2 in English and 1 in Spanish), with a total of 21 participants. Focus groups were facilitated by a bilingual CAFB research associate trained in qualitative research methods, with two other CAFB staff members present for note-taking and technical support. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed in their original languages. The Spanish transcript was later translated to English using the software program DeepL. All transcripts and translations were reviewed and cleaned for accuracy.

Focus Group Participant Characteristics:

Language:

- » English
- » Spanish

Counties:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| » Alameda | » Mendocino |
| » Fresno | » Riverside |
| » Los Angeles | » Sacramento |
| » Imperial | » San Diego |
| » Madera | » Santa Barbara |
| » Marin | » Sonoma |

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

We used the focus group findings to develop the questions and recruitment strategy for in-depth interviews with CalFresh recipients. We first created a Google Form for recruitment, with screening questions that asked about respondents' length of time using CalFresh, amount lost in CalFresh benefits, age, household size, and enrollment in other public benefits programs. We then designed social media and email messages inviting CalFresh recipients to complete the form (which took 2–3 minutes) to volunteer for the study. Recruitment information and study materials were translated to Spanish and Chinese. These resources were provided to CAFB member food banks and CalFresh outreach programs to promote the study among their clients. We offered a Visa gift card of \$75 for completing a 1-hour interview.

The screener form was completed by 193 respondents in English, 63 in Spanish, and 1 in Chinese. We purposively sampled from this group to achieve a diverse range of study participants in terms of language, age, household size, area of residence, and length of time on CalFresh. (The Food Bank of Santa Barbara County requested an oversample from their service area and provided additional recruitment support.) We invited a total of 44 participants for interviews; of those invited, 22 participants accepted and completed an interview. One participant was later deemed ineligible, and that transcript was omitted from analysis. In total, 21 interviews are included in the study: 12 in English, 8 in Spanish, and 1 in Chinese.

We developed an interview guide with questions asking about household demographics, the impact of EAs on daily life, experiences specific to the end of EAs, use of food bank services, and recommendations about CalFresh or other aspects of food assistance. Participants gave verbal consent to be interviewed and recorded at the start of each interview. Interviews were semi-structured, in that the guide was used for question prompts, and interviewers asked additional probes as needed. We made modifications to the guide between interviews to improve clarity and build on previous responses.

All interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom by interviewers trained in qualitative data collection methods. Participants had the option to use video or audio only. All audio files were transcribed and reviewed by the interviewer for accuracy; transcripts were edited as needed. Spanish and Chinese transcripts were translated via online translation services into English.

Interview Participant Characteristics (n=21):

Age:

- » 18–39: 13
- » 40–59: 4
- » 60+: 4

Language:

- » English: 12
- » Spanish: 8
- » Chinese: 1

Years on CalFresh:

- » 3 months to 1 year: 4
- » 1 to 3 years: 8
- » More than 3 years: 7
- » Used to get CalFresh but doesn't anymore: 1
- » Does not know: 1

Household Size:

- » 1: 3
- » 2: 4
- » 3: 8
- » 4: 2
- » 5: 1
- » 6+: 3

Children in Household:

- » Yes: 16
- » No: 5

Disability:

- » Yes: 9
- » No: 12

Receiving Other Programs:

- » Medi-CAL: 15
- » WIC: 5
- » SSI/SSP: 2
- » CalWorks: 3
- » None: 1

Employment Type:

- » Full-time: 1
- » Part-time: 7
- » Unemployed: 8
- » Retired: 2
- » Other/Unknown: 3

Population:

- » Senior (60+) in household: 5
- » Single parent: 6
- » Single income: 14

County of Residence:

- » Contra Costa
- » Los Angeles
- » Humboldt
- » Riverside
- » Sacramento
- » San Bernardino
- » San Francisco
- » San Mateo
- » Santa Barbara
- » Santa Clara
- » Sonoma
- » Stanislaus

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

All English transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. Coding occurred in a series of steps. Two researchers (the Director of Research and one Research Associate) reviewed all transcripts and audio files to develop a preliminary codebook. An open coding process was done in iterative rounds to clarify meanings and create a final codebook. Major themes and sub-themes emerged, which researchers then grouped along with representative quotes into a key findings table. The table was shared with other research collaborators and advisors for refinement and then finalized.

SUPPLEMENTAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Conversations with representatives from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), and Code for America (CFA) were conducted by CAFB's Government Affairs Director. Two or three representatives from each organization participated in one group Zoom interview lasting around 30 minutes. Questions were customized for each organization based on their respective roles and insights in the issuance of EAs. Interviews were transcribed, major themes from each interview were summarized, and representative quotes were selected for inclusion in this report

APPENDIX 2: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

CALFRESH ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Quantitative analyses of CalFresh benefit data were based on data sets provided by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in response to a request by CAFB for the following data elements from February, 2023, the last month that EAs were issued in California:

- Total EA issuances (statewide, and by county)
- Average value of EAs per household (statewide, and by county)
- Average regular CF benefits per household (statewide, and by county)
- Average benefits for households by the following income levels, statewide:
 - » No income, 1–50% FPL, 50–100% FPL, 101–130% FPL, 131%–200% FPL
- Average benefits for households by size, statewide
- Average benefits for the following household types (statewide):
 - » Households with older adults 60+
 - » Households with children
 - » Households with a person with a disability
 - » Households taking the homeless shelter deduction
 - » Single person households, child-only
 - » Single person households, 18–49
- Number of households at minimum and maximum CF benefit amounts, respectively

Data came from CDSS SAWS custom extracts provided to CDSS RADD, March 2024; SARS EBT issuance extracts, July 2023. Total CalFresh regular and EA issuances by county are shared in the original form provided by CDSS in Appendix 3.

FOOD BANK PULSE SURVEYS

In May and August 2023, we sent electronic surveys to all 41 of CAFB’s member food banks to briefly capture observations on changes in food bank operations following the ending of EAs in March. Each survey asked food bank staff to report trends for the previous month compared with the three months prior; for example, April compared with average from January–March, and July compared with April–June. The survey included questions about calls from community members seeking food, number of people served, amount of food distributed, number of requests from partner agencies, financial impacts, and strategies they were using to cope with changes. The May survey had a 61% response rate, and the August survey had an 83% response rate, with one response recorded per food bank.

MONTHLY FOOD BENEFIT GRAPH

Costs for the Thrifty Food Plan 2023 came from USDA tables on the monthly maximum allotments for SNAP for Fiscal Year 2023 in the 48 contiguous United States. Costs for Low-Cost, and Moderate-Cost food plans came from USDA Monthly Cost of Food Report for March 2023.⁴⁵ To obtain estimates of Low-Cost and Moderate-Cost plans by household size, we first constructed a reference family of four consisting of male and a female between the ages of 20 and 50, one child between the ages of 6 and 8, and one child between the ages of 9 and 11. We then calculated the percentage increase of the plan compared to the Thrifty Food Plan 2023 for the same reference family. We applied this percentage to the other household sizes to obtain Low- and Moderate-Cost food plans for those households.

To obtain the Real Cost Food Budget, we used the Real Cost Budgets by Region feature of this dashboard.⁴⁶ We selected the Greater LA region because it represents a large share of the state’s population and was neither at the high or low extreme for food prices. Because household types did not align directly with USDA reference families, we selected the following household types to represent family size:

- Household of 1: 1 Adult
- Household of 2: 2 Adults
- Household of 3: 1 Adult, 1 school aged child, 1 teenager
- Household of 4: 2 Adults, 1 school aged child, 1 teenager

APPENDIX 3: CALFRESH (CF) REGULAR & EA ISSUANCES, BY COUNTY

RESEARCH & DATA INSIGHTS BRANCH,
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

