Chapter Five: Overview of the Application Process

Every application process follows the same general sequence:

GENERAL SEQUENCE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	
The Client:	1. Gets a copy of the CalFresh application or accesses it online. 2. Completes the application (paper or online). 3. Signs and submits it via mail, fax, online, or in person. 4. Participates in the interview (in person or by phone) with the CalFresh eligibility worker (EW). 5. Provides documents that verify the information on the application.
The Eligibility Worker (EW):	6. Determines eligibility. 7. If the client is eligible, the EW approves the award amount, called the benefit. 8. Notifies the client if they are eligible or not eligible. 9. Authorizes the amount for the client's EBT card.
The Client:	10. If found not eligible, may contact the county and, if necessary, appeal the decision. 11. If eligible, receives their EBT card in person or by mail. 12. Maintains their CalFresh benefits by updating their information with the county CalFresh office based on reporting requirements.

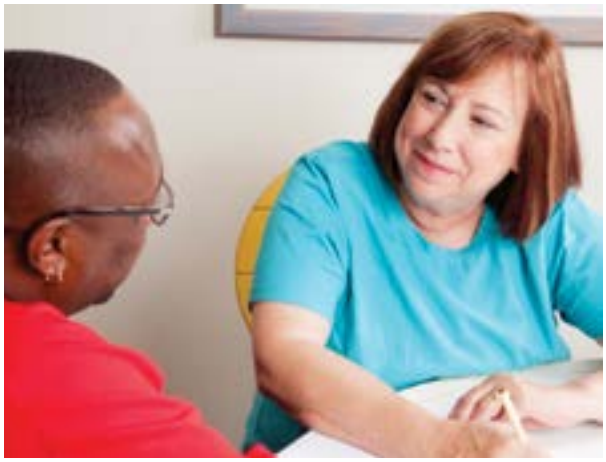
Prescreening for CalFresh

A client is not required to complete a prescreen before applying for CalFresh at the local CalFresh office. A prescreen is used by the CalFresh outreach workers to identify those who are likely eligible; some may need assistance with the application.

During the optional prescreening process, the client answers a few basic questions. The answers will allow you to gather enough information to understand the likelihood that the client is eligible.

This process is referred to as "prescreening" to reinforce that it is not a process to determine eligibility and that it does not "screen out" potential applicants.

While prescreening is an essential piece of California's outreach efforts, it can inadvertently spread incorrect information or inappropriately discourage a person from applying for CalFresh. To avoid this, CalFresh outreach workers are encouraged to use the protocol on the next page:



The prescreen begins when you tell the client about CalFresh. The steps will not necessarily be in the following order. You will need to:

Know

- The CalFresh program: what it is, who it serves, how to apply, and the rights and responsibilities of applicants and recipients
- The word "household" as it applies to CalFresh
- How household size is determined
- Household gross and net income
- The rules for deductions and proration
- The rules for mixed households
- Special rules for people age 60 and older, people with a disability, students, certain immigrants, able-bodied adults without dependents, children in foster care, boarders, and individuals who are homeless
- Supplemental Security Income/ Supplemental Security Payment (SSI/SSP)
- Confidentiality regulations
- Prescreening questions
- How to assist the client with their application if the applicant's gross income and circumstances appear to be in line with eligibility guidelines

Let the client know that **only the local CalFresh office can determine eligibility** and even if they appear ineligible based on this prescreening, they should apply. There are more exceptions than rules in the program and a trained EW will make the final decision on eligibility. Make the client aware that the CalFresh office (local County Welfare Department) can offer assistance for non-English-speaking applicants.

> Let the client know that only the local CalFresh office can determine eligibility and even if they appear ineligible based on this prescreening, they should apply.

Core Concepts

Be familiar with the following concepts, terms, and definitions so that you can best assist your clients.

