

February 15, 2023

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER**

The purpose of this letter is to provide County Welfare Departments with information and guidance regarding the upcoming implementation of the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh) in California. California is approved to operate D-CalFresh in Alameda County.



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**GAVIN NEWSOM**  
GOVERNOR

February 15, 2023

**ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER**

**TO:** ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

**FROM:** JENNIFER TROIA, CHIEF DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** DISASTER CALFRESH FEBRUARY-MARCH 2023: ALAMEDA COUNTY

**REFERENCE:** [H.R. 6201 FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT](#); [UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE DISASTER SNAP GUIDANCE](#); [ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 19-55](#); [ACL 18-125](#); [ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE \(ACIN\) I-64-22](#); [COUNTY FISCAL LETTER \(CFL\) 17/18-31](#)

The purpose of this letter is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with information and guidance regarding the upcoming implementation of Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh) in California. Due to severe winter storms and power outages throughout the state and the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with Individual Assistance (IA), California is approved to operate D-CalFresh in Alameda County. This county is referred to as the “impacted county” throughout this letter.

D-CalFresh provides temporary food assistance to households affected by natural disasters. Eligible disaster impacted households who are not already receiving CalFresh at the time of the disaster will be provided with one month of food benefits.

Based on the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approval of California’s D-CalFresh plan for February 2023, this

letter provides information and guidance regarding general D-CalFresh policy, February-March 2023 operation, outreach, and administration.

## **DISASTER IMPACT**

### **Winter Storms**

Beginning on December 27, 2022, the State of California experienced a series of relentless storms, consisting of multiple atmospheric rivers, that displaced residents from their homes, left thousands without power, and battered vital infrastructure in many counties. On January 4, 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a statewide [State of Emergency](#) in all 58 counties to support emergency response efforts.

During the first several weeks of January 2023, California continued to experience severe winter storms that consisted of heavy rain, snowfall, powerful winds, and thunder and lightning storms. These storms, referred to as a bomb cyclone, have caused life threatening flooding in many areas across the state, as well as destructive landslides, and additional prolonged power outages. Hundreds of thousands of homes throughout California have been without power, ranging from several days to weeks. The harsh conditions also resulted in 22 fatalities.

As a result of the severe winter storms, the following declarations took place.

- On Sunday, January 8, 2023, President Joseph Biden approved an Emergency Declaration for 17 counties in California.
- On Monday, January 9, 2023, the Emergency Declaration was updated to include a total of 31 counties.
- On Wednesday, January 11, 2023, the Emergency Declaration was amended to include a total of 41 counties.
- On Saturday, January 14, 2023, President Biden issued a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA ([FEMA-4683-DR](#)) for Merced, Sacramento, and Santa Cruz Counties.
- On Tuesday, January 17, 2023, the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA was amended ([FEMA-4683-DR-Amendment-001](#)) to include Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties.
- On Wednesday, January 18, 2023, the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA was amended ([FEMA-4683-DR-Amendment-002](#)) to include San Joaquin County.
- On Monday, January 23, 2023, the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA was amended ([FEMA-4683-DR-Amendment-003](#)) to include Calaveras County.
- On Thursday, January 26, 2023, the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA was amended ([FEMA-4683-DR-005](#)) to include San Mateo County.

- On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA was amended ([FEMA-4683-DR-006](#)) to include Alameda, Contra Costa, Mendocino, and Ventura Counties.

## **GENERAL D-CALFRESH POLICY**

### **Eligibility**

For a household to be eligible for D-CalFresh benefits, they must meet the following criteria:

- Lived or worked in the disaster impacted county at the time of the disaster;
- Purchased or planned to have purchased food during the benefit period;
- Experienced an adverse effect due to the disaster; and
- Meet the Disaster Gross Income Limit (DGIL).

