

Network for a Healthy California



The Network's

Writing Style Guide

Introduction

Welcome to the *Network for a Healthy California (Network)*, Champions for Change Writing Style Guide. All *Network* materials – whether created at the state or local level – are a reflection of our organization and should embody the Champions for Change brand. This guide is designed as a supplement to the *Network’s* Branding Guidelines Manual, providing additional direction on conveying the Champions for Change brand through words. It is intended to help anyone writing on behalf of the *Network* to make sure all materials are consistent – both in style and content. To keep the guide current, periodic updates will be made.

Network materials should continue to follow existing review and approval processes. Consistent use of this guide in materials development will reduce review time required by state-level Program Managers and may also speed up the overall approval process.

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This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health's *Network for a Healthy California* with funding from USDA SNAP, known in California as CalFresh (formerly Food Stamps). These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. CalFresh provides assistance to low-income households and can help buy nutritious foods for better health. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. For important nutrition information, visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

Inspire Change

We Are About Change

The *Network* is a dynamic statewide public health campaign that empowers low-income Californians to improve the health of their family and community. At our core, we are about change and the understanding that with small steps, healthy changes can happen at home and in our neighborhoods.

It's important to understand that the *Network* is not just a government agency directing consumers to embrace fruits, vegetables, and physical activity. Rather, we're a unified statewide movement working at a grassroots level to create a new social norm in which healthy eating and physical activity are the accepted choice for all Californians – especially low-income adults and children, many of whom currently do not get the nutrition or physical activity they need to stay healthy.

Our Goal is to Reform the Norm

Our goal at the *Network* is to reform the norm which accepts the conditions that cause overweight, obesity, and sedentary lifestyles and replace it with a norm that expects fresh, healthy food and active living. We're making it happen with a powerful force of more than 40,000 individuals working together under a unified brand and set of messages. In the face of powerful opposing forces, the interventions are changing the way people think and act when it comes to their health and the health of their families and communities.

To continue our success, we must ensure we always speak from one voice and use our written words to continually reinforce our message of change and empowerment. We must make certain that we all communicate the same thing and express it the same way to achieve maximum impact. This writing style guide, which includes tips and examples, is designed to help unify our message, communicate the new social norms we are trying to establish, and empower our target consumers to embrace those social norms to live healthier, more active lives.

Here are some ways you can use your writing to help the *Network* create change and reform the norm:

- **Introduce our consumers to the new social norm we are trying to create** – the image of healthy Californians who make good nutrition and daily physical activity a priority for themselves and their families.
- **Be a model of change** – show by example how change can happen with achievable examples and realistic goals. And whenever possible, use role models like *Network* Champion Moms to talk to other moms, inspiring them to overcome challenges to make healthy changes in their families and communities.
- **Empower the consumer to become role models** who can spread the message of change to others. Help them become change agents who get involved and work to change the conditions that keep their neighborhoods and communities from being healthy.

Inspire Change

Here's another way to think about it: [Network for a Healthy California](#)

- Who:** A dynamic statewide public health movement empowering low-income Californians to improve the health of their families and communities.
- What:** Create a new social norm in which healthy eating and physical activity are the right choice for all Californians – especially low-income adults and children, many of whom currently do not get the nutrition or physical activity they need to stay healthy.
- Where:** From the North Coast to San Diego, the Bay Area, the Central Valley to the inland deserts and Northern Mountains, we create healthy change in every region of the state.
- When:** Every day.
- Why:** To increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, food security, and chronic disease prevention.
- How:** By empowering California families to take small steps toward healthy change.

Use the Pillars to Think Beyond Fruits, Vegetables, and Physical Activity

Empowering consumers to eat the daily recommended cups of **fruits and vegetables** and getting the recommended levels of **physical activity** every day are important goals the *Network* is striving toward. But, that's not all we're about. The *Network* does much more than promote better nutrition and physical activity. We're also about addressing **food security** and **chronic disease prevention**.