Disabled is a classification given to any person who receives any of the following benefits:

- Disability benefits such as Supplemental Security Income/ Supplemental Security Payment (SSI/SSP). For SSI/SSP details see page 31 under Supplemental Security Income/Supplemental Security Payment.
- Social Security disability or blindness benefits (SSDI).
- Public disability retirement pension, if it is for the kind of disability that Social Security says "cannot get better."
- Veterans' disability benefits that can include the veteran or veteran's immediate family members.

Gross Monthly Income is the amount the household earns before any deductions are taken. The gross monthly income limit (130 percent of the FPL) does not apply to people age 60 and older and people with a disability.

Most households with a person age 60 or older, or a person with a disability, don't have to pass the gross income test. Deductions like out-of-pocket medical costs, rent or mortgage costs, dependent care costs, and utility costs are taken from their gross income. In these cases the net monthly income limit is looked at and must meet the guidelines (100 percent of the FPL).

Household is an individual living alone or a group of individuals living together who may or may not be related and usually buy food

and prepare meals together. There may be more than one household occupying the same home, if they buy and prepare food separately. There are special rules to decide if there are separate households and who is included in each household.

See *Regulation Quick Reference Sheet F* for more information on unique household composition.

Household Size is the number of people in this household. These are the people whose income is counted to see if the household is eligible and who help determine the amount of the CalFresh benefit.

Households with a Member 60 Years of Age or Older or a Member with a Disability applying for separate household status have a higher gross income limit than other applicants. The gross income limit for these households is 165 percent of FPL.

Income, Deduction & Proration is the process of review to determine eligibility based

on income minus the allowed deductions. If a household includes a member that is not applying for CalFresh, their income is counted toward the household income. Proration is the reduction of the CalFresh benefit for the first month of eligibility from the date the application was submitted to the end of the month.

Mixed Citizenship Status Household is a household with some members who are federally eligible citizens and state-eligible legal noncitizens. Some households may also include undocumented noncitizens who are not eligible for CalFresh, but their income is counted when determining household gross income and when determining the benefit amounts to the household if the household is eligible. The client is not required to disclose immigration status of undocumented household members who can opt out of the application and are not included; however, their income is counted as part of the household income.

Net Monthly Income is what is left after the allowable deductions are taken. Most households must meet the gross **and** the net income requirements unless they contain a member who is age 60 or older or has a disability.

Senior is defined as anyone 60 years of age or older according to the Food Stamp Act.

Supplemental Security Income/ Supplemental Security Payments Generally, people on SSI in California are not eligible for CalFresh because they also receive a state-funded SSP that includes a food allowance. If someone on SSI moves to California, there may be a short period of time before they receive SSP and when they are temporarily eligible for CalFresh.

Recent budget cuts in California have resulted in some SSP benefits being $0. If a client's SSP is zero as a result of the budget cuts, refer him/her to the local CalFresh office for assistance.

Important tip about SSP: Recent budget cuts in California have resulted in some SSP benefits being $0. If a client's SSP is zero as a result of the budget cuts, refer him/her to the local CalFresh office for assistance.

Maintain Client Confidentiality

You may learn confidential information from clients, such as names of household members, financial information, and medical or employment history. Abide by all confidentiality rules, and do not ask for any unnecessary information. (See Chapter Four.) The prescreen can be completely anonymous. However, if you gather information and the client wants to share the information with a third party, you must have the client sign a waiver to release information.

Basic Prescreening Flowchart

CalFresh prescreening is best done as a conversation. There is a lot of back and forth with the client in order to complete the prescreen. Each client is unique.

Introduce yourself to the client and say:

"Hi, my name is _____ and I am doing outreach for a program known in California as CalFresh. CalFresh is the new name in California for the Food Stamp Program. Have you heard about it?" At this point the client may share their experience or you can offer a brief explanation.

Continue with:

"May I ask you a few questions to help us see if you might be eligible?"

If the client agrees, then continue.

1. Yes/No *"Are you receiving CalFresh, formerly known as Food Stamps?"*

   If "*Yes*," skip to question #9.
   If "*No*," continue.