#### *Residency or Work*

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have lived or worked in the disaster area at the time of the disaster. Households are eligible if they are temporarily residing outside of the disaster impacted county, such as those displaced due to mandatory evacuations, at the time of application. Households who have moved out of California but were living in the impacted county at the time of the disaster may still apply for D-CalFresh, should all other eligibility criteria be met (i.e., lived or worked in the disaster area during the benefit period, verifications, etc.).

#### *Purchasing Food*

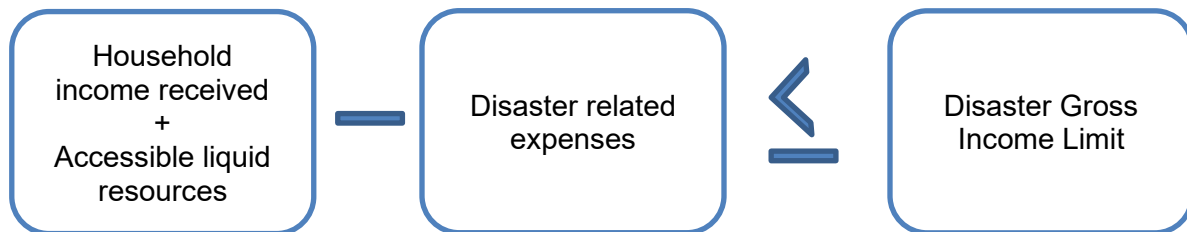
To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have purchased or planned to have purchase food during the benefit period.

#### *Adverse Effects*

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have experienced an adverse effect due to the disaster. Adverse effects include food loss, loss of income, inaccessible resources, or incurred disaster-related expenses. The household must have experienced one or more of these adverse effects.

#### *Disaster Gross Income Limit (DGIL)*

Unlike regular CalFresh, which includes a separate test for income and resources, the DGIL groups income and resources together under one test. The household's take home income received (or expected to be received) during the benefit period plus its accessible liquid resources minus disaster related expenses (unreimbursed disaster related expenses paid or anticipated to be paid out of pocket during the disaster benefit period) must not exceed the DGIL.



Disaster expenses include expenses that the household paid out-of-pocket during the disaster benefit period. When determining the DGIL, it is recommended that CWDs ask clarifying questions about potential loss of income or disaster expenses. For example, did the household lose wages, or incur expenses securing temporary shelter or replacing personal and household items, such as clothing? It may be difficult for individuals and families impacted by a disaster to recall all deductible expenses given the stressful nature of the situation. If the household has received or anticipates receiving a reimbursement for these expenses during the disaster period, only the net expense is deductible.

### **D-CalFresh Household Composition**

A D-CalFresh household includes people who lived and purchased and prepared food together on the start date of the disaster. A D-CalFresh household does not include those people with whom the applicant is temporarily staying at the time of application due to the disaster.

A D-CalFresh household may include an individual(s) who had been excluded from an ongoing CalFresh household at the time of the disaster. For example, an ineligible student, who was excluded from a CalFresh household at the time of the disaster may apply for D-CalFresh if they meet the eligibility criteria (described below). The previously excluded individual must complete the D-CalFresh application, including the interview, and submission of required verifications.

### **D-CalFresh Verification**

Verification rules are eased during a disaster. Eligibility staff should exercise reasonable judgement when evaluating the accuracy of applicant statements. The following verification requirements must be met for D-CalFresh:

1. Identity;
2. Residency and loss/inaccessibility of income or liquid resources, if possible; and
3. Household composition and food loss, when questionable.

While identity verification is required, a specific type of documentary proof is not. Acceptable identity verification may include, but is not limited to, a driver's license, a work or school identification card, an identification card for health benefits, a voter

registration card, a foreign passport, and “matricula consulares.” If documentary proof is not available, identity may be verified through collateral contact. Please note that a social security number is not required to apply for D-CalFresh.

To the extent possible, verification of residency should be satisfied via information from other sources, such as a rent or mortgage billing statement, utility billing statement, and identity documents. No specific type of documentary proof is required.

