

May 28, 2024

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter is to provide County Welfare Departments and stakeholders with information regarding implementation of the SUN Bucks program for summer 2024.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

CALIFORNIA HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

May 28, 2024

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: ALEXIS FERNÁNDEZ GARCIA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

SUBJECT: 2024 SUN BUCKS IMPLEMENTATION

REFERENCE: [CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT OF 2023](#); [ASSEMBLY BILL \(AB\) 120](#); [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(W&IC\) 18901.57](#)

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) and stakeholders with information regarding implementation of the SUN Bucks program for summer 2024.

BACKGROUND

In 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) demonstration project to test the impact of providing summer nutrition benefits through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to low-income families with school-age children. Evaluation of the demonstration project found that it significantly reduced child hunger and improved diet quality. In December 2022, Congress passed the [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023](#), which created a new, permanent S-EBT program for states to provide food benefits to families with school-age children and low-income over the summer months beginning in 2024. In July 2023, California passed [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 120](#) and subsequently codified in [Welfare and Institutions Code \(W&IC\) 18901.57](#) establishing the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) as the lead agency, in partnership with the California Department of Education (CDE), to maximize S-EBT program participation for summer 2024.

In early 2024, the USDA rebranded S-EBT to “SUN Bucks”. The SUN name – derived from the words Summer and Nutrition – reflects the broader, brighter impact USDA’s Summer Nutrition Programs will have on kids across the nation, helping them thrive during summer and beyond. California has adopted USDA’s SUN Bucks brand guidelines.

For summer 2024, it is estimated that approximately 5 million California children will be automatically eligible for SUN Bucks. The program will provide \$40 per month (\$120 total benefit for June, July, and August) in food benefits to children eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM). The school closure period of June, July, and August is known as the Summer Operational Period (SOP).

COUNTY WELFARE DEPARTMENTS’ ROLE IN SUN BUCKS

For summer 2024, CWDs will not be responsible for implementing SUN Bucks. However, because of CWD’s role as trusted social service providers, the CDSS anticipates that eligible families may contact CWDs with general questions about SUN Bucks. Because SUN Bucks benefits are a critical nutrition support provided in response to childhood food insecurity, the CDSS is asking CWDs to proactively share information about the availability of SUN Bucks with eligible families.

Address Changes and Mail Pick Up

Since SUN Bucks cards will be mailed to addresses on file in the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) or the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS), families are encouraged to keep their addresses current with their school and county. For school-aged children who are receiving CalFresh, CalWORKs, or Medi-Cal (under 185% of the federal poverty level [FPL]) that are experiencing homelessness and using a CWD office address for CWD mail pick-up, their SUN Bucks cards will be delivered to a CWD office. In anticipation of card mailings and to assist CWDs with card outreach, CDSS will be offering CWDs a list of children eligible for SUN Bucks in their county and who use a county office for CWD mail pick-up. **CWDs may request their respective list by emailing SUNBucks@dss.ca.gov throughout the summer operational period.**

This ACWDL also provides CWDs with SUN Bucks information for the purpose of referring inquiring families to the appropriate contact for assistance.

SUN BUCKS ELIGIBILITY

All children who are determined eligible for FRPM are eligible for SUN Bucks. Children are determined eligible for FRPM through:

1. A school meal application, or an [Alternative Income Form](#),
2. Receipt of CalWORKs, CalFresh, or Medi-Cal benefits (under 185% FPL) , or

3. Categorical eligibility for FRPM established by attending Head Start, experiencing homelessness, being in Foster Care, is a runaway, or being part of a migrant family.

STREAMLINED CERTIFICATION

Streamlined certification refers to the process by which children are automatically determined eligible for SUN Bucks based on existing data. Streamlined certified children are automatically enrolled in SUN Bucks and do not have to complete an application. These children will automatically receive a pre-loaded SUN Bucks EBT card with \$120 in food benefits. SUN Bucks EBT cards will be mailed to the address of record within the the relevant data system, CALPADS or CalSAWS.

Streamlined certification for SUN Bucks varies by data source and by age.

CALPADS: children age 0-22 years old who have been determined eligible for FRPM based on school meal application/Alternative Income Form or categorical eligibility.

CalSAWS: children aged 6-18 years old who have been determined eligible for FRPM based on receipt of CalWORKs, CalFresh or Medi-Cal (under 185% FPL) benefits.

For summer 2024, children who are not streamlined certified for SUN Bucks *must* apply for FRPM by completing a school meal application or Alternative Income Form and submitting to their local school of enrollment by **August 31, 2024**. Children who are not automatically eligible and do not apply for FRPM by the August 31, 2024 deadline, will not receive SUN Bucks benefits for summer 2024. Families can obtain the correct FRPM application from their school or school administrator's office.

For summer 2024, there is **no** dedicated SUN Bucks application.

SUN BUCKS EBT CARDS

The SUN Bucks EBT cards look the same as the Golden State Advantage EBT card.

All SUN Bucks cards will arrive in the mail with a card insert containing information on how the family can activate the card. SUN Bucks cards can be used just like regular EBT cards. SUN Bucks cards will be accepted at all locations where CalFresh EBT cards are accepted, including grocery stores, farmer's markets, and approved online grocery retailers.

Initial Card Issuance

- Each eligible child will receive a SUN Bucks card with \$120 in food benefits. This means that if a family has four eligible children, they will receive four separate EBT cards.