2. Yes/No *"Have you received CalFresh before?"*

   If "*Yes*," see note* and skip to question #9.
   If "*No*," continue.

*Note: Sometimes a client may have neglected to file updated paperwork and lost benefits that you can help restore. Discuss the reasons why the client has not updated their information. If their circumstances have not changed since they last received benefits, they just need to reapply or reopen their case.

3. Yes/No *"Are you receiving CalWORKs, General Assistance or General Relief?"*

If "*Yes*," see note* and skip to question #9.

If "*No*," continue.

*Note: If the answer is "*Yes*," the client is categorically eligible and should be sent to the CalFresh office immediately, if they have not been receiving CalFresh. Categorically eligible means that the CalFresh program accepts eligibility determinations made by these others programs.

A person with a drug felony for sales or manufacturing is not eligible for CalFresh.

Go to *Regulation Quick Reference Sheet B* for a summary.

An answer of "*Yes*" to any of these questions means **no further prescreen is needed**.

To find out if the client might be eligible, continue with:

4. Yes/No *"How many people live in your home? Do you all purchase and prepare food together?"*

If "*No*," then refer to *Regulation Quick Reference Sheet F* and help the client figure out how many households are in their home.

If "*Yes*," use the *Regulation Quick Reference Sheet F* and help the client figure out how many people are in their own household.

Continue with:
"With just your household in mind, please answer the following questions:"

5. Yes/No *"Does anyone in your household have a Social Security number?"*

(Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) have a Social Security number.)

If "*Yes*," skip to question #6.

If "*No*," then continue.

5a. Yes/No *"Is anyone in your household eligible for a Social Security number and has applied or has not yet applied?"*

If "*Yes*," skip to question #6.
If "*No*," then continue.

5b. Yes/No *"Is anyone in your household a refugee or seeking asylum?"*

See *Regulation Quick Reference Sheet D* for details.

If "*Yes*," skip to question #6.
If "*No*," continue.

5c. Yes/No *"Does anyone in your household meet the special population exceptions?"*

Use your *Regulation Quick Reference Sheets B, C, D & E* to review special populations.

If "*Yes*," skip to question #6.
If "*No*," continue.

Advise the client that there are some exceptions and they may still be eligible. Discuss with the client and see if there are any special circumstances that would make them eligible.

Gross Monthly Income Limits for CalFresh Households Without Any Members Age 60 and Older or with a Disability October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013

How many people are in your household?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Per additional household member
Is your household's combined Gross Monthly Income no more than: (Pick the column that matches the number of people in your household.)	$1,211	$1,640	$2,069	$2,498	$2,927	$3,356	$3,785	$4,214	+$429
You might be eligible for as much as the amount in the column that matches the number of people in your household, every month:	$200	$367	$526	$668	$793	$952	$1,052	$1,202	+$150

Visit www.calfresh.ca.gov/PG841.htm#inc for the most recent income limit information.

6. Yes/No *"Are you, or is there, any person in your household who is age 60 or older, or has a disability and is not receiving SSI/SSP?"*

If "*Yes*," then skip to question #8.

The income chart demonstrating Gross Income at 130 percent FPL does not apply to people age 60 or older or with a disability, or some immigrants.

6a. Yes/No or DK *"Is the person receiving SSP receiving $0 or are they in pending status due to $0 in the award?"*

If "*Yes*" or Don't Know (DK), skip to question #8.

If "*No*," then skip to question #9.

Gross Monthly Income Limits for CalFresh Households Where a Member Age 60 or Older or with a Disability is a Separate Household October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013

How many people are in your household?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Per additional household member
Is your household's combined Gross Monthly Income no more than: (Pick the column that matches the number of people in your household.)	$1,536	$2,081	$2,625	$3,170	$3,714	$4,259	$4,803	$5,348	+$545
You might be eligible for as much as the amount in the column that matches the number of people in your household, every month:	$200	$367	$526	$668	$793	$952	$1,052	$1,202	+$150

7. Yes/No *"Does your household gross income fall below the amount allowed for the size of your household?"*

   See *Tip Sheet B* for the detailed guide to prescreening.