Each disaster is unique, and the availability of verification will vary from household to household. Public information should indicate that applicants are expected to bring all available verification documents. CWDs should assist households in securing necessary verifications, especially if documents have been lost due to the disaster.

This may include, with the client’s permission, verifying information through alternative sources such as online banking or utility accounts and using collateral contacts when appropriate. If verification is not readily available due to unusual circumstances caused by the disaster, such as structure loss or evacuation, eligibility staff will assist the applicant in securing necessary verifications.

### **Benefit Issuance**

Certified households must be able to access their benefits within 72 hours of application. Cases of delayed issuance for questionable applications must allow households to access their benefits within seven days of application, if eligible.

For additional detailed guidance on D-CalFresh eligibility, the DGIL, and determining the D-CalFresh allotment, reference the [Disaster SNAP Guidance](#) released by the FNS.

### **Authorized Representative**

An Authorized Representative (AR) may be used for D-CalFresh following the same policy rules as regular CalFresh. As an adult non-household member who is authorized to act on behalf of a household, an AR is rightfully able to:

- Complete a D-CalFresh application for a household;
- Submit the necessary verification requirements for a household; and/or
- Use the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to purchase food for the household.

An individual AR may represent more than one impacted household. The designation of an AR can be established on the D-CalFresh application form, using the regular CalFresh AR designation form, or via a signed written statement from the household. If the household requires an AR to submit the application on their behalf, the identity of both the AR and responsible household member must be verified. Detailed information regarding AR restrictions and responsibilities can be found in [All County Letter \(ACL\) 19-55](#) released on May 31, 2019.

### **Duplicate Participation**

Disaster impacted counties must screen for duplicate participation before issuing D-CalFresh benefits. Households may not receive D-CalFresh and regular CalFresh benefits at the same time. Additionally, households may only be approved for D-CalFresh once during the benefit period. CWDs will reference the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS) and Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) to determine duplicate participation before completing the D-CalFresh eligibility determination.

### **Employee Applications**

County employee cases will be processed by lead workers or unit supervisors who currently work confidential cases. All CWD employee cases will be reviewed after the disaster period. These cases will be tracked at application and sorted accordingly to ensure review. No other staff will have access to employee cases and the lead worker or unit supervisor working the case will not be in the same unit as the aided employee.

### **FEBRUARY-MARCH 2023 D-CALFRESH OPERATION: WAVE THREE**

The following details are specific to the upcoming D-CalFresh operation in Alameda County.

### **Application Period**

The application period for people affected by the disaster in the impacted counties extends through seven non-consecutive days:

- Tuesday, February 21, 2023 through Friday, February 24, 2023; and
- Monday, February 27, 2023 through Wednesday, March 1, 2023.

D-CalFresh applications received over the weekend will be considered received on Monday, February 27, 2023 if the interview is completed on the same day, please see D-CalFresh filing date information below.

### **D-CalFresh Filing Date**

The D-CalFresh filing date is the day that the interview is completed and not the day that the application was received. For example, an application received on Thursday, February 23, 2023 with an interview completed on Friday, February 24, 2023 will have a filing date of Friday, February 24, 2023.

### **D-CalFresh Benefit Period**

The 30-day disaster benefit period is from Tuesday, December 27, 2022 through Wednesday, January 25, 2023.

### **D-CalFresh Application**

D-CalFresh applicants must complete the *Application for Disaster CalFresh* (CF 385)

and submit the completed form during the D-CalFresh application period. For this operation, the D-CalFresh application can be completed by phone or in-person. Due to the limited D-CalFresh application period, D-CalFresh applications will not be accepted through the mail.

### **Signature Flexibility**

When accepting D-CalFresh applications by phone, disaster impacted counties will document in the case file that a client verbally attested to the information provided on the application. The disaster impacted counties will document the applicant's name, authorized representative if appropriate, date and time of application, a summary of the information to which the client verbally assents, and the applicant's response indicating agreement or disagreement (i.e., Yes or No). Such documentation will fulfill the requirements for a signed application for households who apply over the phone or who have applied without a signature. Additionally, if the household submitted a paper application without a signature, then the CWDs must also note on the paper application that verbal attestation of the signature was given.

