

Assessment of CalFresh Outreach in San Diego County

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Data Sources

SanGIS/SANDAG
U.S. Census Bureau
San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency
San Diego Hunger Coalition
Feeding America – San Diego
Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank

Definitions

CalFresh outreach

To make potentially eligible applicants aware of the program and be involved with clients at one of the following levels:

Promotion

Discussing CalFresh (including how it can help people buy healthy food and dispelling myths), providing outreach materials including pamphlets and income guidelines, and referring people to application assistance agencies.

Outreach

Pre-screening individuals for eligibility, helping an individual fill out and submit an application, and answering an eligibility related question that does not require follow-up.

Access

Assisting beyond filling out and submitting the application, including follow-up and client advocacy to process their application, QR7, and/or recertification.

Areas in need of further investigation

These areas have higher than average poverty rates at 125% FPL by census tract for San Diego County (13%) and lower than average CalFresh participation (of the total population) by zip code for San Diego County (17%).

Stationary CalFresh outreach site

Has a consistent location in the community.

Mobile CalFresh outreach site

Easily adaptable and able to follow trends where the high need populations are located.

Family Resource Center (FRC)

A County office that provides self-sufficiency services and determines eligibility for State and County funded programs like CalWORKs, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal and General Relief.

Acronyms

CBO

Community-based organization

CFO

CalFresh outreach

Background

Consistently not having enough food to eat every day is a foreign concept for most people in the United States. However, increasingly more people struggle with this basic human right on a daily basis. Food insecurity can affect a person at the physical, mental, and emotional level, and has risen with the economic decline that began in 2008. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Currently, there are 16.1% Americans who are food insecure (Feeding America, 2012), and in California, there are roughly 6.4 million individuals (17.1%) who are food insecure (Feeding America, 2012). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was created to enable food insecure households to purchase safe, healthy foods. In California, SNAP is called CalFresh, a name that was created to emphasize fresh, healthy foods. However, California has the worst SNAP participation rate in the country with only 53% of the eligible population enrolled (Cunnyngham, 2011).

Between 2006 and 2011, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) has consistently identified San Diego County as having the worst SNAP participation rate in the country for an urban county; only an estimated 40% of eligible people are enrolled (Food and Research Action Center, 2011). This puts both the state and San Diego County far below the national average of 72% (Cunnyngham, 2011). While it is clear that there is a greater need for CalFresh outreach (CFO) in San Diego County, the first step in solving the problem of low enrollment is to identify areas of high need and potential eligibility. This report seeks to identify areas in San Diego County that are in need of further investigation, which we define as having greater than San Diego County average poverty rates and lower than San Diego County average CalFresh participation.

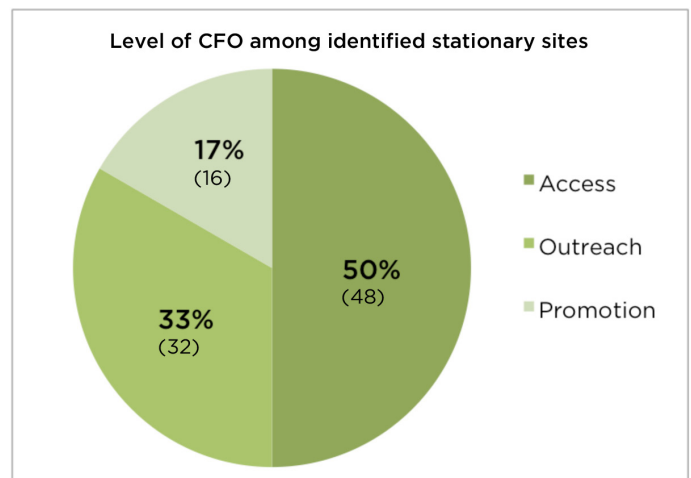
Why This Matters

Assessing CFO is an important preliminary step in identifying opportunities for improvement and for a more

accurate representation of how well our efforts are meeting the existing need. It is also important for future planning efforts within organizations, such as funding and strategic planning, and initiating discussion about opportunities for collaboration among community-based organizations (CBOs).

CBO partners are essential to the success of outreach as they are the bridge between the HHS Family Resource Centers and the community. Through their pre-screening efforts, they streamline the process for HHS and clients.