   When you have finished the questions, evaluate your results. If the answer to any of the above questions is "*Yes*," the household may be eligible for CalFresh. If any answers are "*No*," the household may still be eligible.

   If the client's gross income is considerably higher than the limit in the table, you can let the client know that they are outside the income range of those who are usually eligible; however, encourage them to go to the CalFresh office and have an EW review their application with them.

   If the client appears to meet the income guidelines, offer to assist them with completing the application.

8. Yes/No *"Would you like me to help you to complete an application?"*

   If "Yes," then complete the packet.
   If the client is 60 or older or has a disability, proceed with a review of the deductions for seniors and complete the application assistance as described in the *CalFresh Outreach Basics Handbook for Older Adults*.
   If "*No*," offer the application packet to the client to allow them to apply themselves.

9. Yes/No *"Would you be willing to tell others about the program?"*
   If the client says "*Yes*," then provide them with your phone number. If it seems like a good use of resources you can offer them brochures or fliers to take with them. Make sure your contact information is on the flier.

Remind the client that only the eligibility worker can determine eligibility.

Expedited Service (ES) from CalFresh

Some households may have no money to purchase food. These households with very low income and very few resources may qualify for Expedited Service (ES), which is CalFresh on an emergency basis. The client goes through the same application process as all other clients but not all information has to be verified before benefits are issued (with the exception of identification, which the client is required to provide). Households may qualify for ES if the household:

- Has less than $150 in monthly gross income and liquid resources of $100 or less;
- Has a combined monthly gross income and liquid resources that are less than the household monthly rent or mortgage plus utilities;

OR

- Is a migrant or seasonal farm worker and is destitute. The definition of destitute is that the household's only income for the month of application was:
  - a. Received before the date of application and was from a terminated source;
  - b. Received from a new source and no more than $25 will be received by the 10th calendar day after the date of application;

OR

  - c. A combination of (a) and (b), provided their liquid resources do not exceed $100.

Expedited CalFresh benefits will be made available no later than the third calendar day following the date the application was filed; Saturday and Sunday count as one day. Usually, benefits are issued within 72 hours. The client must complete the application process and follow up with all postponed verifications once the benefits have been issued.

Always refer clients to the county CalFresh office immediately if they appear to qualify for ES.

> Always refer clients to the county CalFresh office immediately if they appear to qualify for ES.

What are liquid resources?

- Cash
- Checking or savings accounts
- Lump-sum payments such as tax refunds or Social Security back payments

Calculating Income, Deductions and Prorating

Using only the income guidelines is not the most accurate way to determine if a household may be eligible for CalFresh. Understanding gross and net income is complicated. For this reason, most outreach programs throughout the state use a prescreening tool. You can perform the calculations manually, but we recommend using a tool.

Electronic Prescreening Tools for Outreach Workers

Food Stamps (CalFresh) Application & Screening Tool (FAST) is a free tool available to any nonprofit organization wishing to determine potential CalFresh eligibility, assist with the application, and follow up with applicants.[1] In approximately seven minutes, a client is prescreened and a printable CalFresh application (California Form DFA-285 A-1 and A-2), pre-filled with the client's information, is generated.

The current tool also prints a confidentiality waiver and a "next steps" flier based on information provided by the county. It directs the client to the closest CalFresh office or provides instructions on applying over the phone. FAST is also an excellent tool for tracking all prescreens conducted, applications distributed and submitted, and follow-up actions.

FAST requires Microsoft Access. All data fields are exported into an Excel spreadsheet, which then allows the user to analyze needed data for reports. FAST is user-friendly, and an excellent way to store client information safely and securely. FAST also offers a quick link to the California Guide to Food Benefits, an unofficial quick reference to CalFresh federal and state regulations. After registering, FAST is available free to CalFresh outreach partners.