- SUN Bucks cards will be mailed alphabetically by last name (A-Z) to the address on file in CALPADS or CalSAWS, depending on the method by which the child was determined eligible. Families are encouraged to report address changes as soon as possible to ensure the card is mailed to the correct address.

For summer 2024, S-EBT cards can only be mailed to households by California's EBT vendor, Fidelity Information Systems (FIS). Over-the-counter issuance of S-EBT cards is not permitted. See below for information on SUN Bucks cardholder support, including card replacement requests.

SUN Bucks Benefit Expungement

SUN Bucks benefits are subject to expungement 122 days after available funds are loaded on the card and cannot be restored or replaced once expunged.

PROPOSED SUN BUCKS ISSUANCE TIMELINE

For summer 2024, SUN Bucks EBT cards will be mailed by FIS, staggered across two stages.

Stage 1: Card issuance begins June 2024 for children streamlined certified through CALPADS data as of March 31, 2024 or through CalSAWS data as of February 29, 2024.

- California's EBT vendor will begin issuing SUN Bucks cards to households determined eligible based on streamlined certification.
- The first stage of SUN Bucks card issuance to approximately five million children is anticipated to be complete in August 2024.

Stage 2: Card issuance for children determined newly eligible for SUN Bucks will begin in late August. Children determined eligible through CalSAWS data between March 1 and August 31, 2024 will be issued cards in Stage 2. Children determined eligible through CALPADS data beginning April 1, 2024 will also be issued cards in Stage 2 until issuance is complete.

- This includes families determined newly eligible for SUN Bucks during the SOP based on FRPM eligibility established by a meal application or approval for CalWORKs, CalFresh, or Medi-Cal (under 185% FPL).
- Stage 2 will also include issuances as a result of a replacement request and any other "clean up" necessary to ensure all eligible children receive SUN Bucks.
- This second stage of SUN Bucks card issuance is anticipated to be complete by the end of January 2025.

SUN BUCKS HELPLINE CARDHOLDER SUPPORT

The SUN Bucks Helpline is accessible via the California EBT Customer Service Center and will only be available beginning May 28, 2024. Families can call (877) 328-9677 to reach the SUN Bucks Helpline. The SUN Bucks Helpline can support the following:

- General information and case specific questions
- Personal Identification Number (PIN) set-up support
- Card replacement requests
- Demographic updates, such as new mailing address
- Program opt-out requests
- Eligibility disputes

If a SUN Bucks cardholder has their card number accessible, they can get help regarding SUN Bucks benefits by entering their card number when prompted.

If a SUN Bucks cardholder does not have their card number accessible, they must wait through two card number prompts without entering their SUN Bucks card number. They will then hear and choose the prompt to report their card as having not yet arrived, or been lost, stolen, or damaged. Then, they will hear a prompt for help regarding SUN Bucks benefits. At that time, the caller can select the option specific to their SUN Bucks inquiry and connect with a phone agent for further assistance.

Requests for Personal Identification Number (PIN) Set-Up Support

If a SUN Bucks cardholder requires additional assistance after attempting to use the automated system to set up their PIN, the SUN Bucks Helpline will provide support.

Request for Replacement SUN Bucks Card

Families may request a replacement SUN Bucks card if: (1) a SUN Bucks cardholder reports a previously activated SUN Bucks card as lost, stolen, or damaged, or (2) the SUN Bucks card, though anticipated to be received via mail, was not received. In either scenario, the SUN Bucks Helpline will assist the cardholder with their inquiry.

Additional Requests

Families may also contact the SUN Bucks Helpline for other inquiries such as general eligibility and case specific questions, demographic updates, SUN Bucks program opt-out requests, and eligibility disputes. CWDs should refer families to the SUN Bucks Helpline for any of these requests.

SUN BUCKS BENEFIT DISPUTES

For summer 2024, disputes regarding eligibility or other actions will be handled at the state level through an escalation process facilitated by the SUN Bucks Helpline. If a

family has a concern with a decision regarding their benefits, they may request a review through the SUN Bucks Helpline. Helpline agents will document household information, submit the request directly to CDSS and/or CDE staff for review and determination, and track progress of the review.

SUN BUCKS OUTREACH

The CDSS and CDE will implement a phased and targeted outreach plan to ensure that all children eligible for FRPM across the state are aware of SUN Bucks availability. The SUN Bucks outreach plan will be carried out by education partners, including schools and school districts, as well as community-based organizations and CWDs that serve families with school aged children and low-income.

The goal of the outreach plan will be to ensure families who are eligible and receive their SUN Bucks benefits via streamlined certification know what SUN Bucks benefits are, why they are getting them, how to activate and use their SUN Bucks benefits, where to get more info, and that they do not need to apply.

Families who are eligible for SUN Bucks benefits but not identified through streamlined certification should know they need to apply for FRPM by **August 31, 2024**, where to apply, and how to get more info about SUN Bucks benefits.

The CWDs can spread the word about SUN Bucks by directing clients to information regarding SUN Bucks. The CDSS will post partner outreach materials and frequently asked questions (FAQs) at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/sun-bucks>.

SUN BUCKS, CALFRESH, AND “TO GO” SCHOOL MEALS

SUN Bucks is not the same as or a replacement for CalFresh benefits or other summer nutrition benefits. SUN Bucks has no bearing on eligibility for CalFresh or any other nutrition program. SUN Bucks eligible families may receive SUN Bucks, CalFresh, and “to-go” school meals at the same time. Families do not need to choose between these available resources.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the California Food Assistance Bureau at SUNBucks@dss.ca.gov.