

December 19, 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 DISASTERS

The purpose of this ACWDL is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with clarification regarding current options to serve Californians displaced as a result of disaster. Displaced households, which may 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 and continuing case services to support CWDs in effectively serving these households.

This letter provides the same guidance as the All County Welfare Directors Letter issued on October 13, 2017, in response to the October 2017 Northern California Wildfires, but has been reissued as an ACWDL to be clear that the guidance applies to all emergencies that result in people being displaced within California, including, but not limited to, the December 2017 Southern California Wildfires.

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. During a disaster, special contact instructions may be provided to the public and CWDs to expedite the process of assisting new CalFresh applicants from the disaster-affected area.

Expedited Service

CWDs are required to screen all applications to determine if a household meets 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 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

CWDs statewide will serve displaced households who have an active CalFresh case in the disaster-affected area. During a disaster, special contact instructions may be provided to the public and CWDs to expedite the process of assisting continuing CalFresh households from the disaster-affected area.

If a CWD receives a CalFresh related request (e.g. replacement electronic benefits transfer [EBT] card, replacement benefits, SAR 7 processing, etc.) from a household with an active case in a disaster-affected county, the CWD may contact the county with the active case to assist with processing the request.

When a CWD calls the county with the active case, 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 in the county with the active case, and ensures that the household’s needs 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.)

Please note, any CWD statewide that receives a CalFresh related request from a displaced resident of a disaster-affected county 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 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, or other disaster, loss of electricity, equipment failure, etc.

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. When applicable, CDSS will provide CWDs details regarding approval of an extension of timely reporting rules.

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 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 a CWD by phone or in person.

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 ACIN, 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.