Remember, the mission of the *Network* is to create innovative partnerships that empower low-income Californians to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, and food security with the goal of preventing obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases.

It's important that your writing reflect all four pillars the *Network* represents. Here are some ways this can be done:

- Address food security issues, providing solutions for finding affordable fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods and promoting the availability of food stamps to help put healthy food on the table.
- Provide ideas for ways families can be physically active together.
- Give tips on how low-income families can afford fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet.
- Empower the consumer to speak up for healthy change in their communities.
- Highlight the serious health problems that Californians can help prevent by eating healthy and being physically active every day.

Capture the Tone

We Are About Empowerment

The *Network* is about empowerment. We actively create the change we want to see in the world. We are not a passive organization. The following are some guidelines for keeping the empowerment tone in your written materials targeted to consumers, along with examples of what to say and what not to say.

Lead with passion and vision, always keeping a positive tone. As needed, use facts to support your statements.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
The <i>Network for a Healthy California</i> is about change and the understanding that with small steps, healthy changes can happen at home and in our neighborhoods. The power is in our hands. Together, we can fight serious health problems like childhood obesity, which affects more than 40 percent of California children ages 9 to 11.	According to the California Department of Public Health, 41 percent of California children ages 9 to 11 are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Every California family should eat more fruits and vegetables to help prevent their children's risk for chronic diseases.

Use action-oriented words and phrases, not rhetorical, passive, or conceptual ones (avoid words like "should," "would" and "could").

Quick Tip 1:

To learn more about how to set the right tone in *Network* materials, please refer to pages 9-11 of the *Network's Branding Guidelines Manual*.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal or snack to help protect your family from serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer.	By making small changes, you could make a big difference for your children.

Write in the present tense and avoid being passive or using the past tense.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Moms like us work hard to give our families a healthier, happier life.	Moms across the state have worked hard to keep their families healthy.



Capture the Tone

Capture the “we” in our organization. Be inclusive and speak from the first person.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
We empower low-income Californians to live healthier lives by eating more fruits and vegetables and being physically active every day.	The <i>Network</i> wants every California family to eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and to get daily physical activity.

Quick Tip 2:

Your materials aren't final until they've been proofread. It's always good to get a fresh set of eyes to review your documents, so be sure to have your materials checked for *Network* tone and style, **and** grammatical accuracy. Be sure to follow your organization's internal approval process, and have your materials approved by your *Network* Program Manager before they are distributed.

Create an empowering, motivating tone.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Moms just like you all over California work hard to keep their families healthy. Help protect your family from serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer by serving more fruits and vegetables and being active every day.	If your children don't get enough physical activity and don't eat the right food, they will be at risk for obesity and other chronic diseases.

Be confident, but don't sound preachy.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Together, we can make positive changes in our own lives and change the lives of our children, one step at a time.	If you want your family to be healthy, you must make changes today.

Capture the Tone

Make sure our message is preventive, not prescriptive.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Serving lots of fruits and vegetables every day is one of the best things you can do to keep your family healthy.	Eating fruits and vegetables will keep your family healthy and will help your family members lose weight and give you back your energy.

Be inspirational without sugar coating.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
Moms just like you are overcoming challenges to make healthy changes in their families and communities.	It's easy to incorporate fruits and vegetables into every meal – give it a try and you'll see.

Avoid “authority speak” – remember we are a movement for change, so our messages need to convey empowerment instead of authority.

DO SAY:	DON'T SAY:
You have the power to make healthy choices for your family, like being more active and eating healthy foods.	Increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables and physical activity levels are major strategies for preventing chronic diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

Capture the Tone

Plain Language

Consumer-targeted *Network* materials should be written for a 5th grade reading level. There are many tips for lowering the literacy level of materials. (Please refer to page 11 of the *Network's* Branding Guidelines Manual for additional tips). One of the easiest ways is to use short, simple words and phrases in place of longer, higher-literacy ones. Here are some examples:

Quick Tip 3:

Be sure to always assess the reading level of your materials. Refer to page 11 of the Network's Branding Guidelines Manual for more information regarding readability.

