

ADDITIONAL FOOD RELIEF AVAILABLE DURING COVID-19

Marin HHS registering more vulnerable families for state's CalFresh program

SAN RAFAEL, CA – Applications for food assistance benefits from the State of California's CalFresh [1] program have increased 343% from last year in Marin County, and the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services [2] (HHS) is encouraging even more residents to sign up.

CalFresh, which replaced food stamps, is for people from relatively low-income households who meet federal income eligibility rules and want to add to their budget to put healthy and nutritious food on the table.

The rapid rise in CalFresh registration is directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic [3] and the resulting economic hardship experienced by lower-income residents, said Marin HHS Assistant Director Kari Beuerman. HHS Public Assistance [4] approved 1,187 CalFresh applications (out of 1,655 submitted) in April 2020 compared with 268 in April 2019.

"We want families to know that HHS is ready to help them access essential nutrition support, such as from CalFresh," Beuerman said. "While we are alarmed by the numbers of people in dire need, we are heartened by the fact that so many seem aware of the program and are availing themselves of this important resource."

Jesse Paran, Public Assistance Division Director, said HHS staff is working hard to meet this increased need and have eligible residents – regardless of immigration status – to apply online, by phone, or by mail.

"In response to the unprecedented increase in applications, we devoted staff to immediately process applications," Paran said. "The more urgently we can get food benefits to qualified applicants, the fewer vulnerable people are skipping meals and going hungry."

There are several ways to connect with HHS staff and apply for CalFresh:

- * Apply at org [5]
- * Call 1-877-410-8817 to apply over the phone
- * Pick up a paper application outside HHS offices:
 - * 120 N. Redwood Drive, San Rafael
 - * 3240 Kerner Boulevard, San Rafael
 - * 1 6th Street, Point Reyes Station

The CalFresh application process includes:

- * Completing an application
- * Providing proof of income and expenses, if needed
- * Completing an interview
- * Waiting for HHS to determine the applicant's eligibility in 30 days.

Reasonable accommodations and services in multiple languages are available for applicants. Since June 2019, CalFresh has expanded to older adults and persons with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income, and we encourage residents in those categories to apply.

Additionally, Marin students can receive hundreds of dollars in nutrition assistance to help prevent childhood hunger while schools are closed amid the pandemic. Families with children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals can receive additional support to purchase groceries through California's Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program [\[6\]](#) (P-EBT).

Families with P-EBT eligible children that receive CalFresh, Medi-Cal, or foster care benefits do not need to apply for P-EBT benefits and will receive a P-EBT card of up to \$365 for each eligible child. The State of California is mailing cards through the end of May. Other families receiving free or reduced-price meal benefits but not on public benefit assistance will need to complete a short online application [\[7\]](#), which will open May 22. For families that do not receive the P-EBT card in the mail, the deadline to apply is June 30.

P-EBT benefits are available to all eligible California children, no matter their immigration status. P-EBT is not the same as CalFresh or food stamps and is administered by the State of California. Residents who have questions about P-EBT can learn more by visiting the state P-EBT website [\[8\]](#).

For more information about CalFresh, call 1-877-410-8817 or visit: the Marin HHS CalFresh webpage [\[9\]](#) or the State of California's page. [\[10\]](#)