February 2023	Regular CF Benefits	Avg. Regular CF Benefits per HH	EA Issuances	EA Benefits	Avg. EA Benefits per HH	HHs at Max CF Benefit	HHs at Min CF Benefit
Statewide*†	\$888,503,889	\$305	2,913,566	\$537,007,753	\$184	1,163,957	232,935
Alameda	\$27,990,711	\$284	98,715	\$17,456,710	\$177	40,744	8,206
Alpine	\$26,244	\$324	81	\$13,881	\$171	34	7
Amador	\$691,528	\$286	2,416	\$463,564	\$192	889	306
Butte	\$6,666,498	\$277	24,109	\$4,268,078	\$177	10,330	2,242
Calaveras	\$1,002,182	\$289	3,468	\$644,082	\$186	1,421	371
Colusa	\$456,372	\$315	1,451	\$318,296	\$219	506	181
Contra Costa	\$16,285,948	\$306	53,165	\$9,679,461	\$182	21,180	4,879
Del Norte	\$1,020,682	\$271	3,772	\$734,821	\$195	1,380	415
El Dorado	\$2,372,396	\$282	8,413	\$1,452,161	\$173	3,589	933
Fresno	\$40,043,459	\$353	113,588	\$22,813,150	\$201	44,142	7,568
Glenn	\$656,429	\$300	2,189	\$481,546	\$220	662	242
Humboldt	\$4,992,028	\$278	17,978	\$3,075,903	\$171	8,192	1,855
Imperial	\$7,398,577	\$322	22,951	\$5,114,086	\$223	7,475	2,037
Inyo	\$379,857	\$302	1,259	\$238,147	\$189	561	154
Kern	\$32,831,812	\$355	92,412	\$19,003,229	\$206	35,300	6,914
Kings	\$4,611,615	\$330	13,961	\$3,010,291	\$216	5,181	1,189
Lake	\$2,585,369	\$272	9,497	\$1,811,591	\$191	3,531	1,059
Lassen	\$696,523	\$299	2,329	\$436,238	\$187	922	257
Los Angeles	\$265,500,031	\$294	902,593	\$154,992,431	\$172	369,580	62,231
Madera	\$5,660,715	\$364	15,561	\$3,287,665	\$211	5,865	1,233
Marin	\$2,649,114	\$279	9,497	\$1,504,644	\$158	4,317	837
Mariposa	\$498,727	\$283	1,763	\$329,253	\$187	736	249
Mendocino	\$2,914,442	\$288	10,104	\$1,825,793	\$181	4,324	1,030
Merced	\$9,419,567	\$348	27,065	\$5,421,979	\$200	10,512	1,968
Modoc	\$296,581	\$273	1,087	\$240,809	\$222	374	144

Mono	\$130,290	\$281	464	\$86,194	\$186	207	61
Monterey	\$9,907,625	\$364	27,242	\$5,183,793	\$190	11,751	2,008
Napa	\$1,459,553	\$277	5,260	\$1,042,771	\$198	1,883	611
Nevada	\$1,890,877	\$276	6,862	\$1,208,446	\$176	2,938	814
Orange	\$49,743,916	\$293	169,856	\$31,332,279	\$184	67,853	13,728
Placer	\$3,608,368	\$282	12,790	\$2,419,481	\$189	4,567	1,695
Plumas	\$417,059	\$275	1,518	\$282,994	\$186	577	180
Riverside	\$51,637,859	\$325	158,838	\$30,754,515	\$194	64,548	13,254
Sacramento	\$41,535,677	\$314	132,488	\$25,147,311	\$190	47,737	9,772
San Benito	\$1,114,423	\$337	3,306	\$656,259	\$199	1,392	316
San Bernardino	\$61,538,812	\$339	181,779	\$35,624,790	\$196	70,335	13,496
San Diego	\$64,126,998	\$295	217,338	\$40,679,683	\$187	88,387	20,703
San Francisco	\$17,430,616	\$233	74,912	\$12,919,178	\$172	27,706	6,928
San Joaquin	\$19,176,810	\$318	60,318	\$12,364,916	\$205	21,440	4,882
San Luis Obispo	\$3,981,019	\$265	15,037	\$2,661,042	\$177	6,515	1,714
San Mateo	\$5,298,652	\$274	19,346	\$3,540,589	\$183	6,916	2,083
Santa Barbara	\$9,704,660	\$308	31,500	\$5,554,576	\$176	14,683	2,446
Santa Clara	\$20,851,737	\$276	75,569	\$13,466,917	\$178	29,632	5,970
Santa Cruz	\$5,521,559	\$286	19,289	\$3,286,452	\$170	8,866	1,848
Shasta	\$4,523,650	\$258	17,543	\$3,533,682	\$201	6,000	2,294
Sierra	\$54,571	\$241	226	\$40,245	\$178	80	29
Siskiyou	\$1,396,116	\$270	5,168	\$1,004,283	\$194	1,895	669
Solano	\$8,757,834	\$299	29,314	\$5,300,456	\$181	12,090	2,687
Sonoma	\$6,518,820	\$280	23,320	\$4,163,051	\$179	9,162	2,505
Stanislaus	\$13,357,506	\$314	42,541	\$8,530,420	\$201	16,217	4,060
Sutter	\$2,272,187	\$337	6,749	\$1,402,188	\$208	2,195	618
Tehama	\$1,826,009	\$278	6,573	\$1,403,380	\$214	2,219	799
Trinity	\$525,848	\$298	1,762	\$305,165	\$173	771	158
Tulare	\$21,327,990	\$375	56,853	\$11,526,111	\$203	23,774	3,716
Tuolumne	\$1,033,624	\$251	4,122	\$757,478	\$184	1,516	577
Ventura	\$12,900,621	\$308	41,944	\$7,940,962	\$189	16,963	3,945
Yolo	\$4,301,680	\$291	14,806	\$2,385,114	\$161	7,684	1,023
Yuba	\$2,983,516	\$314	9,509	\$1,885,224	\$198	3,711	839

