

The Importance of CalFresh in Unstable Times

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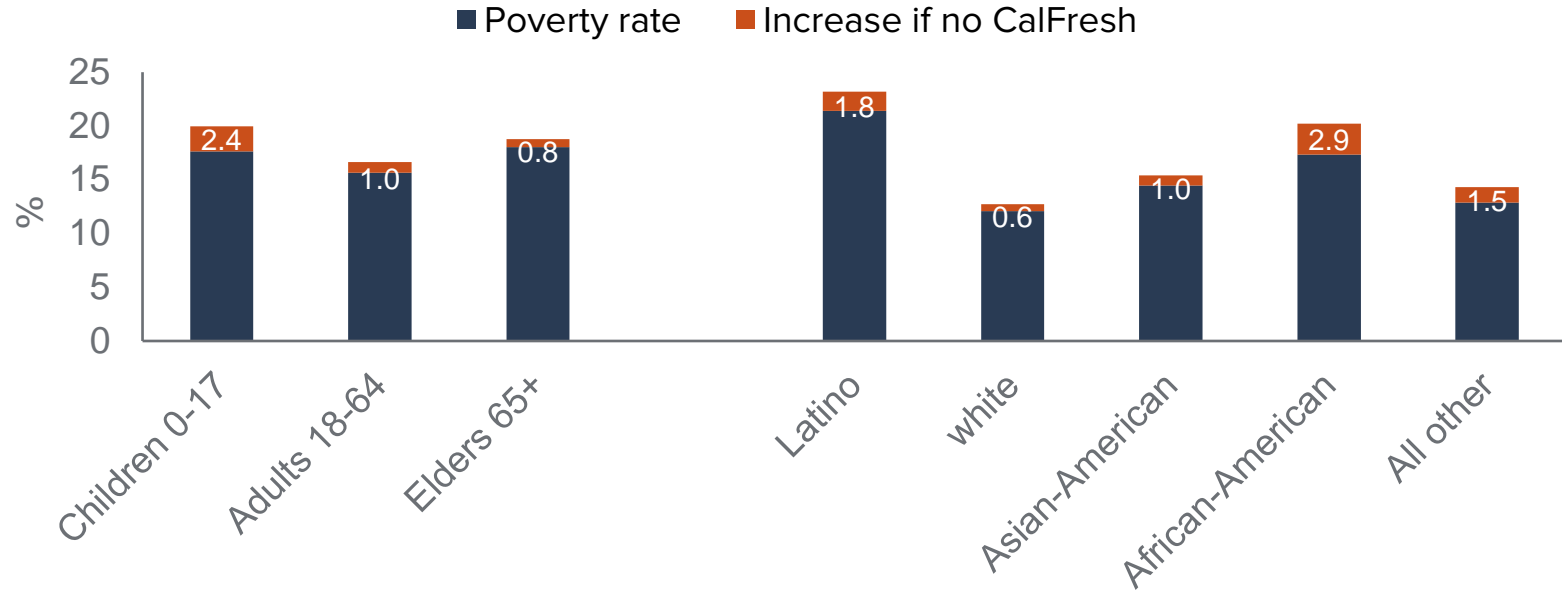
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CalFresh is one of Californian's largest safety net programs

