

Connecting the Community to Public Benefits: Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities for San Francisco

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human Service and Social Service Agencies in counties across the State of California are tasked with administering public assistance programs such as CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKs. Many individuals and households who are potentially eligible are not receiving benefits that could positively impact the quality of their lives. Outreach programs play a critical role in addressing barriers by providing education and facilitating access, regardless of location, legal status, language, or housing status. San Mateo and San Francisco both have uniquely different approaches to outreach. San Mateo conducts outreach activities internally targeting specific populations and locations while fostering partnerships in the community. On the other hand, San Francisco utilizes a community engagement model, where community-based organizations directly engage with their community, providing education and offering application assistance. Staffing challenges seen across the state have affected outreach efforts in San Mateo and San Francisco. With increased staffing and resources, outreach for both counties can continue to grow. Specifically, San Francisco would benefit from leveraging the upcoming roll-out of the mobile office to partner with community-based organizations and city departments such as Public Health and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing.

Introduction

Public Assistance programs like CalFresh, Medi-Cal and CalWORKs can often be associated with stigma, fear of legal ramifications (public charge), and often burdensome requirements. Outreach programs can help alleviate some of these barriers and provide much needed education and information that encourages access for all individuals regardless of location, legal status, language, and housing status. Over the past decade, the State of California has earmarked resources to assist counties with increasing participation in these vital programs. The result has been an increasing percentage of eligible individuals and households participating in these assistance programs. With emergency health waivers ending, now is a great time to look at improving outreach initiatives and focusing on returning outreach programs to pre-pandemic levels and creating new opportunities to serve communities.

Background

Geographically, San Mateo and San Francisco counties share a county line where San Mateo is geographically south of San Francisco. One of the key differences between the counties is their geographical size. Per the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, San Mateo has 448 square miles and 1,704 population per square mile. San Francisco, on the other hand, is only 46 square miles with a population density of 18,629 (see Appendix, Table 1. for further demographic information).

Historically, San Francisco has more residents enrolled in CalFresh and Medi-Cal, per California Department of Social Services (CDSS) data (California Department of Social Services, 2024, *CalFresh Data Dashboard*). As of 2021, the program reach index (which calculates CalFresh program access per U.S. Census

population data) is 82.3% for San Francisco and San Mateo's is 51.7%. As seen in the chart below, San Francisco has significantly more individuals and households enrolled in CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Correspondingly, San Francisco receives two and a half times the allocation amount from the state for CalFresh Administration compared to San Mateo (see Appendix, Table 2. for further information).

San Mateo County Outreach Team

The San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) operates an Outreach Team tasked with raising awareness and facilitating access to various assistance programs within the county, including Medi-Cal, CalFresh, General Assistance (G.A.), CalWORKs, and CAPI. Their mission involves conducting outreach events to engage with the community, provide education on nutrition and health, offer application assistance, and foster trust throughout the community.

The Outreach Team consists of the following staff :

- Human Services Supervisor
- Two Benefits Analyst II (2)
- Benefits Analyst III
- CalFresh Outreach Coordinator
- Three Community Workers

San Mateo County's outreach team is based on a foundation of partnerships throughout the county that focuses on specific target populations (see Appendix, Table 3 for partnership breakdown).

Many of these partnerships were created or enhanced during the public health emergency (COVID-19) due to gaps in service that the county identified, such as

location, population, or type of service. The highlight of the outreach team's activities are partnerships across various entities such as cities, schools, colleges, and community-based organizations. Examples of activities include the creation of the EBT card delivery to CalFresh recipients throughout the county and a partnership with the city of South San Francisco. More specifically, the EBT card delivery service was created during the pandemic to distribute EBT cards to households that could not access transportation to county offices. This program has continued to assist clients with barriers of picking up their EBT cards from regional county offices. Additionally, the partnership with the City of South San Francisco was created due to a county office closing in South San Francisco and an influx of immigrants to the county needing services.

