



CWHS

# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

On average, 2.1 million people in California received food stamp benefits each month in 2007.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these recipients were children (64.2 percent),<sup>2</sup> but, three-quarters of the adult heads of household receiving benefits were women.<sup>3</sup> A general health profile for women receiving food stamps can be drawn from the California Women's Health Survey (CWHS).

The California Department of Public Health's *Network for a Healthy California* creates 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. These efforts are funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program and focus on food stamp recipients and other low-income families. Income eligibility for the Food Stamp Program and for Food Stamp Nutrition Education is  $\leq 130$  percent and  $\leq 185$  percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), respectively.

In 2006 and 2007, a combined total of 655 women answered "Yes" to the California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) question: "Did you receive food stamp benefits in the last 12 months?" while 9,235 responded "No." In both years, women were also asked a series of core questions related to their general health and socioeconomic status as well as a variety of individual and household demographic characteristics associated with health. For example, women were asked to rate their own general health as "excellent," "very good," "good," "fair," or "poor." Women

also provided information regarding their physical and mental health, their diets, and their weights and heights. Responses were weighted in these analyses by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population.

Comparison between women who had received food stamps in either or both 2006 and 2007 and those who had not revealed the following:

## Prevalence and Employment

- Overall, 6.6 percent of the women interviewed reported receiving food stamps in the previous 12 months while 93.4 percent had not; significantly fewer of food stamp users reported being employed (33.7 percent) than women not using food stamps (51.7 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

## Marital Status and Children

- Food stamp recipients were significantly less likely to be married (43.8 percent) and more likely to live in households with children (90.3 percent) than women not receiving food stamps (64.2 percent and 48.2 percent, respectively;  $p < .0001$ ).

## Age and Education

- Women receiving food stamps were on average significantly younger (32.9 years) than non-recipients (45.8 years;  $p < .0001$ ) and a greater percentage had less than a high school education (40.5 percent) than non-recipients (16.6 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

## Race/Ethnicity

- Women using food stamps were more

## Health of California Women Receiving Food Stamps, 2006-2007

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### Public Health Message:

*The Food Stamp Program provides important nutritional assistance to hundreds of thousands of very poor California women, especially single mothers with children at home. Hispanic and African American/Black women are particularly overrepresented in the program. Health indicators including mental, physical, health care, diet, and socioeconomic characteristics, identify women using food stamps as a segment of California women who need public health interventions to eliminate these health disparities.*

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## *Health of California Women Receiving Food Stamps, 2006-2007*

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likely to be Hispanic (58.3 percent), African American/Black (11.2 percent) and Indian/Aleut/Eskimo women (2.7 percent) than non-recipients who were Hispanic (33.8 percent), African American/Black (5.1 percent), and Indian/Aleut/Eskimo women (1.1 percent,  $p < .0001$ ). Recipients were less likely to be White (25.1 percent) or Asian/Pacific Islander (2.8 percent) than non-recipients who were White (54 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islander (6.6 percent;  $p < .001$ ).

Indicators of health and socio-economic characteristics associated with health also revealed considerable differences between food stamp recipients and non-recipients (see Figure 1):

### **Income and Health Care**

- Almost three-quarters of food stamp recipients (70.6 percent) reported household income at or below poverty (100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) than non-recipients (15.9 percent;  $p < .0001$ ). One in four of the food stamp recipients (25.5 percent) reported they had no health care plan while one in six non-recipients reported no health care plan (16.9 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

### **Self-Perception of Health**

- More than half of the non-recipients (52.9 percent) described their general health as being “excellent” or “very good”; however, less than a third of food stamp recipients (30.8 percent;  $p < .0001$ ) did so. Food stamp recipients were much more likely to report “fair” or “poor” general health (31.6 percent) than non-recipients (17.7 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

### **Current Health Problems**

- During the previous 30 days, 17.7 percent of the food stamp recipients reported having 15 or more days when their physical health was not good

(including physical illness and injury) compared to 10.9 percent of non-recipients ( $p < .0001$ ).

