

**Best Practices for Connecting Seniors  
Participating in the Commodity Supplemental  
Food Program (CSFP) to SNAP**

**SCOPE** ■ State, County, Local

**PROGRAM** ■ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

**PRACTICE** ■

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) distribution sites can partner with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach providers and anti-hunger advocates to help CSFP beneficiaries enroll in SNAP.

**WHY** ■

CSFP provides participating seniors with 30 pounds of nutritious, shelf-stable food each month and typically reaches more than 600,000 low-income seniors each year. While this assistance is helpful, it is insufficient to meet the nutritional needs of low-income seniors. In addition, slots in CSFP are limited, based on annual federal appropriations, and consequently, many eligible seniors who need food assistance cannot participate in the program.

Unlike CSFP, SNAP (because of its structure as an entitlement program) can serve any senior who meets eligibility criteria; however, while many CSFP participants are eligible for SNAP, a number of them do not participate. By connecting CSFP participants to SNAP, seniors gain:

- funds to purchase additional nutritious

food;

- flexibility to select groceries that meet their individual needs and preferences; and
- access to ancillary benefits associated with SNAP, such as free cell phone service (Lifeline) and help with Medicare premiums (MSP<sup>1</sup>) and prescription drugs (LIS<sup>2</sup>).

**SPOTLIGHT**

D.C. Hunger Solutions and the Capital Area Food Bank worked together to include SNAP outreach flyers in over 5,000 CSFP food boxes. The flyers generated a 15 percent response rate, resulting in approximately 150 new SNAP applications. Seniors who responded, but had been receiving SNAP, were connected to additional food resources and were re-screened to ensure they were receiving the correct SNAP benefit amount.

**BACKGROUND** ■

CSFP currently operates in all 50 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and five Indian Tribal Organizations. The program is subject to annual appropriations by Congress. In recent years, Congress appropriated approximately \$200 million for CSFP each year and the average state caseload was around 13,000. However,

<sup>1</sup> MSP stands for the Medicare Savings Program, which covers Medicare Part B premiums and copays.

<sup>2</sup> LIS stands for the Low-Income Subsidy for the Medicare Part D prescription drug program.

state caseloads varied widely in terms of the number of participants. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) assigns CSFP caseloads to states based on participation in the previous year. When additional funding is available, USDA-FNS permits certain states' caseloads to grow and new CSFP states to be added. Alabama and Wyoming were the last states to join CSFP. <sup>i ii iii</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT

In Philadelphia, Benefits Data Trust (a national non-profit) and Philabundance (a Feeding America food bank) created a data-sharing agreement to identify CSFP recipients who were not receiving SNAP. Targeted postal mail outreach to these households generated a 21 percent response rate, resulting in over 1,000 applications for SNAP and other benefits, including prescription and energy assistance. <sup>iv</sup>

To be eligible for CSFP, a person must be 60 years of age or older, have income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level, and be a resident of a participating CSFP service area. Most seniors who are eligible for CSFP also will be eligible for SNAP.

## KEY STEPS ■

To launch a SNAP education and application assistance campaign that can reach CSFP recipients in your community:

- create informational material (e.g., a flyer or letter) using simple language;
- develop a communications plan (e.g., in person, in CSFP food boxes, via postal mail) and determine methods to measure responses; and
- ensure the group that is assisting CSFP recipients with SNAP applications has

sufficient capacity to manage potential increases in volume.

## TIP

Check out [FNS Caseload Assignments](#) <sup>v</sup> for more information on your state's CSFP caseload. You can find out which organizations — often local food banks — operate CSFP in your area by contacting your [state agency](#). <sup>vi</sup>

## CHALLENGES ■

Monthly CSFP caseloads vary greatly throughout the nation, ranging from a low of less than 2,000 to a high of around 100,000.

## LESSONS ■

In states with smaller caseloads, low-cost interventions (e.g., flyers placed in CSFP boxes with a hotline number) may work better. By comparison, states with larger caseloads (e.g., California, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania), may find it more effective to invest in upfront data matching between CSFP and SNAP caseload files to ensure limited outreach resources are targeting senior households that are not already enrolled in SNAP.

Organizations which have initiated SNAP outreach to CSFP recipients report important lessons learned:

- Staggering flyers or mailings to CSFP recipients allowed the group that assisted with SNAP applications to respond promptly to each inquiry and not get overwhelmed by an influx of calls.
- Many seniors already receive SNAP, so the SNAP application assistant should be trained to properly evaluate whether there are additional deductions, which the already participating senior might be entitled to claim, as well as be knowledgeable regarding the availability of other food

referrals.

■ Tracking responses to targeted SNAP messages aimed at the CSFP population is critically important to evaluating project success. Consider color-coding informational flyers and adding a “how did you hear about us?” question to the SNAP application.

## MORE RESOURCES

- USDA-FNS’s [CSFP Fact Sheet](#); <sup>vii</sup>
- Benefits Data Trust and Philabundance’s [Case Study: Increasing SNAP Participation Among Older Food Bank Clients](#); <sup>viii</sup> and
- National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association’s [website](#).

## RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR CASE

- FRAC and AARP Foundation’s [Combating Food Insecurity: Tools for Helping Older Adults Access SNAP](#);
- FRAC’s [Interactive Map: SNAP Participation Rates Among Eligible Seniors](#); and
- [Senior SNAP Enrollment Promising Practice Brief](#) from the National Council on Aging. <sup>ix</sup>

### **For technical assistance, contact:**

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)  
1200 18th Street, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.986.2200  
<http://frac.org/>

For more on ending hunger, read FRAC’s [A Plan of Action to End Hunger in America](#).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2018). *Commodity Supplemental Food Program* (fact sheet). Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/csfp/csfp-fact-sheet>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2019). *Commodity Supplemental Food Program: Total Participation*. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/food-distribution-program-tables>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2019). *Caseload Assignments and Administrative Grants* (memo). Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/csfp/csfp-caseload.pdf>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>iv</sup> Benefits Data Trust. (2015). *Case Study: Increasing SNAP Participation Among Older Food Bank Clients*. Available at: <https://www.bdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Increasing-SNAP-Participation-Among-Older-Food-Bank-Clients-BDT-Philabundance-2015.pdf>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>v</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2019). *Caseload Assignments and Administrative Grants* (memo). Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/csfp/csfp-caseload.pdf>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

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<sup>vi</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2014). *Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) Contacts*. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts?f%5B0%5D=program%3A26>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>vii</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). *Commodity Supplemental Food Program* (fact sheet). Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/csfp/csfp-fact-sheet>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>viii</sup> Benefits Data Trust. (2015). *Case Study: Increasing SNAP Participation Among Older Food Bank Clients*. Available at: <https://www.bdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Increasing-SNAP-Participation-Among-Older-Food-Bank-Clients-BDT-Philabundance-2015.pdf>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.

<sup>ix</sup> National Council on Aging. (2016). *NCOA Senior SNAP Enrollment Promising Practice Brief*. Available at: <https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOA-SNAP-Promising-Practices-Brief.pdf>. Accessed on May, 10, 2019.