One of the biggest partnerships San Mateo County has is with the local food bank, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley. The partnership has resulted in increased CalFresh applications and awareness through social media campaigns. CalFresh in-a-day events help connect the community to the county and assist residents with completing CalFresh applications at food distribution sites throughout the county. The Outreach team collects the applications, conducts interviews, and depending on the availability of the mobile office, issues an EBT card on-site, with applications being processed the same day, if possible.

The CalFresh Mobile Office has been a five-year project for San Mateo County, which allows outreach efforts to be conducted throughout the 448-square-mile county. One of the highlights of this mobile office is the ability to print EBT cards, which provides immediate resolution for the community. Additionally, the mobile office has two offices where confidential

interviews can take place. Although the mobile office resource has been available for a few years, its use has been limited due to the size of the vehicle, staff availability to drive the large vehicle, and maintenance repairs.

San Francisco's Community Engagement Model

San Francisco's approach to outreach uses a community engagement model relying heavily on partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to help increase awareness about Cal-Fresh and Medi-Cal. There are several avenues through which San Francisco employs its outreach efforts, including in-person assistance at outstation locations, events, and partnerships through grants with CBOs. Outreach workers (Eligibility Workers) from San Francisco's CalFresh (CF) and Medi-Cal programs provide assistance during outreach events and work from the outstation on specific days throughout the month (see Appendix, Table 4 for breakdown).

Previously, San Francisco also had four other outreach stations that have since been closed. Those four outreach stations were senior centers that assisted SSI recipients in their CF applications. Currently, there are 10 outstation requests made by community-based organizations without current outstations and requests from the established outstations to increase frequency. These requests have been put on hold for a variety of reasons such as low staffing, the migration of CalSAWs, and the need at existing sites. These requests will be revisited later in 2024 when staffing levels increase. See Appendix, Table 5 for other targeted outreach activities.

The largest partnership that San Francisco has is with SF/Marin Food Bank, which helps to oversee a network of CBOs that

assist with applications by leading application assistance events, holding information and training workshops, and teaching participants how to use BenefitsCal. Additionally, SF/Marin Food Bank holds 10 CF-in-a-day enrollment events a year in conjunction with San Francisco. On the horizon, San Francisco will be starting a mobile office that is modeled after San Diego County's Live Well mobile office. The mobile office will include an EBT printer for use. Additionally, the San Francisco Human Service Agency Departments of Benefits and Family Support, Disability and Aging, and Family and Children Services, as well as SF/Marin Food Bank, will partner and utilize the mobile office in order to service the community's needs.

Challenges and Considerations

According to 2024 data from CDSS, San Francisco has higher rates of enrollment in CalFresh and Medi-Cal programs proportional to higher rates of poverty and CalFresh administration budget allocations, compared with San Mateo County (CalFresh Data Dashboard, 2024 and CFL 23-24-24). Outreach efforts in both counties differ, with San Mateo Outreach Team taking more of an active role in a variety of partnerships it has created, whereas San Francisco utilizes community engagement as the driver of outreach, heavily relying on CBOs to conduct outreach within their community by assisting individuals and families with applying for public assistance programs.

Currently, one of the biggest challenges facing both counties is staffing. High vacancy rates in counties across the state have especially impacted outreach efforts in both counties. Specifically in San Mateo County, a few positions are vacant, which severely limits capacity for outreach events as the team is responsible for all aspects of

applications, such as application registration, interviewing, and application processing. For San Francisco, Eligibility Workers are currently only assigned to Outreach activities part-time as they continue to assist with other duties in the Service Center.

Locations of offices throughout the county directly impact outreach locations and populations. For example, in San Mateo County, the county office closure in South San Francisco prompted the Outreach team to create a partnership with South San Francisco City to provide outreach activities one day a week. This was to help increase accessibility for residents in that part of the county. For San Francisco, all offices are located within a designated area in the city, leaving large parts of the city without a consistent presence and limited accessibility to county offices, such as the southeast portion of the city.