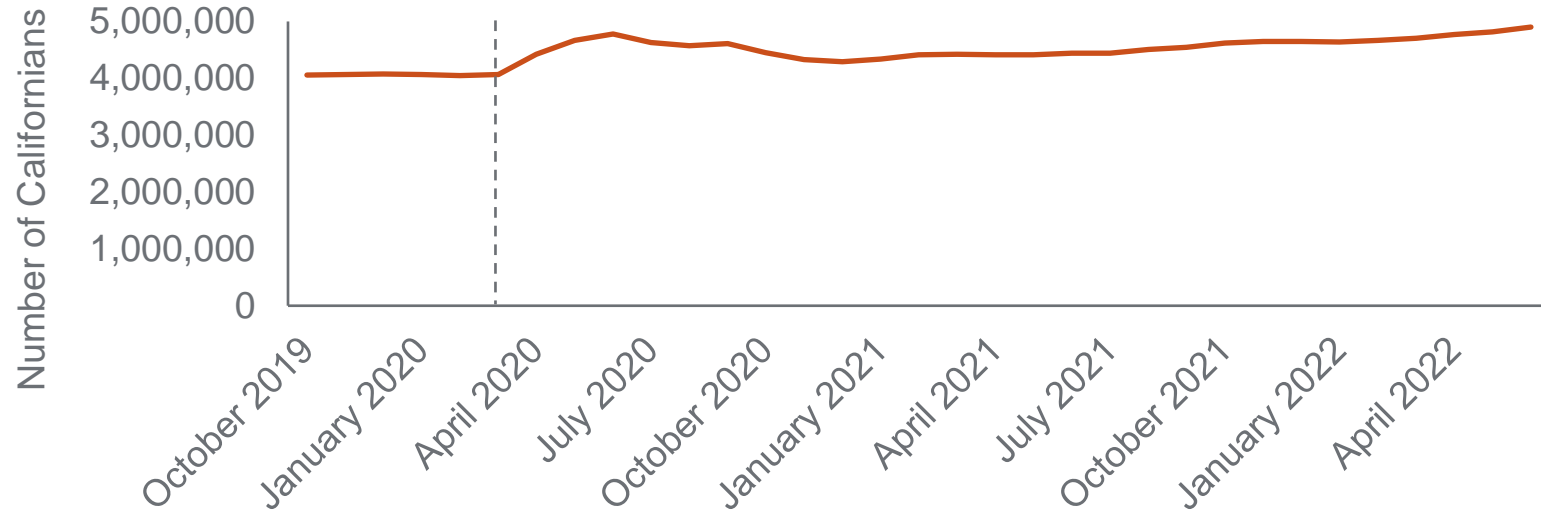
- Provides monthly food assistance on an electronic EBT card to low-income families who apply and qualify
 - Relatively few restrictions on eligibility apart from income
 - Average monthly benefits of \$233 per participant in recent months
- 4.8 million Californians participate each month
 - About 6.5 million are eligible
 - Half or more of young children have participated by the time they enter school
- Helps stabilize household incomes by freeing up resources for other expenses, such as rent and transportation

Without CalFresh, poverty rates would be even higher



Source: 2019 California Poverty Measure.

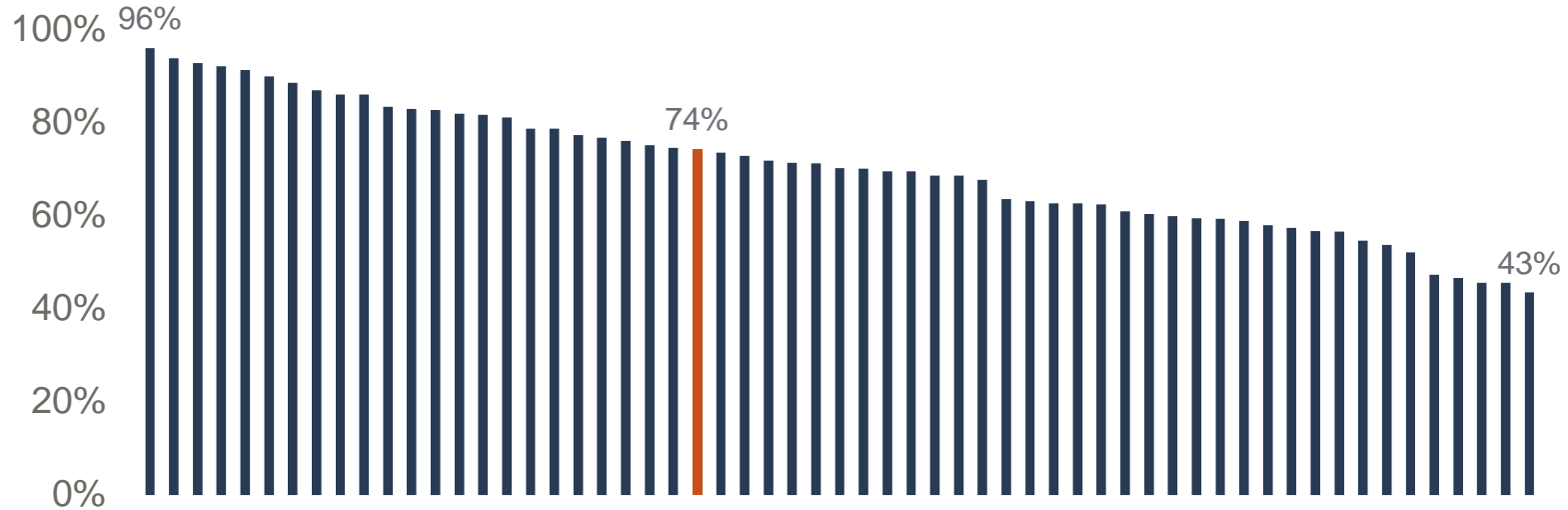
Governments used CalFresh to counter economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: California Department of Social Services, CalFresh Data Dashboard.