We estimate that there are 72 organizations in San Diego County conducting CFO at 96 stationary sites and 229 mobile CFO sites. While the San Diego Hunger Coalition provides training and loose oversight to many organizations, it can be difficult to measure the number of organizations doing CFO because there is no single overarching agency monitoring individual outreach organizations. Additionally, while most CBOs may have been trained in the same way, there are slight variations in how each organization carries out their outreach efforts.



The ultimate goal of this assessment is to increase CalFresh participation rates in San Diego County, especially in areas with underserved populations. To our knowledge, there has not been a similar assessment of CFO in San Diego County. This report illustrates the complexities of doing such an assessment.

Methodology

In order to obtain the most up-to-date information about CBOs conducting CFO in San Diego County, we worked with a group of partner agencies to identify where CFO was being conducted. Among others, we reached

out to 2-1-1 San Diego, Feeding America San Diego, and the Jacobs and Cushman San Diego Food Bank. We also reviewed past training logs and CalFresh Task Force participation to identify additional organizations. The organizations on this list were contacted to complete a questionnaire via telephone regarding their current outreach practices. Addresses were geocoded and other quantitative data was coded and mapped using ArcGIS 10 software. Zip code and census tract files were obtained from the SanGIS/SANDAG GIS Data Warehouse.

CalFresh Participation Rate

CalFresh participation by household in each zip code for June 2012 was provided by San Diego County HHS. Since the data for the number of eligible households (or individuals) is not available, these participation numbers were divided by the total number of households in the corresponding zip code (retrieved from the U.S. Census 2010) to obtain the CalFresh participation rate in each zip code.

Poverty Rates at 125% FPL

Poverty data was retrieved from the U.S. Census 2010 and is only available at the census tract level. Poverty rates were calculated at 125% of the federal poverty level (FPL) by dividing the number of individuals at 125% FPL by the total population of the census tract.

Zip Code Discrepancies

Since the list of the post office zip codes is different from the list of county-defined zip codes, discrepancies in the data sets were resolved by using the county zip codes (in the shapefile from SanGIS/SANDAG) and matching the post office zip code with the appropriate county-defined zip code. For example, the CalFresh participation data for post office zip code 92137 was added to the participation number for the county zip code 92110 for a grand total participation number in 92110. The following zip codes are post office-only zip codes and therefore are not included in the SanGIS/SANDAG shapefile: 92112, 92137, 92138, 92142, 92143, 92149, 92150, 92153, 92156, 92159, and 92160. There were also missing data in the CalFresh participation dataset for the following zip codes: 92135, 92136, 92155, 92161, 92182, and 92259.

GIS Mapping

Basic visual analysis was conducted using ArcGIS 10 software. In determining the areas in need of further investigation, any areas that were not primarily residential or are military bases were not included. This includes national parks, commercial areas, university campuses, Camp Pendleton, and Miramar Marine Corps Air Station.

Limitations

As previously stated, this is meant to serve as a needs assessment in order to identify areas in need of further investigation for CFO in San Diego County. This is not meant to be used to draw definitive conclusions or causation. This report is only meant to be a preliminary assessment and is not comprehensive but rather one part of solving the numerous factors involved with hunger.

We used the 2010 Census data for 125% FPL (individual) by census tract to estimate the 130% FPL CalFresh eligibility requirement, which introduces potential for measurement error or bias. Since this poverty data is not available by zip code region, our overlay of CalFresh participation by zip code also introduces potential for measurement error.

The CalFresh participation rates do not include eligibility estimates and may inaccurately represent participation rates in each zip code. Our calculations for participation rates only show the proportion of households in each zip code that are currently participating.

It is important to note that zip code regions include multiple census tracts. The shaded values for poverty rates in the census tracts are a representation of the poverty in the entire census tract, not absolute poverty in that specific location. For example, the large census tracts in the southeastern region of San Diego indicate low poverty areas and appear to cover a geographically large area. However, the population density of these areas is very low. Therefore, there might be a small pocket of low-income individuals living within this census tract in a small geographic area, but the entire census tract will appear as a darker shade. For this reason, population density is important to take into consideration when assessing the maps.