LONG, HIGH-LITERACY WORD/PHRASES	SHORT, SIMPLE, LOW-LITERACY ALTERNATIVES
A considerable amount	A lot of/lots of
Additional	More, another
Assess	Decide
Certain	Some
Choose/select	Pick
Chronic disease	Serious health problems
Consists of	Made up of
Contain	In, has
Continue	Keep going
Contract	Tighten
Convenient	Easy
Delicious	Tasty
Determine	Decide/pick
Derived from	Made from
Economical	Low-cost
Exchange/substitute	Switch
Food security/food access issues	(Access to) or (available) healthy foods
For information	To learn more
Household	Homes/families
Increase	Add/raise
Increase physical activity	Be more active
Introduce	Try
Maintain	Keep
Maintain a healthy lifestyle	Be healthy
Necessary	Need
Numerous	Many
Nutritious	Good for you/good for your family
Prefer	Like
Prepare	Make
Prevent	Avoid
Provides	Gives
Purchase	Buy
Repair	Fix
Requires	Needs
Suggestions	Tips/ways/ideas
Vibrant	Bright

Communicate a Consistent Message

We've all heard the phrase "consistency is key." It couldn't be more true for a program like ours. Our brand is supported by four pillars that represent the essential goals of the *Network* – increased fruit and vegetable consumption, increased physical activity, increased food security, and increased chronic disease prevention. How we communicate these four pillars must be consistent to show a unified campaign. Let's take a closer look at our four pillars and the language we use to describe each.

Fruits and Vegetables

KNOW WHAT TO RECOMMEND

In the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, servings was replaced by cups by gender for different ages and physical activity levels. The chart below shows a range of the recommended number of cups of fruits and vegetables people should eat each day (keep in mind, a cup is about the size of one medium apple). Reaching the higher amount is better. For more information, refer consumers to the USDA Web site, www.mypyramid.gov.

<i>If you belong to this group ...</i>	<i>You should eat this amount of fruits ...</i>	<i>... and this amount of vegetables every day.</i>
Kids 2 to 5 years old	1 – 1½ cups	1 – 2 cups
Kids 6 to 11 years old	1 – 2 cups	1½ – 3 cups
Kids 12 to 18 years old	1½ – 2½ cups	2 – 4 cups
Adults 19+	2 – 2½ cups	2½ – 4 cups

Quick Tip 4:

With the exception of the Retail Program's Fruit and Veggie Fest, the Network always uses the term "vegetable" or "vegetables" not "veggie" or "veggies."

Here is the approved way to talk about fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations in written materials:

Adults and teens need 3½ to 6½ cups of fruits and vegetables, and elementary-age children need 2½ to 5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day. To find out how many cups of colorful fruits and vegetables each member of your family needs, visit www.mypyramid.gov.

Communicate a Consistent Message

COMMUNICATE THE BENEFITS OF EATING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Fruits and vegetables not only taste great, they are good for the body and help prevent serious health problems. Here are ways to describe the health benefits of fruits and vegetables:

Eating lots of fruits and vegetables is a good way to keep your family healthy. Fruits and vegetables taste great, and they help fight serious health problems. These problems include obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer.

or

Fruits and vegetables have lots of vitamins, minerals and fiber, and they are low in fat. That means they help lower your risk of serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer.

Offer suggestions for how consumers can achieve their recommendations.

In order to change social norms, we need to lead by positive example. Be sure to give suggestions for ways your readers can make fruits and vegetables a part of their everyday diets.

Provide easy serving suggestions:

Example 1: You can use fruits and vegetables to make great tasting, low-cost, fast, and healthy meals. Just add some chopped vegetables to a salad or fresh fruit to your kid's cereal.

Example 2: Eat crunchy baby carrots or celery sticks instead of chips.

Give reasons why fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables are all healthy options:

Example 1: Frozen fruits and vegetables are great time savers because they are already cleaned and ready to use. As-is, they keep the same nutrients as fresh, and they usually cost less.