Reaching all eligible Californians is an ongoing challenge

Program reach varies widely across California's counties



Source: California Department of Social Services, CalFresh Data Dashboard.

Other opportunities and challenges

- Time-limited benefits for some adults and eligibility restrictions for college students have created access hurdles
- Undocumented immigrant eligibility rules affect many households
 - Finalized federal public charge rule change expected to ease fears among mixed immigration-status families
 - State food benefits will be extended to all age 55+ regardless of immigration status
- Many are affected by inflation and California's high cost of living
 - October 2021 Thrifty Food Plan increase and October 2022 COLA are bringing some relief

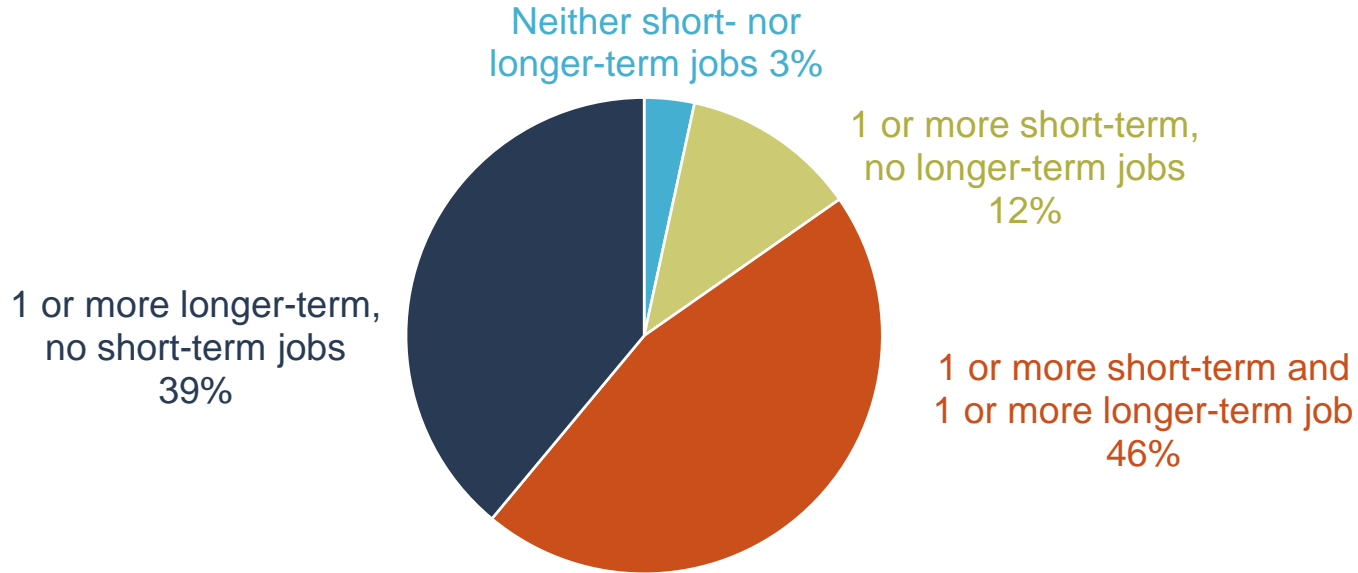
Two new PPIC reports explore the relationship between CalFresh and income stability

- Employment Patterns for CalFresh Adults
 - Patterns of employment around new CalFresh enrollment, and changes over the course of participation
- The Role of CalFresh in Stabilizing Family Incomes
 - To what extent do safety net resources stabilize incomes of CalFresh participants?
 - How did this change at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data and analysis sample