Source: SAWS custom extracts provided to CDSS RADD, March 2024; SARS EBT issuance extracts, July 2023

* Due to data availability, about 5% of the CalFresh caseload is unreported here, so figures presented above are estimates.

† Use caution when comparing data contained in this analysis with prior analyses of the same report month. The recent CalWIN migration and natural variability of SAWS case data affect the consistency of point-in-time caseload reporting.

CITATIONS

1. "SNAP Eligibility | Food and Nutrition Service," accessed November 9, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>.
2. Nita M. [D-NY-17 Rep. Lowey, "Text - H.R.6201 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): Families First Coronavirus Response Act," legislation, March 18, 2020, 2020-03-11, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6201/text>.
3. Courtney McKinney, "PRESS RELEASE: Settlement Reached with USDA to Provide Emergency Food Benefits to One Million California Households Most in Need," Western Center on Law & Poverty (blog), April 2, 2021, <https://wclp.org/press-release-settlement-reached-with-usda-to-provide-emergency-food-benefits-to-one-million-california-households-most-in-need/>.
4. Gerald E. [D-VA-11 Rep. Connolly, "Text - H.R.2617 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023," legislation, December 29, 2022, 2021-04-16, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2617/text>.
5. "Pandemic-Era CalFresh Expansions Lifted Many Families Out of Poverty," Public Policy Institute of California, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.ppic.org/blog/pandemic-era-calfresh-expansions-lifted-many-families-out-of-poverty/>.
6. "2023_Emergency-Allotments-PEBT_Factsheet.Pdf," accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.cafoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023_Emergency-Allotments-PEBT_Factsheet.pdf.
7. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, "The Impact of SNAP Emergency Allotments on SNAP Benefits and Food Insecurity," 2023.
8. Matthew Lavalley, Sandro Galea, and Nadia N. Abuelezam, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Emergency Allotments and Food Security, Hospitalizations, and Hospital Capacity," JAMA Network Open 6, no. 8 (August 9, 2023): e2326332, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.26332>.
9. Lavalley, Galea, and Abuelezam.
10. Kabir Dasgupta and Alexander Plum, "Termination of Snap Emergency Allotments, Food Sufficiency, and Economic Hardships," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, July 2023), <https://doi.org/10.17016/FEDS.2023.046>.
11. "SNAP Emergency Allotments and Public Health Emergency: Addressing the Hunger Cliff," Food Research & Action Center (blog), accessed October 20, 2023, <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/emergency-allotments>.
12. Alexis Fernandez, "All County Letter 20-145," December 29, 2020.
13. Diana Jensen, "SSI CalFresh Expansion Dashboard," Tableau Public, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/diana.jensen8067/viz/SSICalFreshExpansionDashboard/Welcome>.
14. California Department of Social Services, "Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents," accessed October 26, 2023, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh/abawd>.
15. Karla Palos Castellanos et al., "Emailing Eligible College Students Resulted in More than 7,000 Students Applying for CalFresh Benefits," August 18, 2022, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6z8931wh>.
16. "Poverty Guidelines," ASPE, accessed October 23, 2023, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>.
17. "COVID-19 Recession at Six Months: California's Unemployment Remains High," California Budget and Policy Center (blog), accessed October 20, 2023, <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-unemployment-remains-high/>.
18. "Most Working-Age SNAP Participants Work, But Often in Unstable Jobs | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities," March 15, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/most-working-age-snap-participants-work-but-often-in-unstable-jobs>.
19. "Guide to Measuring Household Food Security (Revised 2000) | Food and Nutrition Service," accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/guide-measuring-household-food-security-revised-2000>.
20. Consumer Price Index, West Region — September 2023 : Western Information Office : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_west.htm#table1.
21. "Consumer Price Index, West Region — September 2023 : Western Information Office : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_west.htm#table1.

