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California Department of Social Services Efforts to Enhance Access to the Food Stamp Program (FSP)

Modified Categorical Eligibility

AB 433 established a new eligibility standard for food stamps. The Governor's 2010-11 proposed budget includes full funding for county eligibility workers to approve food stamp benefits for all families without regard to assets. Previously, a family would have to deplete their savings in order to qualify for food stamps. Approximately 87,000 families will be served because of this change.

Food Stamp Program Restoration Waiver

In 2009, CDSS requested and received approval of a federal waiver to allow restoration of food stamp benefits for recipients whose benefits have been terminated for failing to submit paperwork, for example. Restoration of benefits will be automatic if a family is able to comply with program requirements within one month of termination of benefits and the full re-application process is avoided.

Face-to-Face Interviews Waiver

In 2009, CDSS requested and received approval of a federal waiver allowing county welfare departments the option of waiving the face-to-face interview for all food stamp recipients. The interview can instead be conducted by telephone and the fingerprint imaging requirement can be postponed for up to a year. CDSS issued county implementing instructions in October 2009. The waiver is effective as of June 1, 2009 through May 31, 2013.

Foster Youth Eligibility

In 2009, counties received implementing instructions from CDSS to develop a process ensuring that foster youth are given the opportunity to apply for food stamps prior to "aging out" of the foster care system. In addition, CDSS submitted on March 1, 2010 a demonstration project request to the federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to provide foster youth with food stamp benefits without regard to income or resources for one year after they "age out." We are awaiting a response from FNS.

FSP Access and Improvement Project

This project involves a collaboration with the California Department of Public Health to reach underserved communities through a number of community organizations in 43 counties that might qualify for food stamps and help them apply. Since 2009, funding has more than doubled

from \$6 million to \$13 million and the number of contractors has almost more than doubled, from 52 to 82. The major partners in this effort are the California Association of Food Banks and the Central Valley Health Network.

USDA Western Region Roundtables

In partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, CDSS held a series of roundtable meetings to further implement a strategic planning process to increase FSP participation in targeted counties. The meetings have been held in Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego and Tulare.

Restaurant Meals Allowance Program Expansion

California is one of only four states in the nation that provides counties the option to operate a Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Program for homeless, elderly, and disabled food stamp recipients who may not have easy access to cooking facilities. Five counties, accounting for 42 percent of caseload, have implemented this option.

ARRA Modernization Projects

California received more than \$22 million in administrative funding over a two year period for the Food Stamp Program from the federal FNS under the Economic Stimulus package for additional administrative efficiencies and enhancements for the Food Stamp Program. Funding has been used for an expansion/creation of on-line applications in all three automation systems as well as installation of document imaging capability in one automation system and Interactive Voice Response systems in the other two automation systems. These automation enhancements will benefit recipients and county welfare departments by expediting the application process and provide quicker handling on Food Stamp cases.

Direct Certification

As of July 2008, all school districts can automatically enroll students in the no-cost school lunch program those children in households eligible for the welfare to work program or food stamps.

Food Stamp Program Rebranding Effort

Working with critical stakeholders, including the California Food Policy Advocates, and research and marketing specialists employed with Foundation funding, CDSS is in the process of renaming the FSP. The new name will eliminate some of the stigma associated with the FSP and provide a great opportunity to outreach to potentially eligible families through the marketing campaign that will support the launching of the new name.

DMV Pilot Project

CDSS is exploring options for leveraging Department of Motor Vehicle information to assist in establishing identity for individuals in the food stamp program. This partnership may help to decrease administrative costs with counties and may provide a less intrusive mechanism for detecting duplicate aid.