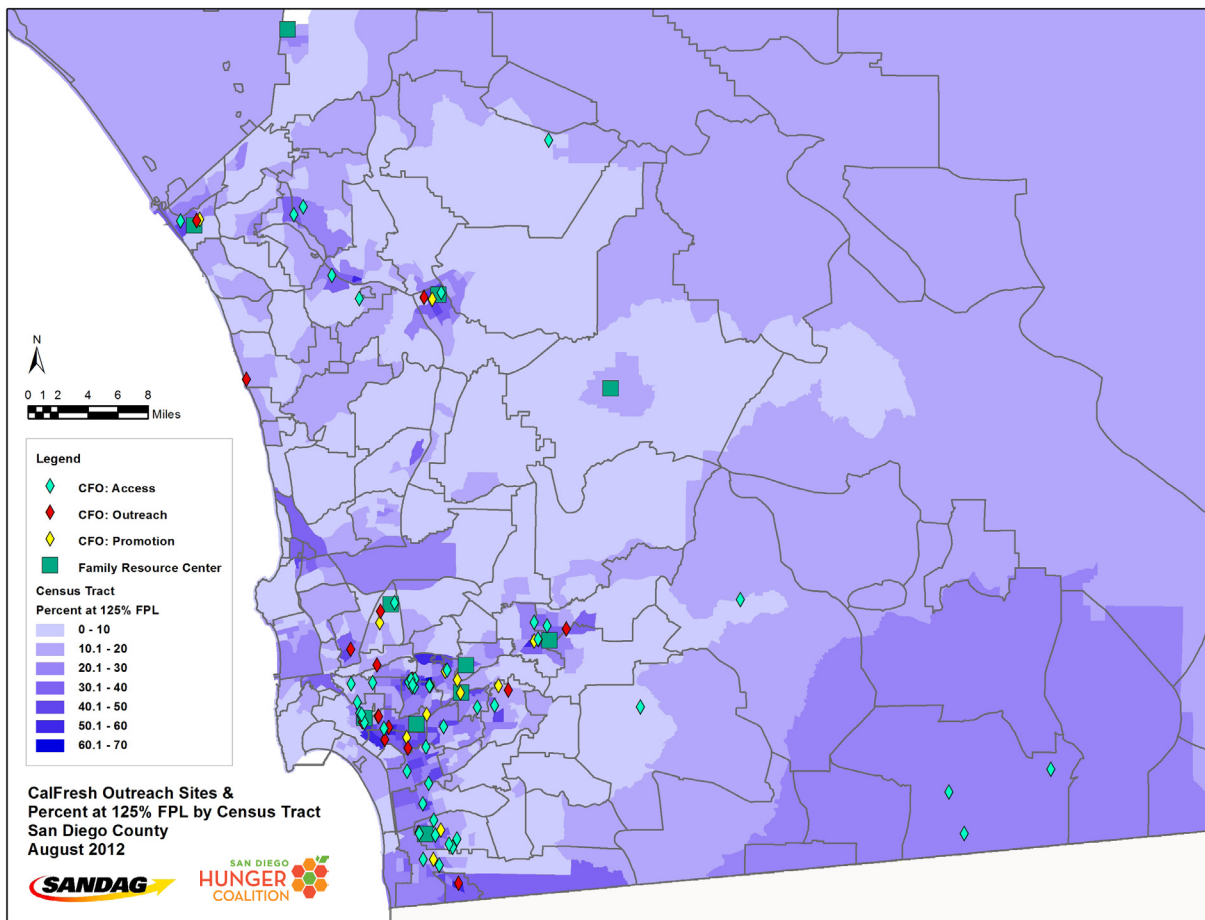


Figure 1. Stationary CalFresh Outreach sites, FRC locations, and percent at 125% FPL by census tract