CalFresh Excel Calculator is for more advanced CalFresh outreach workers.

This Excel screening tool is especially helpful to determine potential eligibility for a household that includes a person age 60 or older, a person with a disability, or people with mixed immigration status.[2] In these cases, the standard income guidelines may not apply.

Other Websites

California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) has a wealth of information on its website at www.MyCalFresh.org. This is available as a tool for all outreach workers.

California Department of Social Services has a link to electronic benefits at www.calfresh.ca.gov.

Applying for CalFresh – General

Once the prescreen is complete, the outreach worker can move forward to help the client with the application process.

The client has rights and responsibilities. Some are listed on the following pages.

[1] California Association of Food Banks, Food Stamp Prescreening Tool. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.myfoodstamps.org/screeningtool.html
[2] http://www.myfoodstamps.org/docs/FFY0910_Food_Stamp_Calculator.xls

CalFresh Applicants Have the Right to:

- Get help filling out the application.
- Receive services in their preferred language.
- Ask for translated forms and notices.
- Receive an application when they ask for it.
- Turn in their application the same day they receive it.
- Receive their CalFresh benefits (or be notified that they are not eligible for the program) within 30 days after they turn in their application.
- Receive expedited CalFresh benefits within three (3) days, if they are eligible and qualify for expedited service.
- Have a fair hearing if they disagree with any action taken on their case.

The CalFresh Applicant Responsibilities Are to:

- Answer all questions completely and honestly when they apply for CalFresh benefits. They must sign their name to certify, under penalty of perjury, that all their answers are true.
- Provide proof that they are eligible.
- Promptly report changes in household circumstances to the CalFresh office.
- Not put their money or possessions in someone else's name in order to be able to get CalFresh benefits.

In order to begin processing, an application only needs to contain the client's:

- Name
- Address
- Dated signature

- Not make changes on any CalFresh cards or documents.
- Not sell, trade, or give away their CalFresh benefits, or any CalFresh cards or documents.
- Use CalFresh benefits only to buy eligible items.

Applicants have the same rights, regardless of their county of residence. The California Department of Social Services provides a list of the rights and responsibilities for CalFresh.[3]

Step 1: Application

1a. Client submits an application.

Whether in person, online, by phone, fax, or mail, the client must first submit a signed application. The official date of submission starts the day that the county CalFresh office receives a valid application. (This is known as the **filing date**.) If the application is online, the EW may have a legal way to obtain an electronic signature.

Note: Telephonic signature is still being developed and is not yet implemented statewide.

[3] California Department of Social Services, *Rights and Responsibilities*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps/PG873.htm

Make sure to have an address and phone number of the local CalFresh offices available to share with the client. To help avoid problems if an application is misplaced after it is submitted to the county, encourage the client to keep a copy of the application and request a receipt on the date of submission if it is submitted in person. If the application is submitted online, the client needs to keep the confirmation code. The EW will issue benefits from the date the application was originally filed.

In order to begin processing, an application only needs to contain the client's:

- Name
- Address
- Dated signature

Paper Application
In California, each county may have a different way to apply for CalFresh benefits. All counties accept a paper application. You can provide a paper application to the client, or the client can:

- Pick one up at the local CalFresh office; or
- Call the CalFresh office and have a copy mailed to them; or
- Download the application from CDSS website at www.CalFresh.ca.gov.

Forms
There are two different types of CalFresh forms: DFA forms and SAWS forms.[4] Some counties use the DFA 285 A1, A2 and A3 forms for CalFresh-only applicants. Other counties prefer for all applicants to fill out the SAWS forms. Check with your county for their preferences before starting to assist clients with their applications.

