

Statement on the Great Plates Delivered

In response to Governor Newsom's March 19, 2020 Executive Order N-33-20 requiring Californians to stay at home,¹ the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) developed the Great Plates Delivered Program (Great Plates) to ensure that older and high-risk Californians have regular access to prepared meals delivered through local restaurants.² Among other criteria, Great Plates requires that recipients are not enrolled in federal nutrition assistance programs, namely, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/CalFresh in California) or Home Delivered Meals through the Older Americans Act (OAA) Nutrition Program.

The San Diego Hunger Coalition applauds our state's innovative and proactive approach to supporting food security and local economies; however, we have significant concerns related to Great Plate's capacity to meet the food security needs of our state's most vulnerable residents, particularly low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities. This statement outlines concerns with the program design and recommendations on how to make the program more equitable.

Concerns

The Great Plates program, as designed, creates an inequitable approach to food assistance across the state of California because it prevents very low-income residents receiving other forms of food assistance from participating. We understand the assumption that people currently receiving federal nutrition assistance programs have their needs met; however, CalFresh/SNAP and the home-delivered meal program do not – nor are they intended to - fully meet the nutritional needs of enrolled Californians. By excluding federal nutrition assistance recipients, we are creating an inequitable state approach that leaves behind those with the most significant food security needs.

Federal Food Assistance Benefits vs Great Plates Delivered Program

Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs				Great Plates Delivered Program			
	Max Daily Benefit Amount	Funds per meal (if 3 meals provided)	Max Income for Household of Two		Max Daily Benefit Amount	Funds per meal (if 3 meals/day)	Max Income for Household of Two
CalFresh	\$6.26	\$2.09/meal	\$34,480	Great Plates Delivered Program	Up to \$66.00	\$22.67/meal	\$103,440
OAA Home Delivered Meal (with add'l \$0.60/meal COVID Incentive)	\$12.08	\$6.04/meal <i>Only 2 meals allowed</i>	\$22,412				
Commodity Supplemental Food Program	1.23 lbs (equivalent to \$2.23)	\$0.73/meal	\$22,412				

¹ State of California Executive Department, "Executive Order N-33-20," March 19, 2020, <https://covid19.ca.gov/img/Executive-Order-N-33-20.pdf>.

² Governor's Office of Emergency Services, "Emergency Feeding Program Framework," <https://covid19.ca.gov/restaurants-deliver-home-meals-for-seniors/>

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CalFresh, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, was not designed to provide a household's full food budget, but rather act as a supplement. Even the maximum benefit amount of \$194/month³ for an individual, the equivalent of \$2.16 per meal, does not provide enough money for individuals to meet their nutritional needs, especially for those seniors and individuals with disabilities that need to use their benefits at restaurants. The gross income eligibility for CalFresh is \$2,082 per month for a 1-person household and \$2,820 per month for a 2-person household, leaving little extra to purchase food in a state with one the nation's highest costs of living.

Serving California's Most Vulnerable

The Supplemental Security Income program (SSI) provides financial support to those over 60 or with a disability that have no other source of income. A one-person household receives \$943.72 income per month; a two-person household receives \$1,582.14 per month. San Diego County has the second largest population of CalFresh eligible SSI recipients in the state of California (92,773). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved an expansion of the SNAP/CalFresh program nationwide, to provide Emergency Allotments (EAs) to SNAP/CalFresh households. These EAs provide a supplemental payment to bring each household's monthly benefit up to the maximum amount described above, based on household size. EAs have been approved through May; however, unless EAs continue to be approved through the entire crisis period, an average one-person SSI household in San Diego County will only receive an average of \$83 of CalFresh a month⁴, or \$0.92 per meal. If the state seeks to safeguard the most vulnerable Californians, it should not exclude CalFresh recipients.

The OAA Home Delivered Meal Program provides critical meals for thousands of home bound seniors and individuals with disabilities each day; however, it was similarly not developed to meet all nutritional needs of recipients. Contracted organizations like Meals on Wheels are only providing one to two meals a day and have shared that they do not have the capacity to expand to three meals a day for all recipients. During this COVID Pandemic, local providers across San Diego County have reported extensive waitlists or have had to stop receiving referrals all together. At a time when our existing meal providers are stretched beyond capacity, the state could provide much needed support to ensure that all low-income seniors and individuals with disabilities are able to access enough food through Great Plates.

While the guidelines are unclear as to whether additional federal nutrition assistance programs may be taken into account, more than 13,000 low income seniors in San Diego and Imperial Counties rely upon the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). This federal food box, distributed locally by the San Diego Food Bank, provides 38 lbs of food monthly, resulting in ~21 meals.⁵ This nutrition is critical for many seniors who otherwise would have little to eat, but it is only available to a subset of eligible seniors.

Recommendations

The Great Plates program, as written, will create two systems of nutrition assistance: one for people in poverty and very low-income households, and a separate one for people who have higher income.

The Great Plates Delivered Program is currently designed to serve older and high-risk Californians below 600% of the federal poverty level in need of meal delivery that are not receiving CalFresh and Home Delivered Meals. **To ensure that all older and high-risk Californians in need of support receive adequate nutrition, the Hunger Coalition strongly recommends first and foremost that the program be expanded to include the most vulnerable by incorporating all who meet the program's broader criteria, including those receiving federal nutrition assistance programs.**

We also recommend lowering the maximum income threshold to 400% of federal poverty level, which is closer to the California Self-Sufficiency Standard in most counties, so that the funds allotted for distribution through this program can reach more individuals.

³ United States Department of Agriculture, "SNAP—Fiscal Year 2020 Cost-of-Living Adjustments," July 24, 2019, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/snap-fy-2020-cost-living-adjustments>.

⁴ CDSS: CalFresh Data Dashboard <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/research-and-data/calfresh-data-dashboard>

⁵ Conversations with San Diego Food Bank and 2017 Demographic Profiles San Diego County: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/CHS/demographics/2017%20Demographic%20Profiles.pdf>