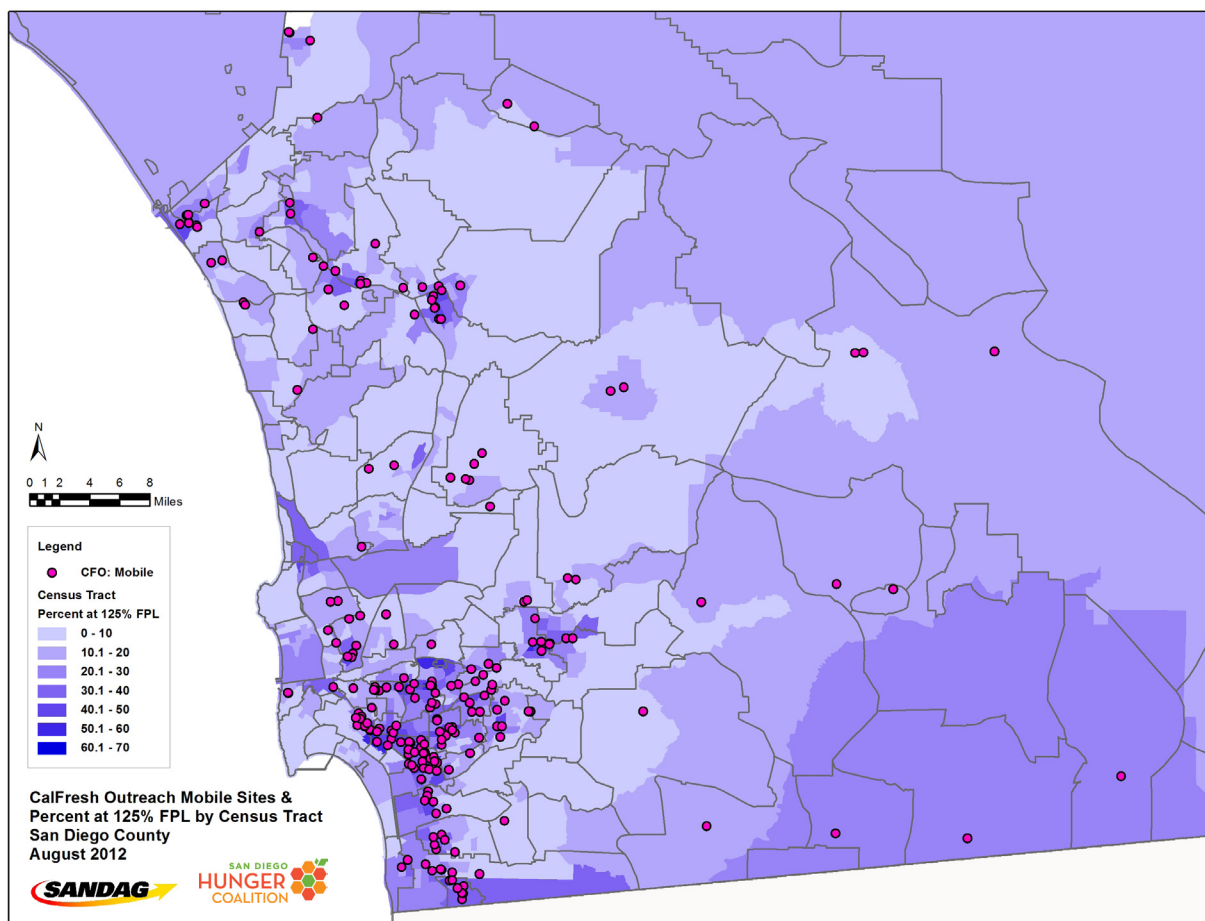


Figure 2. CalFresh Outreach mobile sites and percent at 125% FPL by census tract

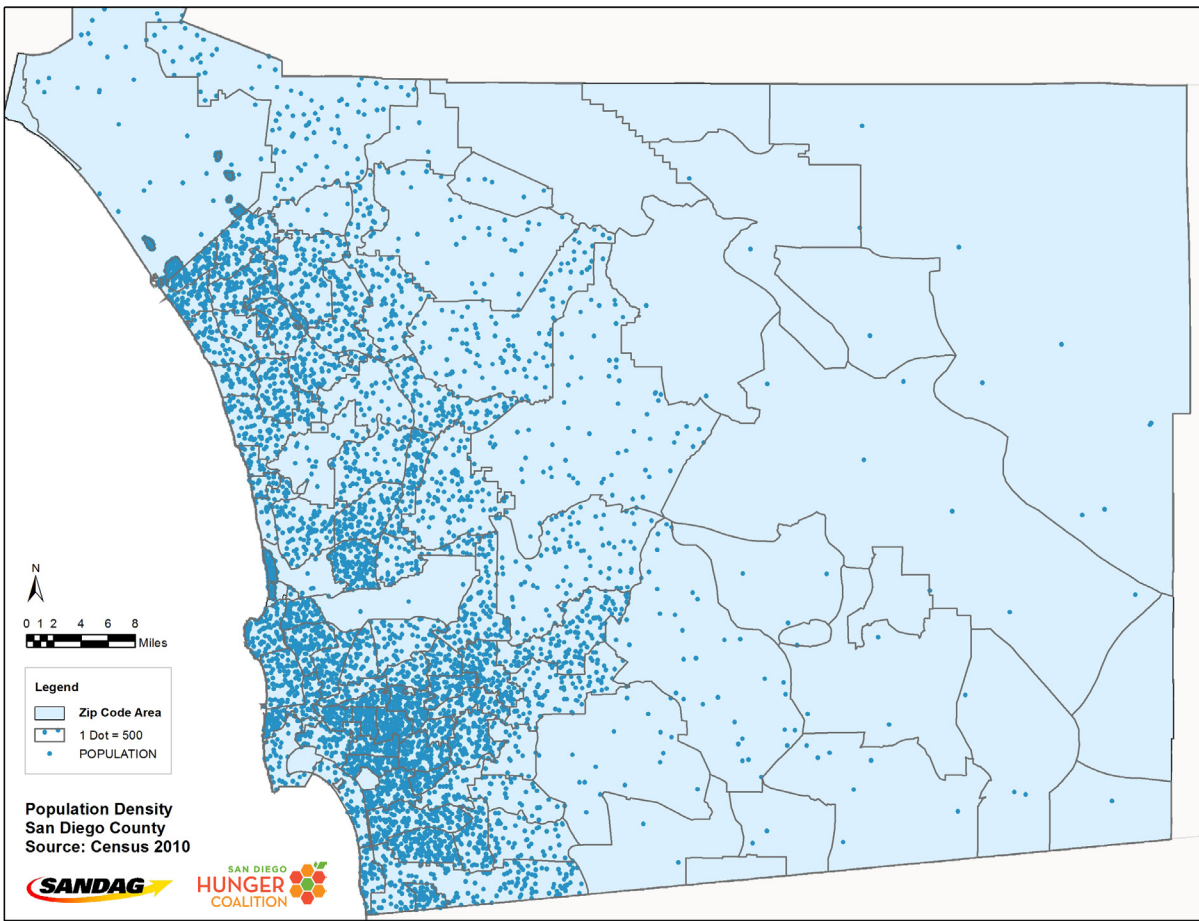


Figure 3. Population density by zip code

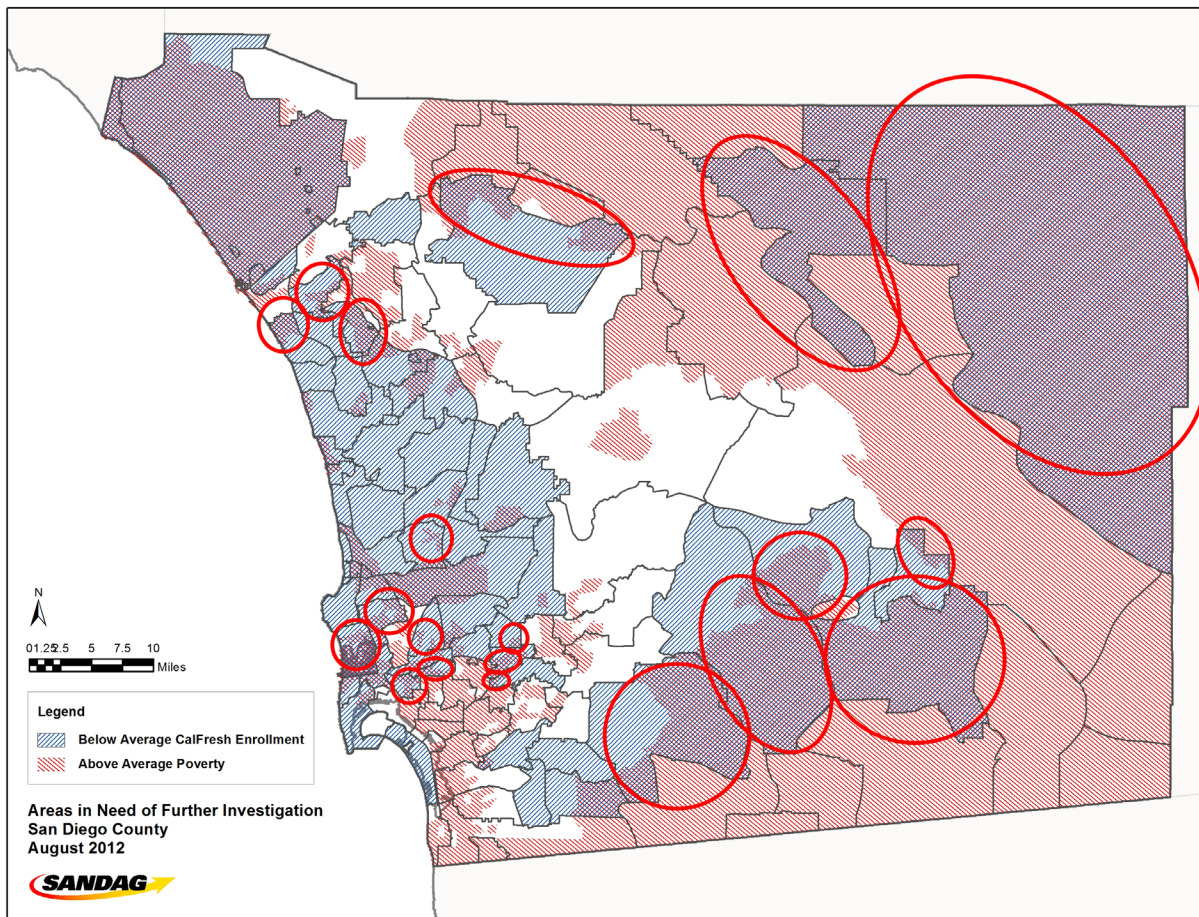


Figure 4. Areas in need of further investigation

Where are the areas of need?

Urban areas

The following 12 zip codes met our “areas in need of further investigation” requirements of having above average poverty rates and below average CalFresh participation rates in high population density areas:

91941 (La Mesa)	92109 (Pacific Beach)
91942 (La Mesa)	92116 (University Heights)
92008 (Carlsbad)	92117 (Clairemont)
92056 (Tri City)	92119 (Lake Murray)
92081 (Vista)	92123 (Serra Mesa)
92103 (Hillcrest)	92126 (Mira Mesa)

Rural areas

The following eight zip codes met our “areas in need of further investigation” requirements and were below the average zip code population size:

91901 (Alpine)	91962 (Pine Valley)
91916 (Descanso)	92004 (Borrego Springs)
91935 (Jamul)	92082 (Valley Center)