Recommendations

San Francisco has a robust network of CBOs that assist community members in applying for CalFresh and Medi-Cal, as well as a handful of longstanding outreach stations in the community. As community engagement continues to ramp up after the winding down of COVID-19 policies and as staffing levels continue to increase, outreach activities can continue to utilize a community engagement model. As seen during the SSI expansion, continuing to use current infrastructure will help to extend the reach in the community. San Francisco could benefit by targeting specific populations, such as college students through SF City College and SF State, as well as Navigation Centers throughout the city to assist the unhoused populations. Additionally, when staffing levels increase, San Francisco can in turn assess whether new outstation sites can be opened and outreach expanded by new

partnerships, with particular attention to unfilled requests by the community.

Upcoming for San Francisco is the rollout of the new CalFresh Mobile office. The CalFresh Mobile Office can be leveraged to expand and create new partnerships with CBOs and other county departments such as Public Health and Homelessness and Supportive Housing . San Francisco can continue to learn from other counties about the constraints and opportunities in regard to operations, and how to best use this new resource. San Francisco enrolls new applicants at high rates relative to its population, indicating that outreach efforts, including the mobile office, might best be

utilized if benefit recipients are targeted in the communities where they live, rather than requiring them to travel to a central hub.

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Appendix

Table 1: Population Data Comparison

As of July 2023	San Mateo	San Francisco
Population	726,353	808,988
Population without Health Insurance	4.70%	4.40%
Median Household Income	\$149,907	\$136,689
Percent of Population in Poverty	7.20%	10.40%
Foreign Born Percent (Immigrant)	35.20%	33.90%

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023, July). *U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts*.

Table 2: Medi-Cal and CalFresh Data Comparison

As of January 2024	San Mateo	San Francisco
Total Medi-Cal Enrollment*	167,935	243,566
CalFresh Participation: Individuals**	32,103	102,348
CalFresh Applications Received**	2,811	4,959
CalFresh Administration Budget Allocation 23-24***	\$12,661,280	\$35,204,845

*Department of Health Care Services. (2024, January). *Medi-Cal Continuous Coverage Unwinding Dashboard*.

**California Department of Social Services. (2024). *CalFresh Data Dashboard*.

***California Department of Social Services. (2024, November 9th). *CFL 23-24-24*.

Table 3: Partnership Target Population and Frequency

Location/Partnership	Target Population	Frequency
City of South San Francisco	Immigrant Population	Every Friday
San Mateo Navigation Center	Homeless Population	Every two weeks
Newcomer Project at local High Schools	Immigrant Population	As needed
Local Colleges (Cañada, College of San Mateo & Skyline)	College Students	Bi-Weekly basis at Canada College, all others per offsite consultation

Location/Partnership	Target Population	Frequency
Mobile Office- Countywide	All	Varied- Depends on Truck status
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley- Food Bank	All	Quarterly CalFresh in a Day Events
EBT Card Delivery	Transportation Difficulties	As needed- Referral from Service Center

Table 4 : SF HSA In-person Assistance at Outstations and Outreach Events

Location/Partnership	Target Population	Frequency
CASC (Community Assessment and Services Center)	Justice-involved individuals	1/week, 8 hours
Chinese Newcomers	Cantonese-speaking population	1/ week, 8 hours
Wu Yee	Cantonese-speaking population	1/week, 4 hours
Pop-up Pregnancy Village	Low-income pregnant women	1/month every 2nd Sat
Pathways to Citizenship	Immigrant communities	Varied
SF/Marin Food Bank	All	10 CalFresh in-a-day/per year

Table 5: Other Targeted Outreach Activities

Partnership	Activity	Goal
211 San Diego	Outbound calls	Conduct phone calls to likely eligible CF/MC individuals & to reduce churn
SF/Marin Food Bank	Trainings, Workshops, Application Events	Oversee network of CBOs that assist with Applications, including BenefitsCal outreach
Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) with subcontractors Wu Yee & Good Samaritan	Workshops, events, conducting focus groups, social media campaign	Engage with immigrant communities and develop messaging specific to immigrant communities