Example 2: If you can't find fresh fruits or vegetables, buy canned or frozen ones. They taste great, cost less, keep longer, and are easy to make.

Communicate a Consistent Message

Provide cost-saving ideas:

Example 1: Buy extra fruit in season when it costs less, and then freeze it for later.

Example 2: Frozen fruits and vegetables usually cost less, especially if you buy the store brands. Plus they usually last longer than fresh, which means they will be on hand when you need them for quick meals.

Physical Activity

KNOW WHAT TO RECOMMEND

The *Network* aims to make active living a normal behavior for consumers. Our materials emphasize the need to “be active.” If you include a specific quantifiable recommendation, the following is what the *Network* recommends:

Children and teens need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Adults need at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

KNOW WHAT TO SAY

At the *Network*, we prefer to use the terms “be active” and “get daily physical activity” rather than talking about “exercise.” Exercise sounds like work – being active sounds like something we can all accomplish.

HELP READERS UNDERSTAND THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Along with eating more fruits and vegetables, daily physical activity helps prevent serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer. When you talk about serious health problems, use the order referenced on page 14 (just like you did when talking about the benefits of eating more fruits and vegetables).

GIVE SUGGESTIONS

If space permits, give readers examples of ways they can be active. Make suggestions that are achievable and realistic for our consumer’s lifestyle and budget. Remember, we want physical activity to become a norm for families.

Example 1: We know it can be challenging to be active every day, but as a Champion for Change, you can do it! If it’s tough to find 30 minutes each day for physical activity, try 10 minutes of moderate-intensity activity three times a day, like taking a walk or playing a game of tag with your kids.

Communicate a Consistent Message

Example 2: Turn up your favorite music and dance with your kids. It's fun and involves the whole family. (Note: This turns the chore of "working out" into a fun way to be active).

Example 3: Find fun ways to get active. Play with your kids, go to the park, or play a game of Frisbee. Check your local community centers for low-cost or free sports teams or fitness classes that you and your family can join.

Example 4: If you're taking the bus, get off one stop early and walk the rest of the way.

Food Security **WHAT IT IS**

Food security is defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life." Food security includes at a minimum: 1) the ready availability of nutritious, safe foods; and 2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies)" or in lay terms "knowing where your next meal will come from."¹ For low-income California families, participation in the Food Stamp Program is a means to stretch the family budget to assure that the home is food secure. In the context of providing nutrition education, include information on the Food Stamp Program and tips on how and where consumers can purchase healthy foods. Here are some ways to talk about these issues in your written materials:

Give ideas about nutrition assistance programs and places consumers can find low-cost, healthy foods:

Example 1: Look for fruits and vegetables in season at your local farmers' market. When fruits and vegetables are out of season use frozen and canned, they cost less.

Example 2: Enroll your kids in free or reduced-price school meals for a healthy breakfast and lunch at school. You can sign them up any time during the school year by calling the school office.

Example 3: Food stamps are redeemed through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at almost all food stores. Call 1-877-847-3663 to see if your family might be eligible.

1 G. Bickel and coauthors, *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security*, Revised 2000.

Communicate a Consistent Message

Example 4: Plant a small garden at home with the kids. Try growing good container plants like tomatoes, peppers, and squash. For more information on how to start your own garden, visit www.garden.org.

Empower families to speak up for community change:

Example 1: Get more healthy foods into your neighborhood. Ask the stores in your area to offer more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Example 2: Find out if an empty lot in your neighborhood can be turned into a community garden. Work with your neighbors to get the community garden started. They will love growing their own food.

Example 3: Want to learn where the nearest farmers' markets are? Check out www.cafarmersmarkets.com. Want to get a farmers' market started in your neighborhood? Find out how at www.cachampionsforchange.net.

Example 4: If your kids don't have a salad bar at school, ask their principal or school child nutrition director to start one. Or, see if the PTA can put a salad bar in the cafeteria.

Quick Tip 5:

The federal name for the Food Stamp Program has changed to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Acknowledgements and funding statements must reference the federal name. However, California is developing its own name to replace the Food Stamp Program, which will be unveiled in 2010. Until then, California will continue to use the name "California Food Stamp Program" when referring to the state program or "food stamps" when referring to the instrument.

Promote participation in the California Food Stamp Program:

Participation in the California Food Stamp Program will help our consumers buy fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods. The *Network* can and should **promote** participation in the California Food Stamp Program as a means to stretch the low-income consumers' food budget. Here are examples of ways to promote food stamps in your written materials:

Example 1: Learn more about how food stamps may increase your family's food budget. For more information, call 1-877-847-3663 or visit www.myfoodstamps.org.

Example 2: Times are tight, food stamps stretch the family food budget so you can keep healthier food on your table. Visit www.myfoodstamps.org/eligible.htm to see if you qualify.

Example 3: These days, food stamps can make healthy food more affordable for more families. For more information, call 1-877-847-3663.

Communicate a Consistent Message

Note, in all examples the name “food stamps” is not capitalized. References to the program name, the “Food Stamp Program” should be capitalized.

Chronic Disease Prevention

BE CONSISTENT WHEN TALKING ABOUT OBESITY AND OTHER SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS

When we talk about obesity and other serious health problems, it’s important that we are consistent in the language we use.

When creating consumer targeted materials, here is the way to list the serious health problems:

... serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer.

If you’re short on space or when referencing children, simply remove “stroke” and “cancer.” The order for the other serious health problems, however, should remain the same.

Incorrect ways to talk about serious health problems:

Example 1:

... chronic diseases, including obesity and type two diabetes.

This is incorrect because common obesity is not usually considered a chronic disease. “Type two diabetes” should be “type 2 diabetes;” and with consumer pieces we use “serious health problems” rather than “chronic diseases.”

Example 2:

... serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and colon cancer.

This is incorrect because we don’t enumerate specific cancers. We simply say “certain types of cancer.”

Example 3:

...chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes.

This is incorrect because illness suggests infirmity rather than diseases people live with chronically, often with no symptoms – we say “serious health problems. We don’t use the general term “diabetes” – we associate with the preventable form, which is “type 2 diabetes.”

Quick Tip 6:

Not sure about proper naming structure for the Network’s established Programs and Campaigns, or any of the Network funded projects and partners? Take a refresher course on page 23 of the Network’s Branding Guidelines Manual.

Other Online Resources to Help you Write (and Edit) Like a Pro

Quick Tip 7:

Remember – all newly developed and reprinted materials must have the appropriate acknowledgements/funding statement. Refer to page 25 of the Network's Branding Guidelines Manual for more information about appropriate acknowledgements/funding statements.

Network Communications Resource Library

www.cachampionsforchange.net/Library – the place to find a wide variety of *Network* resources, including templates like press releases, brochures, and flyers.

Network Branding Guidelines Manual

<http://www.cachampionsforchange.net/Library/download/pdfs/CFC%20Brand%20Manual.pdf> – your step-by-step guide to help build the *Network* into a highly recognizable brand.

Associated Press (AP) Stylebook

www.apstylebook.com – a writing and reference resource used by news media, writers, and professional editors. Note: the *Network* follows most, but not all, formats noted in the AP Stylebook.