- **DFA 285 A1** is the basic **Application** form. It is three pages and includes 10 detailed questions that help the EW to identify households entitled to expedited service. You can help the client to complete this form, or they can complete it themselves and submit it. The application is available in several different languages.
- **DFA 285 A2** is the **Statement of Facts.** It is six pages and has 24 sections labeled A-X. It elaborates on some of the information provided in the DFA 285 A1. In most cases, it is filled out by the EW during the interview with the applicant. However, it can be completed by the applicant with the outreach worker if the county CalFresh office approves this level of assistance. The client can also fill this out when they recertify or if they apply by mail.
- **DFA 285 A3 and QR** is the client **Rights and Responsibilities.** It is a single page and can be reviewed with the client by the outreach worker or by the EW during the scheduled interview with the local CalFresh office. Check with your county to find out whether you can assist with this form.

[4] California Department of Social Services, *Forms/Brochures*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG183.htm

- **SAWS 1, 2, 2A and QR** are an alternative to the DFA A1, A2, A3 and QR and are Multi-Program Applications that allow the applicant to apply for Cash Aid, CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and in some counties the California Medical Services Program (CMSP). They include the Statement of Facts and Rights and Responsibilities. You can provide these applications to the client and assist them with the CalFresh portion. Once you complete the CalFresh portion you can have the client sign and submit it to the local CalFresh office for follow-up on all benefit entitlements.

Online Applications

Online applications have been increasing in popularity. All counties have online applications and this may be a very efficient way to assist someone with their application. If a client applies online, they will need access to a printer to print their own copy of the application. Otherwise the client can note the tracking number and pick up their copy at the CalFresh office.

There are three automated systems in California that process online applications. The client can log on to www.benefitscal.org for the English version or www.beneficioscal.org for Spanish, choose their county of residence, and be redirected to the online application that their county uses.

The three online application systems are:

- Benefits CalWIN: www.mybenefitscalwin.org
- C-4 Yourself: www.c4yourself.com
- Your Benefits Now: www.dpssbenefits.lacounty.gov/ybn/Index.html

1b. County registers the application.

The county CalFresh office registers the completed application by first clearing the application to ensure that the household or any members of the household are not already receiving CalFresh benefits, then entering the application into the computer eligibility system. If the application is submitted online, the CalFresh office will code the application, indicating that it has been cleared.

1c. County assigns the application.

The application may be assigned to an EW. In some counties, clients who already have an open case in another program (e.g., Medi-Cal) may be assigned to their existing caseworker.

1d. EW conducts an interview.

An interview is required before the EW can certify the household to get CalFresh benefits. The interview may be held with the head of household, the authorized representative,[5] or any other responsible adult household member.

[5] http://foodstampguide.org/authorized-representatives/

Impress on the client that missing this interview is the number one reason that CalFresh application processing is delayed.

Authorized representatives **can** be:

- Relatives
- Friends
- Agency workers

Authorized representatives **cannot** be:

- Soup kitchens or shelters that accept CalFresh
- CalFresh outreach workers

The interview can either be in person or by phone. Counties may waive the face-to-face interview, even when a hardship preventing the client from attending a face-to-face interview does not exist, and conduct the interview over the phone. The county CalFresh office schedules and notifies the applicant, in writing, of the time, date, and place of the interview. Some counties allow applicants or CalFresh outreach workers to schedule this interview.

If applicants miss their first interview, the CalFresh office will notify the applicant, and the applicant household is responsible for contacting the CalFresh office to set up another interview. If the household contacts the CalFresh office within the 30-day application processing period, the CalFresh office will schedule a second interview. If applicants miss a second interview, the CalFresh office can deny the application. If the CalFresh office has issued a denial, applicants can apply again.

Impress on the client that missing this interview is the number one reason that CalFresh application processing is delayed.

1e. Application is verified.

Some details of the application require verification. There are usually several options regarding the types of verification that can be used.[6] The verification documents most commonly used are:

- **Identification:** driver's license, ID card, or a health card (a picture ID is not required).
- **Citizenship/Immigration Status/Social Security Number:** a Social Security number (a card is not required), a passport, birth certificate, or a resident alien card.