### **Interviews**

D-CalFresh interviews should be completed in-person when possible. For this operation D-CalFresh interviews can also be completed by phone. For online pre-registrants, counties must make three attempts to reach the applicant for an interview, providing a reasonable amount of time between each attempt. After the county has made three unsuccessful attempts, it becomes the household's responsibility to contact the county to complete the interview during the D-CalFresh application period in order to complete their application.

### **Reminder Notice**

If an online application does not have a phone number, the county must provide the applicant with a reminder notice via priority mail. The D-CalFresh reminder notice will serve to remind the household that the interview component of the process is still outstanding, and to encourage the applicant to contact the CWD to complete the interview, via telephone or in-person.

CWDs must generate a freeform notice which includes the language below, appropriate phone number, and address where the D-CalFresh interview can be conducted in person if the applicant so chooses. The language of the reminder notice is as follows:

*"You are receiving this letter because you submitted a pre-registration online application for participation in the Disaster CalFresh program and your phone number was not included. As a reminder, an interview is required in order for your county to determine eligibility for the Disaster CalFresh program.*

*Please call (XXX) XXX-XXXX or go to your county CalFresh office listed below to complete the interview no later than Monday, March 6, 2023.*



*Disaster CalFresh In-Person Site Address:*

*XXXX STREET NAME*

*CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE*

*HOURS OF OPERATION:*

*[DAY(S) OF THE WEEK*

*TIMES OF THE DAY]"*

**D-CalFresh Household Composition**

D-CalFresh household composition is established as of the start date of the disaster which began on Tuesday, December 27, 2022.

**Verification Submission**

D-CalFresh applicant households will have several options for submitting verifications. Options include submission via the SAWS client portals, secure email or fax, and submission at in-person application sites.

**D-CalFresh Allotment**

Because the disasters covered in this operation officially started in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023, the FFY 2023 D-CalFresh DGIL and allotments will be used. The DGIL and allotment by household size were released by the [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-64-22](#) on September 27, 2022.

**Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT)**

D-CalFresh benefits will be issued through the statewide EBT system. Regardless of the method of application submission, households who have been determined eligible for D-CalFresh will pick up their cards in person at designated EBT card pick-up locations in order to meet the D-CalFresh 72-hour timeframe. When information is questionable, this timeframe may be extended up to seven days to allow households additional time to provide verifications. D-CalFresh pick up will be coordinated at the time of the eligibility determination.

If a D-CalFresh eligible household is displaced or no longer residing in the disaster impacted county, the county will coordinate cross-county printing where the household is currently located to allow access to the EBT card within the 72-hour timeframe without requiring them to return to the impacted disaster area. The disaster impacted county will coordinate with the county where the household is located and send the necessary information to the local EBT printer. In the case that an eligible household is unable to pick up their EBT card, counties may priority mail out EBT cards but must meet the 72-hour timeframe. Counties must contact a household who misses their scheduled EBT card pick-up to determine whether the household wants to coordinate a new EBT card pick-up day/time or to priority mail out the EBT card.

**D-CalFresh 72-Hour Timeframe**

Applications will be processed in the order they are submitted, regardless of the method of submission. The D-CalFresh 72-hour timeframe will begin on the day of the interview. The day an applicant completes their interview with eligibility staff will be considered the filing date of the application.

### **Ongoing CalFresh Households**

Ongoing CalFresh households are not eligible to receive supplemental D-CalFresh benefits under this operation as they are already receiving a minimum of \$95 per month via Emergency Allotments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If an ongoing CalFresh household has pre-registered for D-CalFresh, the CWD must contact the pre-registrant to clarify household circumstances and narrate in the case file the reason why they are not eligible for D-CalFresh.