### **Mental Health**

- More than one in five food stamp recipients (21.4 percent) reported having 15 or more days of the last 30 days when their mental health (defined as stress, depression, or emotional problems) was not good than non-recipients (11.3 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

### **Food Insecurity**

- Food stamp recipients were three times more likely to have experienced food insecurity (62.7 percent) than non-recipients (20.6 percent). Food insecurity meant that due to money constraints, they or others members of their household did not have access to enough food for an active, healthy life at some time during the previous 12 months ( $p < .0001$ ). Food stamp recipients were also significantly more likely to have received food assistance from a food bank in the last 12 months (15.9 percent) than non-recipients (2.4 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

### **Healthy Eating**

- Only 14.6 percent of the women receiving food stamps reported meeting the combined Healthy People 2010 goals of five or more fruits and vegetables a day than non-recipients (21.1 percent;  $p < .0001$ ).

### **Overweight and Obesity**

- Based on heights and weights (excluding those who were pregnant), body mass index (BMI) was calculated and more food stamp recipients were identified as being overweight or obese (71.3 percent) than non-recipients (51.6 percent); however, the greatest difference was evident in the prevalence of obesity: 45.0 percent among food stamp recipients

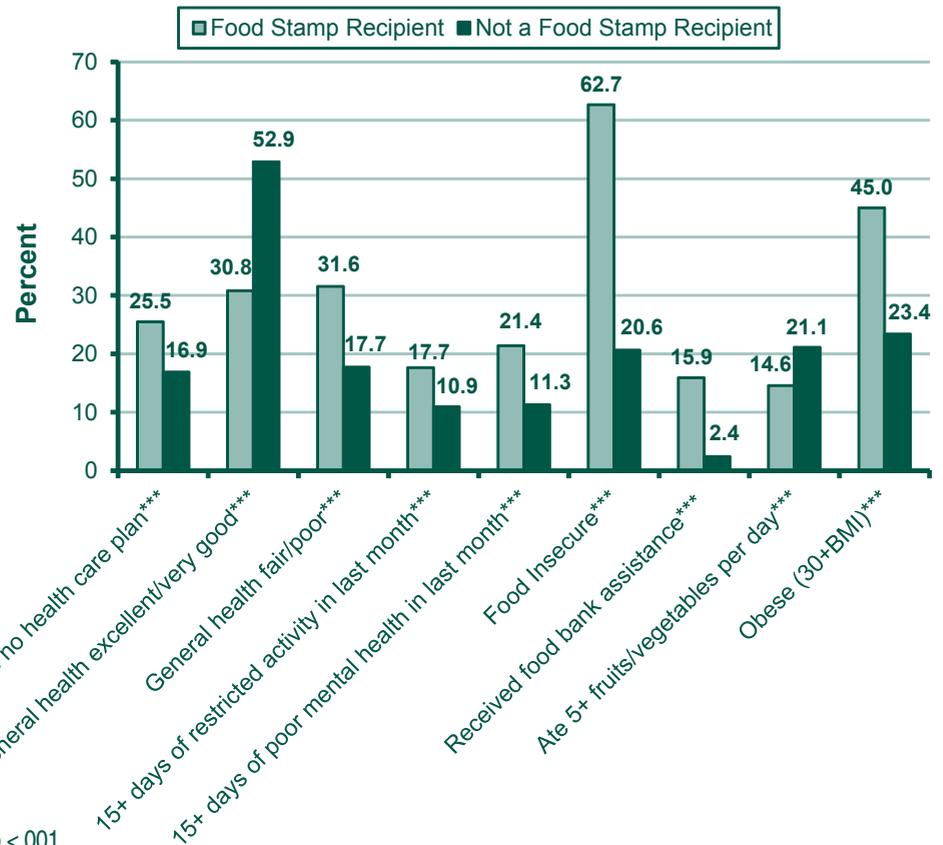
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compared to 23.4 percent among non-  
recipients ( $p < .0001$ ).

Figure 1

**California Women Who Are and Who Are not Receiving  
Food Stamps, 2006-2007**



\*\*\* $p < .001$

Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2006-2007

- 1 California Department of Social Services, *DFA 256: Food Stamp Program Participation and Benefit Issuance Report January-December, 2007*. <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG352.htm>. Accessed August 2010.
- 2 United States Department of Agriculture. Food and Nutrition Services. *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2007*. September, 2008. Available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2007Characteristics.pdf> Accessed March 2009.
- 3 California Department of Social Services Food Stamp, *Food Stamp Household Profile, Federal Fiscal Year 2007*. Available at: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps/PG844.htm> Accessed March 2009.

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