

# Chapter One: Background

The *CalFresh Outreach Basics Handbook for Older Adults* provides CalFresh outreach workers with knowledge and tools to effectively serve older Californians. In this section, the terms “senior,” “elderly,” and “older adult” are used interchangeably and refer to persons aged 60 and older.

Between 1950 and 2000, California’s older adult population grew almost 200 percent. It is expected to reach 14.6 million people by 2050, which will represent 25 percent of California’s population.<sup>1</sup> This growth will significantly impact many programs and services throughout California.

Nutrition is an essential component to successful and healthy aging. Research indicates that food is not only critical to one’s health and physiological well-being but also contributes to social, cultural, and psychological quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Nutrition assistance programs like CalFresh are particularly important because they help low-income older adults maintain food security and good health when resources are scarce.

According to the report *Senior Hunger in America 2010*, the number of older Americans threatened by hunger increased 78 percent between 2001 and 2010.<sup>3</sup> Over 16 percent of California seniors experienced the threat



of hunger between 2001 and 2010. Based on recent state population estimates, at least 940,000 older adults in California face the threat of hunger.<sup>4</sup> An in-depth study of the causes and consequences of senior hunger in America found that seniors experiencing some form of food insecurity have significantly lower calorie and nutrient intakes, were hospitalized more frequently, are more likely to report poor health, and are less able to perform daily tasks.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> California Department of Aging, *California State Plan on Aging 2009-2013*, 2009. Accessed August 2, 2011, [http://www.aging.ca.gov/aboutcda/docs/California\\_State\\_Plan\\_on\\_Aging\\_AoA\\_2009-2013\\_06-30-2009.pdf](http://www.aging.ca.gov/aboutcda/docs/California_State_Plan_on_Aging_AoA_2009-2013_06-30-2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bernstein, M. & Munoz, N., “Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Food and Nutrition for Older Adults: Promoting Health and Wellness,” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, Volume 112, Issue 8, p.3. August 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ziliak, J.P. & Gundersen, C., “Senior Hunger in America 2010: An Annual Report,” Meals on Wheels Research Foundation, Inc., May 2012.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census. DP-1-United States: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile.” Accessed June 6, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>

<sup>5</sup> Ziliak, J.P. & Gundersen, C., *The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in the United States*, March 2008. [http://www.mowaa.org/Document\\_Doc?id=13](http://www.mowaa.org/Document_Doc?id=13)

<sup>6</sup> Ziliak, J.P. & Gundersen, C., “Senior Hunger in America 2010: An Annual Report,” Meals on Wheels Research Foundation, Inc., May 2012.

Older adults, more than any other population, have the lowest participation rate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California. Nationally, approximately 34 percent of eligible seniors participated in SNAP in 2006, whereas only 10 percent of eligible seniors participated in CalFresh.<sup>7</sup> Misinformation, burdensome administrative requirements, and social stigma associated with receiving public assistance prevent eligible older adults from participating in CalFresh.<sup>8</sup>

Many older adults, especially the Silent Generation (those born between 1925 and 1945), view CalFresh as a handout or welfare. Born during the Great Depression and World War II, adults of this generation learned to be resourceful and stoic; they prize self-sufficiency and independence. Many are embarrassed to be seen in a welfare office applying for benefits or using benefits at the store.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, many older adults believe that receiving Social Security disqualifies them for CalFresh benefits.<sup>10</sup> Often, older adults find the CalFresh application and verification of paperwork to be overwhelming; this is especially true for those with disabilities.

Many rural and/or homebound older adults face an additional challenge: they may lack transportation to their local CalFresh offices.<sup>11</sup> While it is now possible to apply for CalFresh online, older adults (aged 65 years and older) are also less likely than any other age group to go online, with just 53 percent of older adults reporting that they use e-mail or the Internet.<sup>12</sup> Among the oldest adults (aged 75 years and older), only 28 percent are reported to own a desktop computer.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these challenges, CalFresh benefits have the potential to help older adults purchase healthful foods. By offsetting food costs, CalFresh also leaves older adults with more money to pay for other basic needs. Fortunately, many recent regulatory changes have made it easier for older adults to apply by addressing many of the barriers associated with accessing CalFresh. For example:

- Individuals can apply for benefits on the phone, online, by mail, or in person.
- Older adults can now apply for benefits without coming into a CalFresh office and may request a phone interview, or even a home visit, to complete the application process.

<sup>7</sup> Cunygham, Karen, “State Trends in SNAP Participation Rates Among Elderly Individuals Preliminary Results,” Mathematica Policy Research, October 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Health Systems Research, Inc., “Seniors Views of the Food Stamp Program and Ways to Improve – Focus Group Testing Washington State,” June 2002. Accessed March 9, 2012, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02012/efan02012fm.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> USDA Toolkit – Addressing Barriers and Challenges <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits.htm>

<sup>10</sup> While persons receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are not eligible for CalFresh benefits, Social Security benefits are OK.

<sup>11</sup> USDA Toolkit – Addressing Barriers and Challenges. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/tool-kits.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Zickhur, Kathryn & Mary Madden, “Older Adults and Internet Use,” Pew Internet, June 2012. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Older-adults-and-internet-use.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> Zickhur, Kathryn, “Generation and Their Gadgets,” Pew Internet, February 2011. [http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2011/PIP\\_Generations\\_and\\_Gadgets.pdf](http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2011/PIP_Generations_and_Gadgets.pdf)

- An older adult may have their own home, car, bank account, and retirement savings and still be eligible.
- If all adults in the household are 60 or older, or have a disability, and the household has no earned income, recertification of benefits may only be required every two years.
- Individuals receiving CalFresh benefits are no longer required to be fingerprinted.
- While individuals who receive Social Security Income (SSI) in California are not eligible for CalFresh benefits, older adults receiving Social Security Retirement benefits can still apply.

In addition, CalFresh benefits are easier to use now that they are issued on an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. An EBT card is similar to an ATM card and can be used at most grocery stores and Certified Farmers' Markets, as well as some restaurants in participating counties. Using CalFresh benefits helps state and local economies too, which is an idea that resonates well with older adults.



- ✎ This handbook, along with the tips and fact sheets (see the *Older Adults Appendices*), is designed to give CalFresh outreach workers information and techniques to work effectively with older adults, a vulnerable and underserved population.