### **Skimming and Scamming**

If a CWD receives a report of electronic theft of D-CalFresh benefits by skimming or scamming, the CWD must follow policies outlined in [ACL 21-133](#), released on October 29, 2021, and [ACL 23-13](#), released on January 27, 2023, and treat the replacement request for D-CalFresh benefits consistent with a request for regular CalFresh benefits.

### **FEBRUARY 2023 PRE-REGISTRATION**

D-CalFresh eligible households will be able to pre-register for D-CalFresh by submitting a completed CF 385 online. Pre-registrations will be accepted in Alameda County at <http://www.mybenefitscalwin.org> during the D-CalFresh application period.

Pre-registration will allow households to apply for D-CalFresh beginning Saturday, February 18, 2023 and submit required D-CalFresh verifications via online portals. Households who pre-register will be called to complete a phone interview during the application period based on the order in which their pre-registration was received. Counties will attempt to call pre-registrants to complete the interview by phone a minimum of three times during the application period. As a reminder, if the pre-registration application does not include a phone number, the county will send the household a reminder letter and the household will need to call the county to complete the interview no later than Monday, March 6, 2023.

Please note, a pre-registration for D-CalFresh is not an application for D-CalFresh. After submission of an online pre-registration, the telephone or in-person interview must be completed to complete an application for D-CalFresh.

### **D-CALFRESH OUTREACH**

Outreach is an essential component of the CalFresh disaster response. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will provide D-CalFresh information for this operation on the CDSS webpage

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh/disaster-calfresh>.

The CDSS will also issue public facing materials such as a press release, flyers, visual guides, and social media posts. All public facing materials will be provided to counties in English and Spanish.

## **D- CALFRESH ADMINISTRATION**

### **D-CalFresh Daily Reporting Requirements**

A State operating D-CalFresh must submit a daily report to FNS.

During the application period, the CDSS will provide daily reports, as well as a summary report after operations end, with the following information for each approved county:

- The number of pre-registrations received online.
- The number of paper applications received.
- The number of phone applications received. (Phone applications include pre-registrations received online once an interview is completed).
- The number of households and persons approved for D-CalFresh.
- The amount of disaster benefits issued to approved households.
- The number of households denied based on their eligibility.
- The number of pending cases remaining each day.
- The average issuance amount per household.

During the application period, the CDSS will provide FNS with a daily narrative describing the status of, and any updates to, its phone interview operations.

To meet this requirement, impacted counties must submit daily reports beginning February 9, 2023 until all applications are processed. Reports must be submitted each day even if no or very few D-CalFresh applications have been submitted. Each county operating D-CalFresh will work with the CDSS to fulfill this requirement.

### **Other D-CalFresh Reporting Requirements**

D-CalFresh cases and their benefits **should not** be reported on the *Food Stamp Program Participation and Benefit Issuance Report* (DFA 256) or the *CalFresh Monthly Caseload Movement Statistical Report* (CF 296).

### **Administrative Claiming**

Administrative costs related to D-CalFresh should be claimed in accordance with normal CalFresh processes. Costs should be tracked as described in [County Fiscal Letter \(CFL\) 17/18-31](#) released on October 13, 2017. Any questions regarding this CFL should be directed to [Fiscal.Systems@dss.ca.gov](mailto:Fiscal.Systems@dss.ca.gov).

**Post-Disaster D-CalFresh Quality Control (QC) Review**

FNS requires the State to conduct a comprehensive review of general D-CalFresh program performance and individual cases. The individual case reviews must consist of a random sample of 1 percent of D-CalFresh cases (minimum of 50, maximum of 1,000), both approved and denied. In addition, the State is required to complete a review of 100 percent of approved CWD employee cases that received D-CalFresh benefits. Outcomes of the D-CalFresh QC review process will have no impact on the State's annual CalFresh error rate.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh Policy and Employment Bureau at [CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov).