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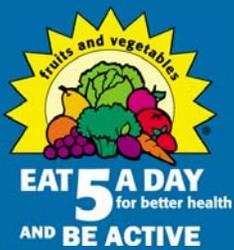
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Perceptions of Food Stamp Program Outreach and Participation in California: Data from Service Providers, Program Advocates and Eligible Users

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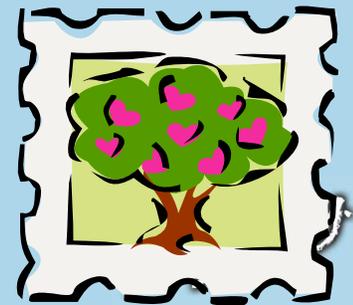
Food insecurity and obesity

- Over 5 million of California's 33.3m people, are food insecure and over 1.2 million of those individuals experienced hunger in 2002*
- More than one quarter of all California's youngsters are overweight**
- Almost 50% of CA's adolescents and adults are (at risk of) overweight or obese***
- Federal nutrition assistance programs can play an important role in mitigating food insecurity and obesity

*Sullivan A and Choi E. August 2002.

**California Food Policy Advocates

***California Health Interview Survey





Basic Facts about the Food Stamp Program (FSP)

- \$1.58 billion are issued annually*
- Number of average monthly beneficiaries is 1.74 million*
- Average monthly issuance is \$78 per recipient; \$205 per household*
- 80.4 percent of recipients are female heads of household*
- 19.3 percent of recipients are elderly/disabled persons *
- 1/3 of applicants get approved.
- Mothers with children participate for an average of 11 months

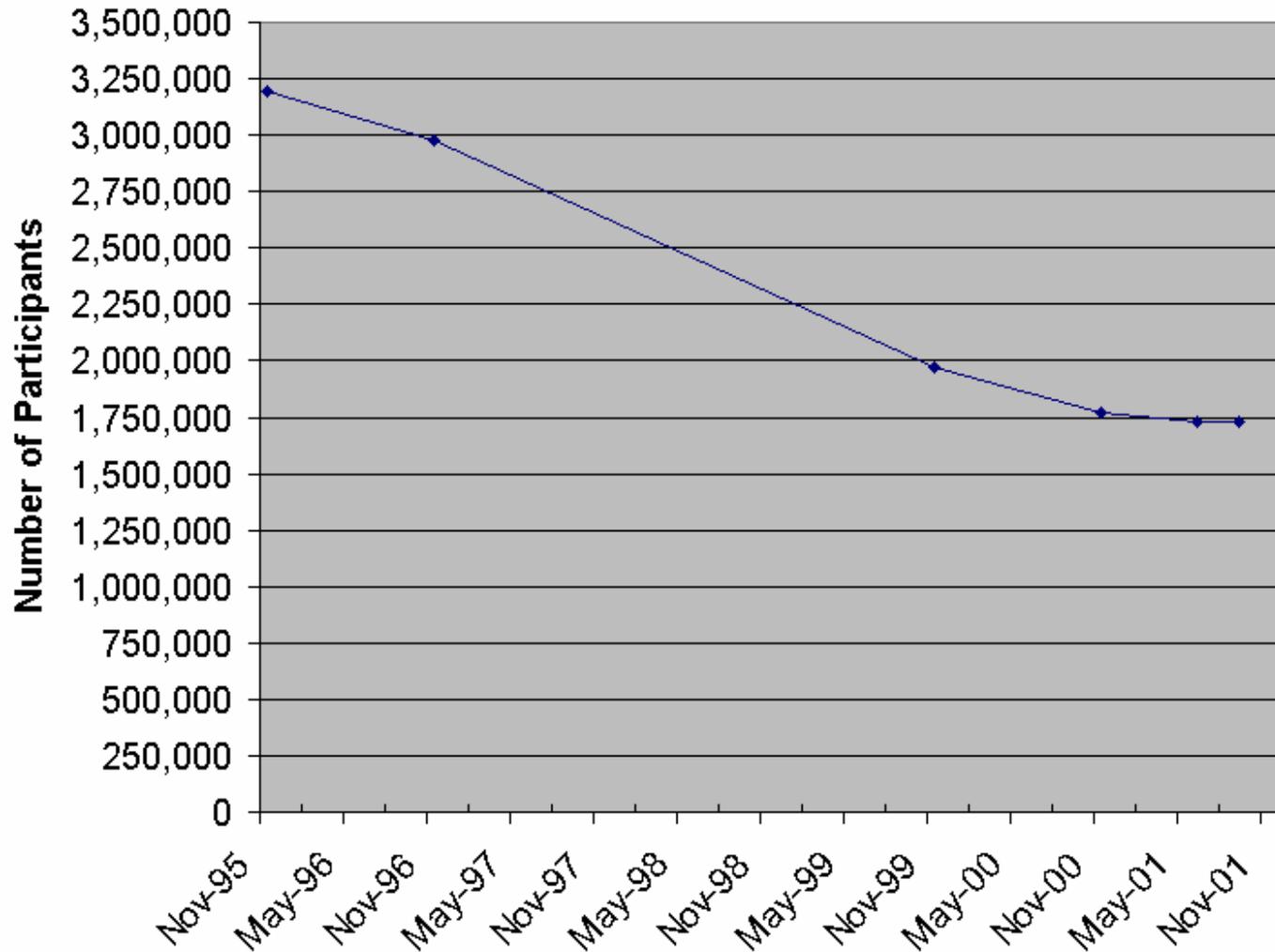
* CA Dept Social Services (CDSS)

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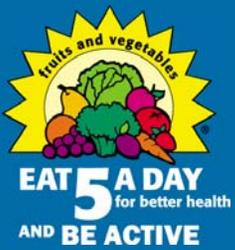


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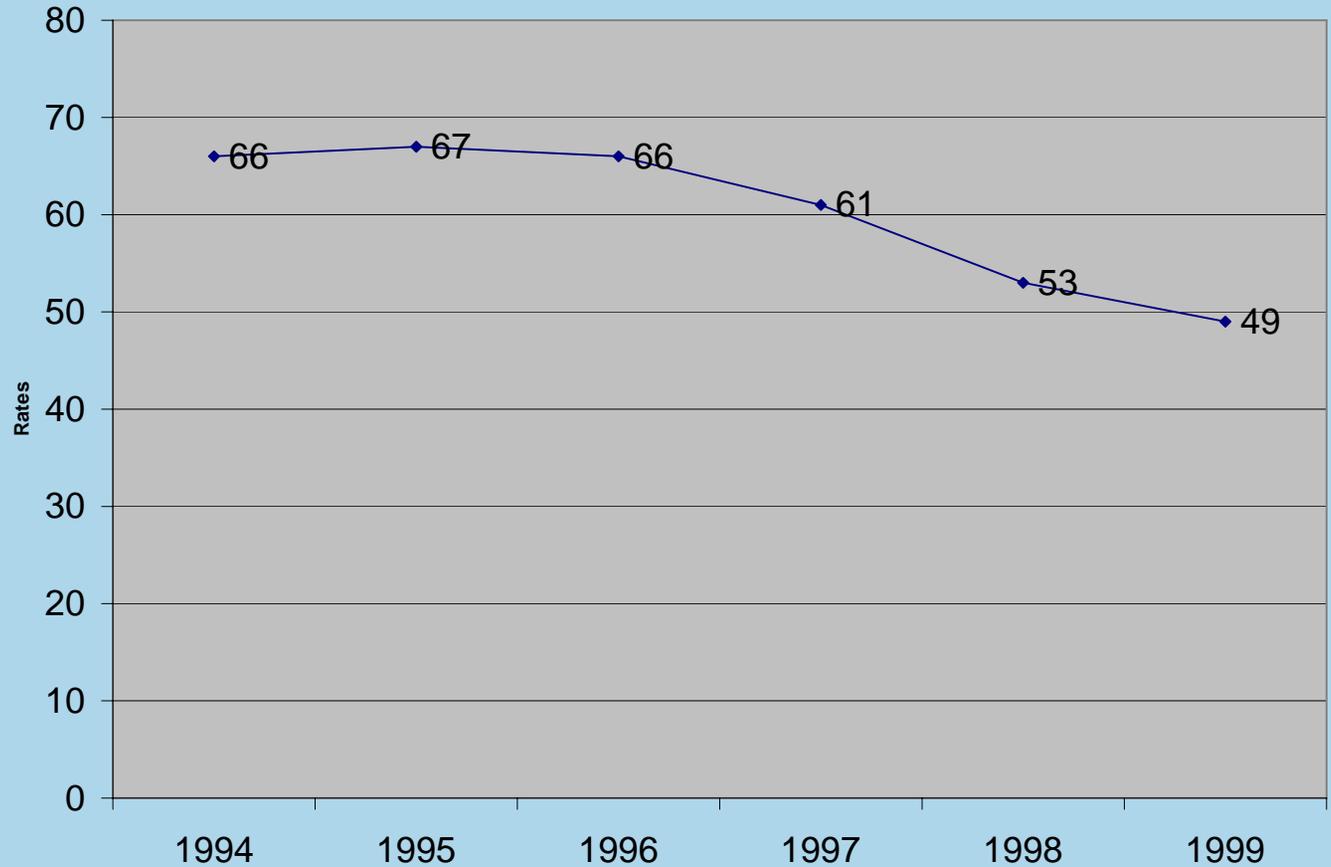
Drop in Food Stamp Participation in California



- California Food Policy Advocates, 2002 at <http://www.cfpa.net/>



Food Stamp Participation Rates 94-99

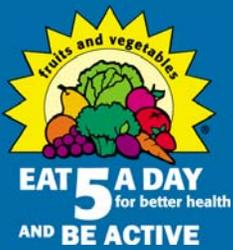


Schirm AL, Castner LA. 2002



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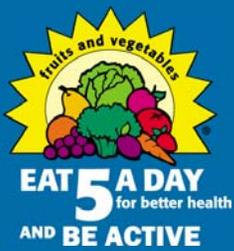


Significance of Underutilization

- 1 in 4 income-eligible adults not receiving food stamps also report being food insecure*
- Use of food stamps would free money for use on other family needs (i.e., housing)
 - 50% of low income families in CA spend 80% of income on housing
- Loss of revenue for local food businesses
- Every food stamp dollar that is spent generates another \$1.84 in economic benefits

*DiSogra CA, et al July 2003

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Purpose of Current Study



- To determine if Food Stamp Program (FSP) advocates and FSP service providers report different successes and challenges to FSP outreach and participation
- To compare FSP advocate's and FSP service provider's perceptions of barriers to utilization with those of FSP eligible persons
- To inform future improvement of CA FSP outreach projects and utilization rates

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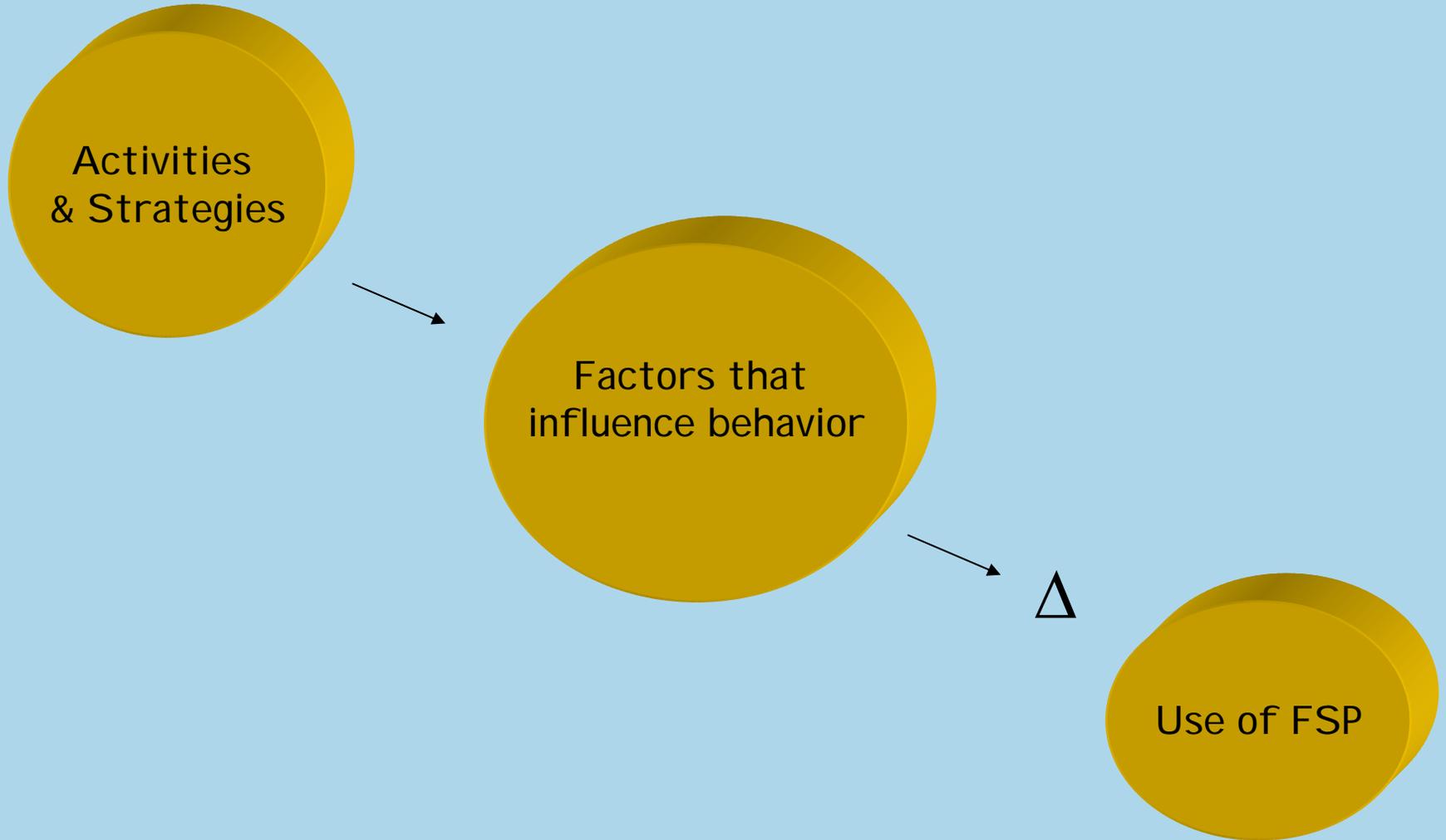


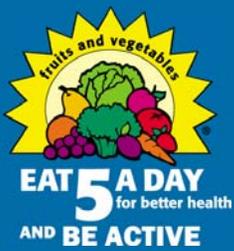
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Theoretical model





Methods – Key Informant Interviews

- Structured interviews
- N = 30
 - 28 phone interviews
 - 1 e-mail interview
 - 1 face-to-face interview
- 17 FSP advocates
- 13 FSP service providers
- Conducted in August 2001



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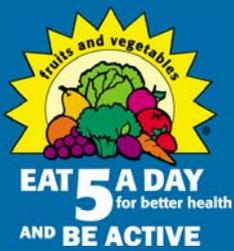
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Sample of Interview Questions

- (1) What do you feel is going well in California in terms of food stamp outreach and participation?
- (2) What do you think are the greatest challenges in California in terms of food stamp outreach and participation?
- (3) Do you think there is underutilization of food stamps in California?

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Sample of Interview Questions

- (4) What would you say are the most effective actions that your organization currently does in terms of food stamp outreach and participation?
- (5) Do you have any ideas about additional actions that your organization could be doing?



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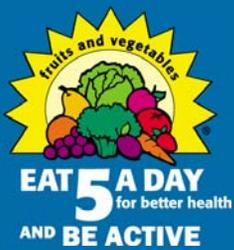
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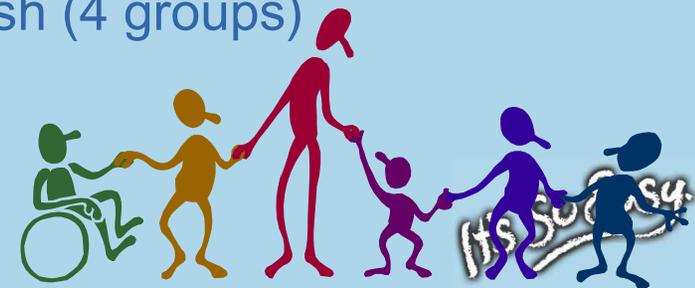


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Focus Groups

- 10 focus groups (n=85) conducted by Juarez and Associates in 2001
- Inclusion criteria
 - White, African American, and Hispanic 18-45 years
 - Not presently using Food Stamps
 - Children in home
 - <\$20,000 annual family income
- Locations
 - Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego
- English (6 groups) or Spanish (4 groups) dominant only

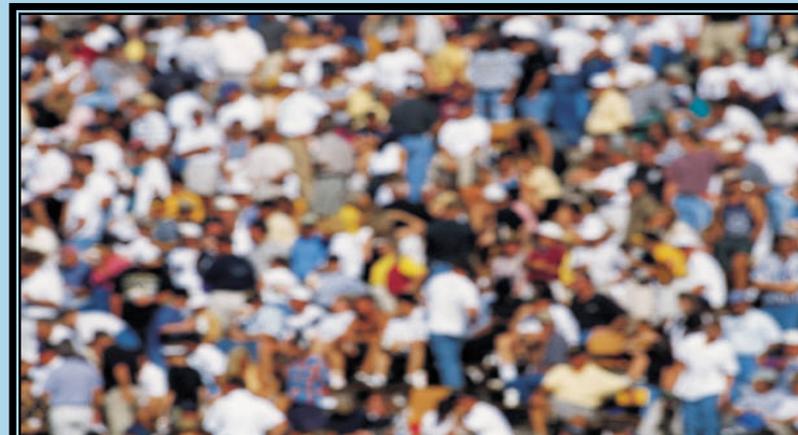


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The Focus Group Sample

- 85 people
 - 15 men; 70 women
- 58% Latino
- 20% African-American
- 19% White
- 55% married/had partner
- 40% single/divorced
- Mean # children - 2.2
- Past participants - 23
- Never used FS - 58
- 30% enrolled in WIC
- 48% free/reduced school meals





Factors that influence use of Food Stamps

- Awareness of programs
- Knowledge of eligibility
- Misinformation about consequences (Hisp)
- Customer service (rude treatment by staff)
- Stigma
- Extensive application requirements
- Complicated application process

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Results - Awareness of programs

- Some advocates and providers thought “*outreach was going well*” and that they had some effective outreach strategies in use, i.e., advertising
- But potential users had little knowledge about the program and eligibility requirements. Most had not seen advertisements for the program



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A SMALL REASON TO FIND OUT IF YOU QUALIFY FOR FOOD STAMPS.

YOUR CHILD.

FOOD STAMPS HELP

SINGLE PEOPLE AND

FAMILIES WITH LITTLE

OR NO INCOME

TO BUY FOOD.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I CAN GET HELP?