91948 (Mt. Laguna)	92086 (Warner Springs)

Key Findings

As listed above, there are a total of 20 zip codes in both urban and rural areas that are in need of further investigation for CFO (Figure 4). We recommend that the next steps in investigating these areas are to talk with partners about their current outreach efforts and further investigate population density and demographic information to determine need in the area. This is important for areas such as Hillcrest (92103) and Carlsbad (92008) as they are considered more affluent areas. However, there could be low-income populations in these zip codes that are being overlooked and in need of CFO.

Additionally, we identified the following top three obstacles to conducting CFO in our qualitative assessment of CBOs:

Lack of Funding

CBOs indicated loss of funding for the program or position, or a lack of funding to expand to meet the need.

Lack of Publicity

CBOs stated that the public is not aware that the organization provides CFO.

Time Consuming Process

CBOs express concern that a client’s wait time in the office and the time it takes the County to process an application, especially for emergency cases, is prohibitive for people in need of food.

Conclusion

While putting effort toward increasing the number and availability of CFO outreach sites in the zip codes we identified, it is important to consider the most common answers from CBOs to our questions about obstacles to conducting CFO. There may already be existing CFO sites in a particular area with high poverty and low CalFresh participation, but they may have limited staff and funds to match the need or to strengthen their partnership with their local FRC. Additionally, this may reduce their capacity to respond to much needed promotion and publicity. Improvements in communication with the public, HHSA, and among CBOs to identify solutions to these barriers should be seriously considered while setting goals for improving CalFresh participation rates.

References

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