22. Food and Nutrition Service, "Thrifty Food Plan, 2021," 2021, <https://FNS.usda.gov/TFP>.
23. "USDA Food Plans: Monthly Cost of Food Reports | Food and Nutrition Service," accessed November 16, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-monthly-reports>.
24. United Ways of California, "The Real Cost Measure in California 2023," June 2023, <https://unitedwaysca.org/real-cost/>.
25. Adrienne R. Brown, Katherine G. Geifer, and Michael D. King, "Impact of the End of Extra SNAP Benefits," Roughly 32 Million People Now Receiving Less Government Food Assistance (blog), April 27, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/04/impact-of-the-end-of-extra-snap-benefits.html>.
26. Matthew P. Rabbitt et al., "Household Food Security in the United States in 2022," accessed November 10, 2023, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=107702>.
27. Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts, "Estimates of Food Insecurity During the COVID-19 Crisis: Results from the COVID Impact Survey, Week 1 (April 20–26, 2020)," 2020.
28. Chadwick K. Knight et al., "Household Food Insecurity and Medication 'Scrimping' among US Adults with Diabetes," *Preventive Medicine* 83 (February 1, 2016): 41–45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2015.11.031>.
29. Seth A. Berkowitz, Hilary K. Seligman, and Niteesh K. Choudhry, "Treat or Eat: Food Insecurity, Cost-Related Medication Underuse, and Unmet Needs," *The American Journal of Medicine* 127, no. 4 (April 1, 2014): 303-310.e3, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2014.01.002>.
30. Ali Pourmotabbed et al., "Food Insecurity and Mental Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Public Health Nutrition* 23, no. 10 (July 2020): 1778–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S136898001900435X>.
31. Craig Gundersen and James P. Ziliak, "Food Insecurity And Health Outcomes," *Health Affairs* 34, no. 11 (November 2015): 1830–39, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>.
32. Molly Knowles et al., "'Do You Wanna Breathe or Eat?': Parent Perspectives on Child Health Consequences of Food Insecurity, Trade-Offs, and Toxic Stress," *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 25–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-015-1797-8>.
33. Patrick Canning and Brian Stacy, "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier," n.d.
34. Toral Patel, "Propel Survey Insights," August 30, 2023.
35. Sara Kimberlin et al., "Poverty in California," Fact Sheet, October 2023.
36. United Ways of California, "The Real Cost Measure in California 2023."
37. "The Real Cost Measure in California 2023," United Ways of California, accessed October 24, 2023, <https://unitedwaysca.org/realcost/>.
38. Patricia Malagon and Tess Thorman, "Pandemic-Era CalFresh Expansions Lifted Many Families Out of Poverty," Public Policy Institute of California (blog), accessed November 16, 2023, <https://www.ppic.org/blog/pandemic-era-cal-fresh-expansions-lifted-many-families-out-of-poverty/>.
39. Sarah Bohn et al., "Poverty in California," Public Policy Institute of California, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>.
40. Nicholas A. Fleming, "May Update," June 15, 2023.
41. Craig Gundersen and James P. Ziliak, "Food Insecurity And Health Outcomes," *Health Affairs* 34, no. 11 (November 2015): 1830–39, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>.
42. Shilpa Pai and Kandy Bahadur, "The Impact of Food Insecurity on Child Health," *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 67, no. 2 (April 2020): 387–96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2019.12.004>.
43. Cindy W Leung et al., "Household Food Insecurity Is Positively Associated with Depression among Low-Income Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participants and Income-Eligible Nonparticipants1, 2, 3," *The Journal of Nutrition* 145, no. 3 (March 1, 2015): 622–27, <https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.114.199414>.
44. Kathryn S. Cain et al., "Association of Food Insecurity with Mental Health Outcomes in Parents and Children," *Academic Pediatrics* 22, no. 7 (September 1, 2022): 1105–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2022.04.010>.
45. "USDA Food Plans: Monthly Cost of Food Reports | Food and Nutrition Service."
46. United Ways of California, "The Real Cost Measure in California 2023."