You can get help if:

- You have low income or work for low wages.
- You have or will get a social security number.
- You have child or elder care costs, or pay child support.
- You have high rent, a house payment, or utility bills.
- You have a car that is not worth too much.

HOW DO I GET FOOD STAMPS?

- Look in the government section (blue pages) of your phone book. You can find food stamps under "social services department" or "welfare department."
- Call the food stamp office to set up a meeting with a worker. **Ask what papers you need to bring.** The worker will need to see your pay stubs, rent information, and utility bills. If you pay child support, you'll also need your child support papers.
- At the food stamp office, you will talk with a worker, answer some questions, and sign some papers.
- If you can't go to the food stamp office, you may send a friend or relative to talk to the worker. Or, you may be able to talk with a worker on the phone.

CAN LEGAL NONCITIZENS GET FOOD STAMPS?

Talk to a food stamp worker about this. Even if you can't get food stamps, family members born in this country may be able to get them. Getting food stamps won't hurt you if you want to become a citizen.

CAN I GET HELP IF I AM NOT WORKING?

Yes. If you are able to work, you must look for work, take a job offer, or go to training.

WHAT IF I AM ELDERLY OR HAVE A DISABILITY?

If you are 60 years old or over, or have a disability, you don't have to look for work. You can also claim high medical bills that insurance doesn't cover.

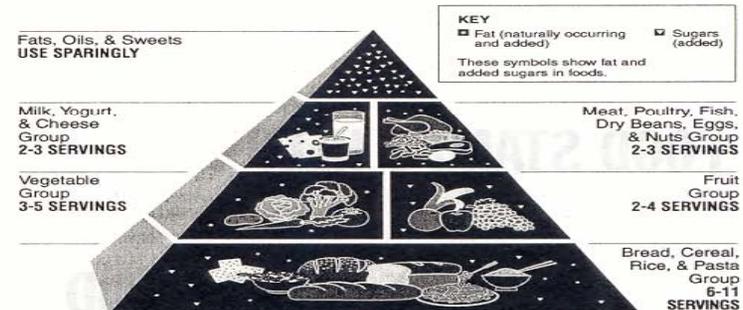
ARE FOOD STAMPS CASH?

No. Food stamps are paper coupons that don't look like regular paper money. You can use them only for food. In some areas, food stamps come on a plastic card that you use just like a bank card.

GOOD FOOD CHOICES PROMOTE A HEALTHY FUTURE AT EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

- Food stamps expand your ability to eat a variety of foods.
- The Food Guide Pyramid shows you how to choose foods to eat a healthy diet.

FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID A GUIDE TO DAILY FOOD CHOICES*



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
*The Food Guide Pyramid is a guideline for normal adults.

- Be physically active! Walk, jog, dance, or play with your kids at least 30 minutes a day.
- Watch your weight! Choose lower fat foods like fruit, vegetables, and skim milk.
- Drink plenty of water!

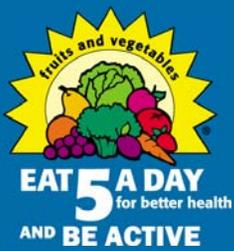
For more information, call:

Or call toll-free **1-800-221-5689**



United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



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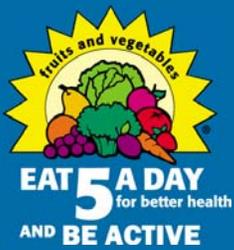
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Results - Knowledge of Eligibility

- Advocates and providers agreed that the FSP is underutilized because potential users are not aware of eligibility requirements
- One advocate said “*people don’t have a clue about the FSP and if so, [they are] worried about getting caught if illegal or it counts against them.*”
- Potential users corroborated this
- Misperceptions common
- Elderly are most impacted

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Special concerns for Spanish-dominant Latinos

- It would be considered “public charge” by the BCIS* and jeopardize their residency status
- Children would have to pay back any assistance in the future
- The children would be the first sent off if the United States was in a war
- It would affect any purchases of homes in the future

*Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

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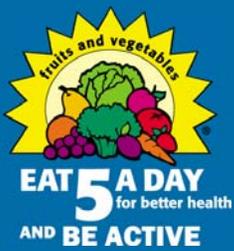
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Results - Stigma

- All three groups agreed that stigma is a problem
 - It is manifest in
 - poor treatment and “dirty looks” in stores
 - perception of users as “lazy”
- Advocates and Providers said the name of the program creates stigma but the potential users did not want to change it



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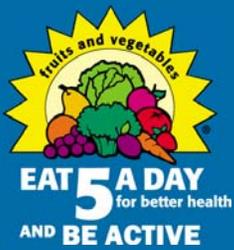
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Results – Customer Service

- Advocates and users agreed that treatment by eligibility workers was a barrier to participation
- Providers did not mention customer service as a problem
- One advocate attributed poor service to administrator's and worker's perception of the FSP as a welfare program
- Potential users expressed frustration through comments like,
 - “*They cop this attitude.*”
 - “*They make it confrontational*”
 - “*Sometimes they don't believe you*”

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Results – Complex Application Process

- All 3 groups agreed the application process is complicated due to:
 - The “*length of the application*”
 - The time required to fill it out
 - A system that is “*difficult to navigate*”
 - *Avg 2-3 visits and is problem for families with children and those working*
 - It is perceived as “*a bureaucratic process*”

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Excessive eligibility and application requirements

- Potential users lamented that too much information was required for the application.
 - “...complex rules”
 - Auto (max value was \$4650)
 - Biometrics (Finger imaging) (advocates and providers viewed this as a barrier but potential users did not. One gentleman remarked that it is required for a driver’s license)
 - Income verification records, rent receipts, utility bills, ss#
 - More complicated and extensive than WIC

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General Conclusions

- Many potential Users had little awareness of programs even though some providers and advocates believed they were doing a good job of outreaching to the target audience
- Even though As and Ps believed they were doing a good job of outreaching to the target audience there is widespread ignorance of eligibility requirements
- Advocates and potential users agreed customer service was poor, but providers did not comment in this issue

General Conclusions

- All 3 groups agreed participation is inhibited by the stigma associated with program
- All agree the application process and requirements are complicated but As & Ps are intervening to change these barriers



CA Food Stamp Access Improvement Project

- USDA wants participation of 225,000 individuals by 2004
- \$282,000 distributed to 10 food banks; range 5,000-33,000
- Increase FS promotion – small and mass media (brochures, flyers, PSAs) to move individuals through the stages of change
- Increase FS Outreach – face-to-face contacts, e.g., to prescreen individuals for eligibility or assist them with application

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Implications for food stamp interventions

- Advocacy and follow-up – Accompany people to Dept of Social Svcs, determine if they completed the interview, what happened, engage worker – did they qualify?

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References

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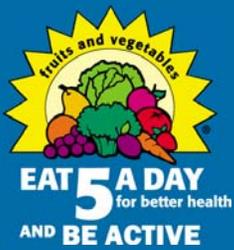
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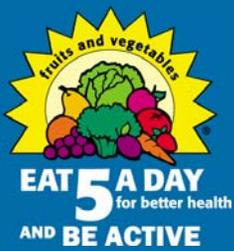
Error rates and sanctions

	National Tolerance	California	Sanction
FFY 2000	8.91	13.99	\$11.8M
FFY 2001	8.66	17.37	\$114.3M
FFY 2002	8.26	14.84	\$60M
FFY 2003	8.00 (10/02 Projection)	6.82 (as of 5/03)	

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Error rates and sanctions – the good news

- California is leading the nation with the largest drop in error rate & is projected to be under the National Tolerance rate
- CA may receive a bonus for as much as \$12M.
- Source: Personal Communication with Terwillinger at Food Stamp Corrective Action Bureau



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