You can help the client to gather and copy the required verification documents. These do not have to be submitted with the application, but are required before an application can be approved.

[6] California Department of Social Services, *All County Information Notice 1-45-11*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acin/2011/I-45_11.pdf

- **Income:** recent pay stubs, letter from employer, child support orders (check or payment stub), and benefit statements.
- **Residency/Expenses:** rent receipts, mortgage statement, utility bills, and child care receipts.

The applicant is required to provide this information or the case will be denied for "failure to provide." If the client does not have access to some of the documents listed above, the county may help the client obtain them (e.g., identification). In other cases, the county can allow the client to self-certify.

You can help the client to gather and copy the required verification documents. These do not have to be submitted with the application, but are required before an application can be approved.

If additional information is needed, the EW will let the applicant know during the interview and through a written Notice of Action (NOA) after the interview is conducted. If the applicant does not comply with requests for verification within 10 days of the interview, the county may deny the application effective no earlier than the 30th day following the date the application was filed. The applicant must receive a letter of determination stating the reason for approval or denial and information about how to appeal a denial.

The EW will run the applicant's information through various computer systems to do a secondary verification of information provided.

If the client submits an accurate and complete application and includes verification documents at the outset, the case can be evaluated and the outcome determined more quickly.

If the client submits an accurate and complete application and includes verification documents at the outset, the case can be evaluated and the outcome determined more quickly.

Step 2: Eligibility Determination

Once the interview and verification are complete, the county CalFresh office will determine eligibility and send a letter to the client. The county has up to 30 days from the filing date to approve or deny the application. If an individual needs food before 30 days, they may qualify for Expedited Service (ES).

If the EW determines that the client is eligible, the EW will grant CalFresh benefits. The EW notifies the client and the client will be given an EBT card with the approved dollar amount. The benefits are added to the EBT card each month, as long as the client is eligible. If the client already has an EBT card, the CalFresh benefit will be added to their existing card. Any unused benefits will roll over to the next month even if another monthly benefit is added.

Encourage the client to write down the name and phone number of the EW or the appropriate county contact at the local CalFresh office so that they can follow up on their application.[7] The EW's name is listed on the letter the client receives in the mail.

When the client follows up on an application, their case status can be either "denied," "pending," or "approved." The client may need to provide additional information if the case is pending, or is denied erroneously. The client can contact the EW or CalFresh office directly to resolve any misunderstanding. Often you, the CalFresh outreach worker, can communicate with the EW on behalf of the client if you have a signed release of information from the client.

See *Worksheet* G for a sample release of information.

Appeals Process

Any CalFresh applicant or recipient can request a Fair Hearing to any action that affects their benefits. The request should be made within 90 days of the action the household wishes to appeal, and can be made in person, by telephone, or in writing.

Appeals in writing are best and only need to include the request for a hearing and a brief explanation of why the hearing is being requested. The state agency will respond by organizing a hearing, and must accommodate the schedule of the applicant or the recipient. Written Fair Hearing requests are sent to the CDSS State Hearing Division. Details are provided to the client with every written communication from CDSS to the client.

Generally, the appeals process is best handled by legal services.[8] But you can assist by educating the client about the process, helping them decide whether to file an appeal, telling them how to file, and referring them to legal aid.[9]

Step 3: Maintenance

EBT Card Issuance and Use

In California, the EBT card is known as the Golden State Advantage EBT card. The cardholder simply slides this card through a point-of-sale (POS) device in the grocery store. Once they slide their card, they select EBT as the card type, enter their PIN, and continue as they would with an ATM card purchase. A household can request that more than one card be issued to the account.