Online Thesaurus

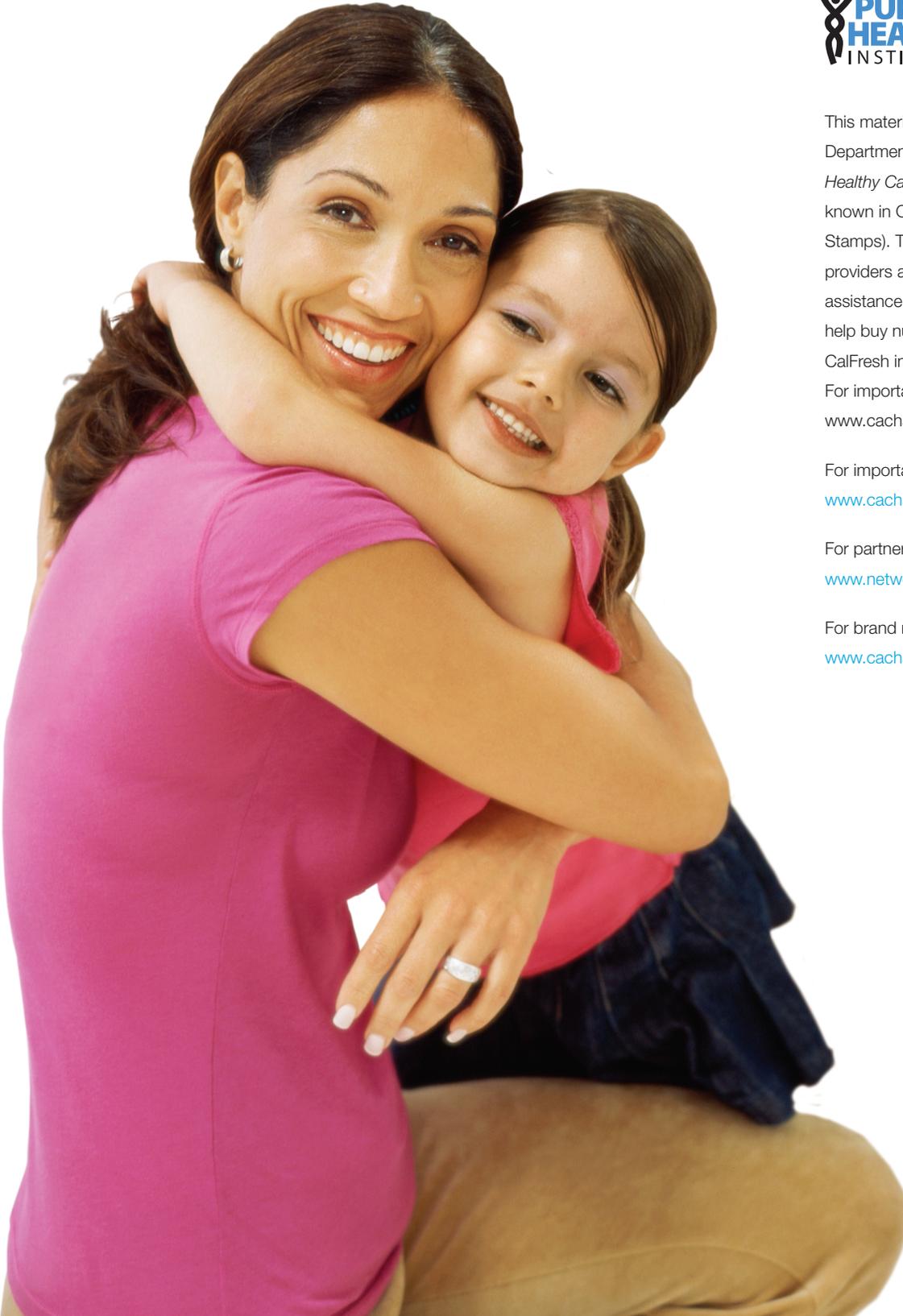
www.thesaurus.com – a tool to help you find lower-literacy alternatives to more difficult words.

Online Dictionary

www.merriam-webster.com – the preferred dictionary used by the AP.

Standard Boilerplate – an informational statement to include in every press release.

The California Department of Public Health's *Network for a Healthy California (Network)* is a public health effort working with hundreds of partners and organizations to empower low-income Californians to live healthier lives through good nutrition and physical activity. Funding is from USDA SNAP, known in California as CalFresh. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. For important nutrition information, visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.



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For important nutrition information, visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

For partner information, visit www.networkforahealthycalifornia.net.

For brand resources, visit www.cachampionsforchange.net/Library.