

October 13, 2017

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER (ACWDL)

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: TODD BLAND, Deputy Director
Family Engagement and Empowerment Division

SUBJECT: CALFRESH NEW APPLICATION PROCESSING & CONTINUING CASE
SERVICES FOR PEOPLE DISPLACED BY CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

The purpose of this letter is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with guidance on serving Californians displaced as a result of the wildfires burning in numerous counties across the state. Due to the scope of the disaster and mandatory mass evacuations, displaced households have begun to arrive in counties across California. These households, which include both new applicants and current recipients, may find themselves in need of food assistance. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is providing guidance regarding CalFresh application processing to support CWDs in effectively serving these households.

Please note that this letter is not about Disaster CalFresh. A separate ACWDL will be issued on that topic when authorized.

New CalFresh Applicants

CWDs statewide will serve displaced applicant households under regular CalFresh eligibility rules, including Expedited Service (ES) when appropriate, regardless of whether or not the household is a permanent resident of the county of application.

Expedited Service

CWDs are required to screen all applications to determine if households meet the criteria for ES entitlement. When the CalFresh application indicates that a household meets one of the three ES criteria, the CWD must process the application within three calendar days.

Residency Verification

When verification of residency is impossible due to unusual circumstances, such as a natural disaster, the CWD shall accept self-certification. No length of residency may be imposed.

In such instances, CWDs may also provide several options to ensure that clients without a permanent mailing address receive notices. Options may include:

- Using the address of a friend or family member
- Using the address of a local shelter
- Holding correspondence at the local office for pick up
- Sending correspondence to a local post office as general delivery

Other Verifications

If a displaced household is unable to provide necessary verifications requested by the CWD due to unusual circumstances, self-certification or a signed and dated written affidavit can be used in place of the requested verification.

Continuing CalFresh Households

Processing Requests Made by Residents of Sonoma and Napa Counties

CWDs statewide will serve displaced households who have active CalFresh cases in Sonoma or Napa counties when those households contact them in person, by phone, or online, in accordance with the following guidance:

- If a CWD receives a CalFresh related request (e.g. replacement EBT card, replacement benefits, SAR 7 processing, etc.) from a household with an active case in **Sonoma County**, the CWD may contact **(916) 874-2200**, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to reach a county worker who can assist and process the request.
- If a CWD receives a CalFresh related request from a household with an active case in **Napa County**, the CWD will contact **(510) 374-4000**, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to reach a county worker who can assist and process the request.

When a CWD calls one of these numbers to assist people with cases in Sonoma or Napa counties, the CWD should provide a “warm handoff,” meaning that the person initiating the call remains on the line with the household until the call is answered, explains the household’s situation and needs to the worker, and ensures that the need can be met. Once that has been established, the CWD may drop off the call or remain on the line to assist. (For example, if a replacement EBT card is needed, it may be easiest for all parties to remain on the line to ensure that all the necessary information has been provided, in order to print the card in the location most convenient for the household.) These calls are being routed to be answered quickly by a live agent able to assist with CalFresh continuing case services.

Please note that any CWD statewide that receives a CalFresh related request from a resident of Sonoma or Napa counties will follow this guidance, regardless of the Statewide Automated Welfare System consortia of the CWD.

These procedures are intended to avoid a disruption in CalFresh benefits for displaced households in need of food assistance who may be temporarily residing in a number of communities across California.

CWDs who receive CalFresh related requests from displaced households with an active CalFresh case in a county other than Sonoma or Napa, such as a household displaced as a result of wildfires burning in other California counties, will employ normal procedures to contact the county of residence and assist the clients in resolving their request.

CWDs are highly encouraged to do everything possible to serve all displaced households in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Provision of Replacement Benefits

Federal regulations provide for the replacement of food lost by individual recipients due to “household misfortune.” Household misfortune includes fire, flood, loss of electricity, equipment failure, or other disaster.

To request individual replacement benefits, CalFresh households must report food loss within ten days of the loss – by phone or in person – to be considered timely. This applies unless the household’s county of residence has been approved for an extension of the timely reporting rules. Several California counties have applied for such an extension. CDSS will provide details regarding approval of an extension of timely reporting rules as soon as available.

To receive individual replacement benefits under normal or extended reporting timelines, a household must complete the Replacement and Affidavit/Authorization (CF 303) form, which is an affidavit attesting to the food loss. If a CWD is approved to issue mass replacement benefits, households that have already received individual replacement benefits will be excluded before mass replacement benefits are issued.

Replacement Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Cards

CalFresh households may request a replacement EBT card by calling EBT Customer Service at (877) 328-9677. (A card will arrive by mail in approximately five days, excluding Sundays and holidays.) CalFresh households may also obtain more immediate assistance by contacting their local CWD by phone or in person. The CWD will use the contact numbers on the previous page for Sonoma and Napa counties to request a new card printed in the CWD's location.

Disaster CalFresh

At this time, California has not been authorized to operate Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh). California is applying for Sonoma County and, once approved by USDA, will issue statewide guidance regarding the operation of D-CalFresh via county letter.

CalWORKs

The CDSS is releasing an ACWDL regarding CalWORKs eligibility for disaster victims and evacuees on October 13, 2017. CWDs should reference this guidance for more information on serving new and existing CalWORKs clients who have been impacted by the wildfires.

County Fiscal Claiming

The CDSS is releasing a County Fiscal Letter on claiming administrative activities during an emergency and disaster on October 13, 2017.

Public Outreach

The CWDs are encouraged to inform displaced households of the availability of CalFresh and replacement benefits in CWD offices, websites, and other appropriate channels.

If you have any questions about this ACWDL, or if you would like additional guidance on how to properly process a case, should a displaced household apply for CalFresh benefits in your county, please contact the CalFresh Policy Bureau at (916) 651-8047.