The positive economic benefits of EBT in California extend beyond the cardholder. Every time an EBT card is used it acts as an economic stimulus for retailers and those who work in the

[7] California State Association of Counties, *California Counties' Websites*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.csac.counties.org

[8] Legal Services of Northern California, *LSNC Advocates Feed*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.lsnc.net

[9] http://foodstampguide.org/requesting-a-fair-hearing/

food industry. EBT food and cash aid benefits can be redeemed at more than 80,000 locations in California.[10]

Personal Identification Number (PIN)

Once the client receives their EBT card, they must set up their own four-digit secret number or PIN. This can be done at the local CalFresh office by calling a 24-hour toll-free number on the back of the EBT card, or online.[11]

If the client forgets their PIN, wants to change their PIN, or loses their card because of accident or theft, they can call 1-877-328-9677.

Checking Benefits Online

There are four ways for the client to find out their CalFresh balance:

1. Make an EBT purchase. The balance remaining shows on their receipt.
2. Call the automated EBT Customer Service line at 1-877-328-9677 and enter their card number.
3. Find a store with a customer service counter where the client can swipe their card to check their balance.
4. Access their account at https://www.ebt.ca.gov/caebtclient/reciplogin_client.jsp

Replacing a Lost or Stolen EBT Card

The client should report a lost or stolen EBT card immediately to the 24-hour EBT customer service telephone number at 1-877-328-9677.

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) is available in certain counties for approved EBT cardholders who:

- Are age 60 or older, or
- Have a disability, or
- Are homeless

The local CalFresh office will cancel the card immediately and give the client a new card within two business days after the card is reported lost or stolen.

Where to Shop and Allowable Purchases

The client can use their EBT card at any store that accepts CalFresh/SNAP throughout California and across the country.[12] They can buy food, as well as edible plants and seeds to grow food. There is no sales tax charged on the food items purchased.

Pet food, vitamins, medicine, alcohol, tobacco, paper products, prepared food, and food that will be eaten in the store cannot be purchased with CalFresh. The only exception occurs if the county participates in the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) and if the client has been certified as eligible for RMP. In this case, the client can purchase prepared food at approved participating restaurants.

[10] www.ebt.ca.gov

[11] California EBT Client Website, *Welcome to the California Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Client Website*. Accessed September 10, 2012, https://www.ebt.ca.gov/caebtclient/reciplogin_client.jsp

[12] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Series, *SNAP Retailer Locator*, August 2012. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.snapretailerlocator.com/

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) is available in certain counties for approved EBT cardholders who:

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For a list of restaurants that accept EBT cards, go to www.snapRMP.org.

Recertification

CalFresh recipients do not receive CalFresh for an indefinite period of time. When they are certified as eligible, the EW will let them know how long they can remain eligible (the certification period) without recertifying.

Victims of a Natural Disaster

After a natural disaster declared by the President, with a provision for Individual Assistance, and when commercial channels of food distribution have been disrupted, the CalFresh office can issue emergency CalFresh disaster benefits. These benefits may be issued to CalFresh households and to households that normally would not qualify for CalFresh.

Replacement CalFresh

If a household is receiving CalFresh and experiences a house fire or flood that destroys their food, the CalFresh office may replace the actual value of food destroyed.

The client must report the "disaster" to the CalFresh office within 10 days of the event. The office will verify the disaster by contacting the Red Cross, the fire department, another witness, or by coming to the site.

Help Line

If the client needs help, refer them to the EBT customer service line at 1-877-328-9677. This line is answered in many different languages.

For information on where to apply for CalFresh, clients can call 1-877-847-3663 for assistance in English or 1-888-9-COMIDA (1-888-926-6432) for assistance in Spanish. They can also go online at www.calfresh.ca.gov.

Maximizing CalFresh Benefits

The benefits that are available through CalFresh are meant to supplement the household's food budget. Share tips and strategies for stretching the client's food budget, including couponing, shopping in bulk, or spreading benefit use throughout the month. There are a number of websites that have practical tips like these.[13]

Food Resources in the Community

Have the information available in your local area for Meals on Wheels, food banks, and pantries, etc.

[13] *Network for a Healthy California* Champions for Change, *My Kitchen Recipes*. Accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.cachampionsforchange.cdph.ca.gov/en/Recipes.php