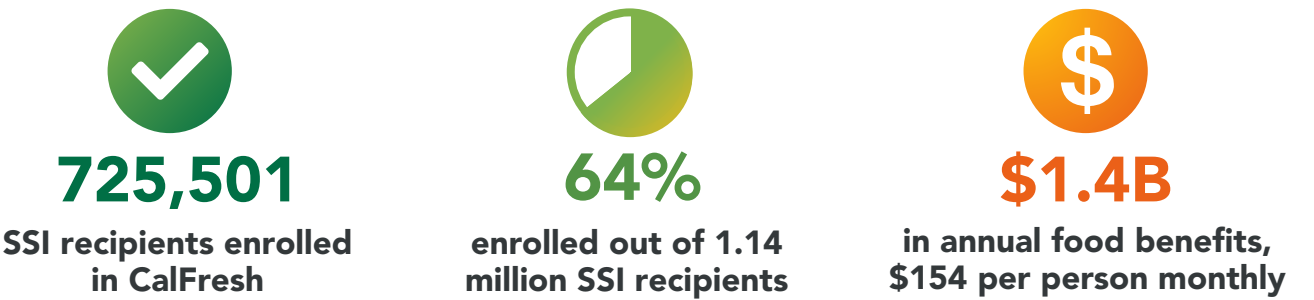


CALFRESH EXPANSION TO SSI RECIPIENTS:

On the Road to Full Enrollment

A Majority of SSI Recipients Now Benefit from CalFresh

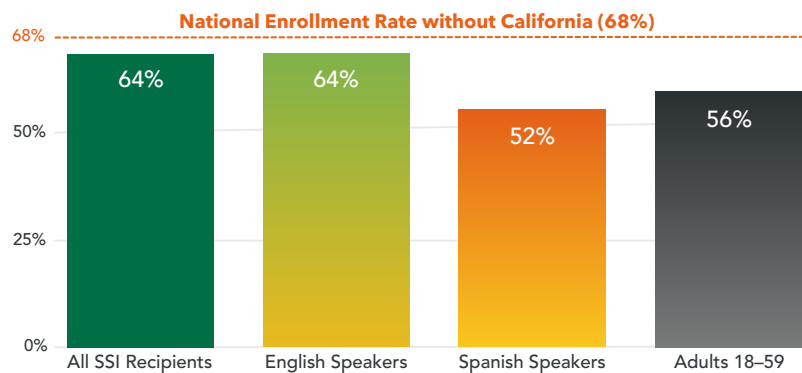
More than 725,500 SSI recipients (64%) in California can now purchase food with CalFresh as a result of the 2019 expansion of program eligibility to include Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients. This is an increase of 3% (~19,300 people) compared to the last time we analyzed enrollment figures in February 2023.* Program participants receive an average of \$154 per person per month, \$8 higher than last year’s average benefit.



Enrolling 47,430 More SSI Recipients Would Bring CA to the National Average Enrollment Rate

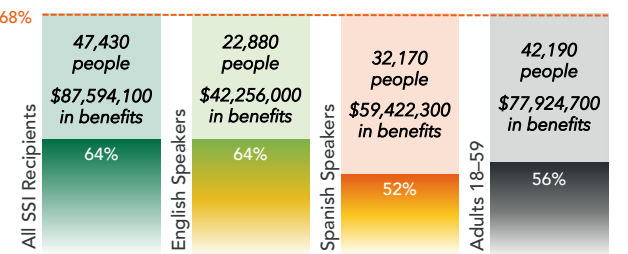
California’s CalFresh enrollment rate among SSI recipients (64%) remains below the national average (68%, excluding California). Below, see the potential impact of additional CalFresh enrollment — how many more SSI recipients would benefit and how many federal dollars they would have to spend in their communities — by increasing enrollment rate to the national average for all SSI recipients and for the largest sub-populations. *Were California to become a top 10 state for CalFresh enrollment of SSI recipients (e.g. 80%+), the impact would be much higher.*

CALFRESH ENROLLMENT RATES OF SSI RECIPIENT POPULATIONS IN CALIFORNIA, FEBRUARY 2024



IMPACT OF REACHING THE NATIONAL AVERAGE (68%)

Estimated Additional People & Annual Benefits if California SSI Recipient Populations’ CalFresh Enrollments Reached the National Average (68%)



*Figures based on February 2024 enrollment and include enrollment in CalFresh, as well as Supplemental Nutrition Benefits (SNB) and Transitional Nutrition Benefit (TNB), the two “hold harmless” programs that the State put in place to protect existing CalFresh households from the negative impacts of the policy change.

THE PATH TO FULL ENROLLMENT

Full CalFresh enrollment of eligible SSI recipients will require dedicated efforts in outreach, policy refinement, and operational improvement. These short- and long-term recommendations are largely focused on areas that will need strong leadership from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California legislature, as well as federal partners at the USDA and Congress, in partnership with county administrators and advocates.



Set our sights on becoming a leading state for SSI enrollment in CalFresh benefits.

Currently, 20% of states have enrollment rates of 80% or higher for SSI recipients, and San Francisco county has followed suit, with an impressive 81% enrollment rate. The state should maintain the momentum of the past five years of excellent enrollment work and set an attainable but ambitious target.



Invest in targeted outreach and support for enrollment of Spanish-speaking SSI recipients.

Enrollment of Spanish speakers has increased over the last year, but remains troublingly low. Successful enrollment of Spanish-speaking SSI recipients will require targeted communications campaigns along with culturally-relevant application assistance, and strong presence in the community.



Strengthen support for targeted outreach and in-reach strategies in under-enrolled communities.

Enrollment rates of SSI recipients continue to vary significantly by county. CDSS should work with counties with enrollment rates below the national average to address barriers to SSI recipient enrollment. This can include urging counties to focus on data matching and other in-reach strategies that target enrollment efforts across programs (In-Home Supportive Services, MediCal), mail postcards to people from low enrolled populations and zip codes, as well as finding opportunities for counties and outreach contractors to share best practices with each other. CDSS should also offer technical assistance to make in-reach strategies a reality, if needed.



Pursue all avenues to maximize simplified enrollment at Social Security Administration (SSA) touchpoints.

In comparison to people in other states, SSI recipients are at a structural disadvantage for CalFresh program access. CDSS should pursue several policy and technology changes to address this:

- Advocate for Food and Nutrition Services to reopen Combined Application Project applications, allowing for enrollment automation via state data exchange.
- Encourage counties to review the often low rate of SSI CalFresh enrollments from local SSA offices and strengthen partnerships and protocols to ensure consistent implementation of required SSA onramps.



Improve application design shortcomings that cause procedural denials; Address denials from technology migration.

CalFresh application denial rates for the SSI population have often been as low as 15%, but have been climbing in recent years, often with increasing rates of procedural denials. Recent technology migrations appear to have resulted in a major uptick in denials. The CalSAWS Project team, who run the backend statewide case management system, known as the California's Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS), and the public facing website for applying for many public benefits (BenefitsCal) should:

- Prioritize making improvements to California's BenefitsCal system for older adults and people with disabilities, who often face higher barriers to successfully navigating online application platforms; and
- Reach out to applicants who may have been denied due to heightened access barriers during county migrations to CalSAWS.