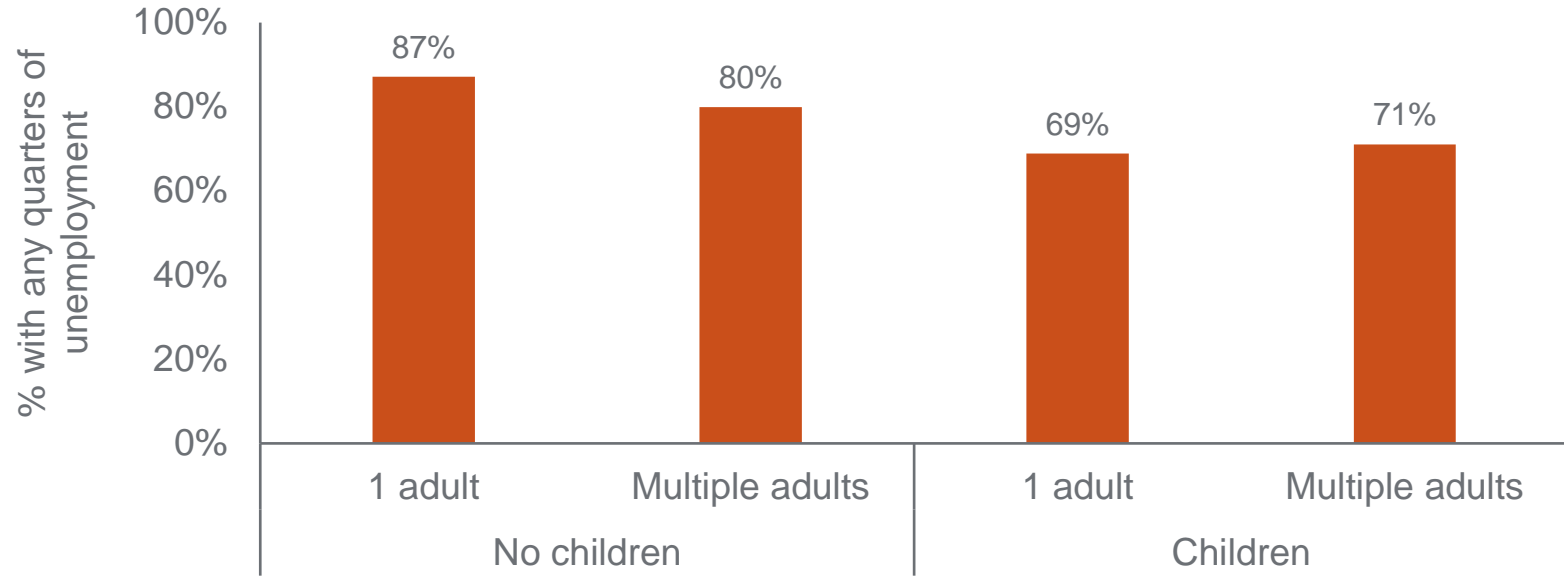
- Monthly records for CalFresh and other safety net programs
 - Participation (MEDS)
 - Benefit amounts (EBT/SARS)
- Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits and UI-covered wages
 - UI payment data (monthly) and EDD Base Wage file (quarterly)
- Focus on adults ages 25–54 who newly enroll in CalFresh

Most adults new to CalFresh are workers with at least one longer-term job



Source: Thorman and Danielson (2022), Employment Patterns for CalFresh Adults. Public Policy Institute of California.

Single adults enrolled in CalFresh are especially likely to experience unemployment

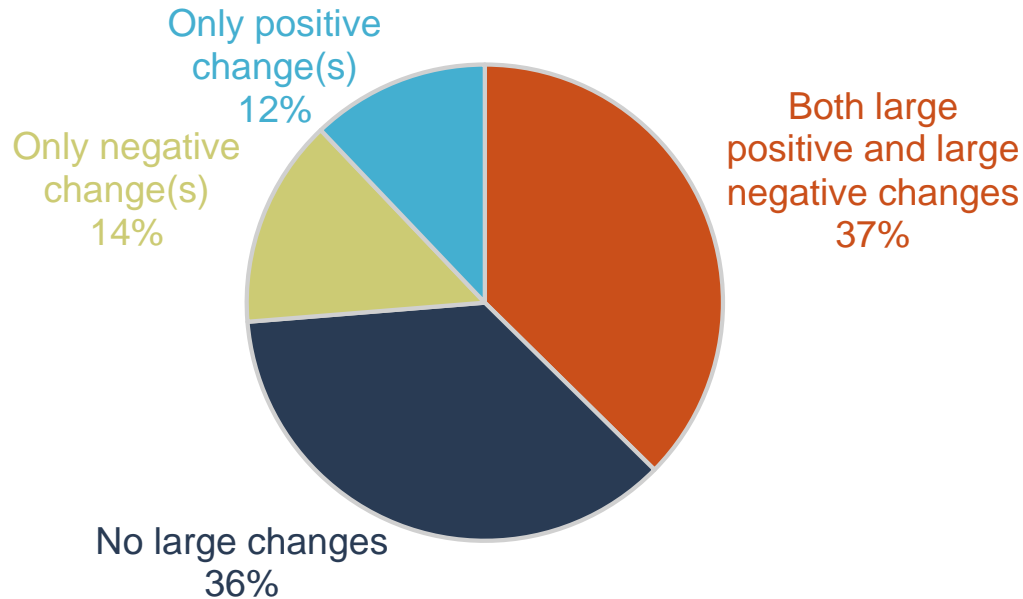


Source: Thorman and Danielson (2022), Employment Patterns for CalFresh Adults. Public Policy Institute of California.

Key takeaways

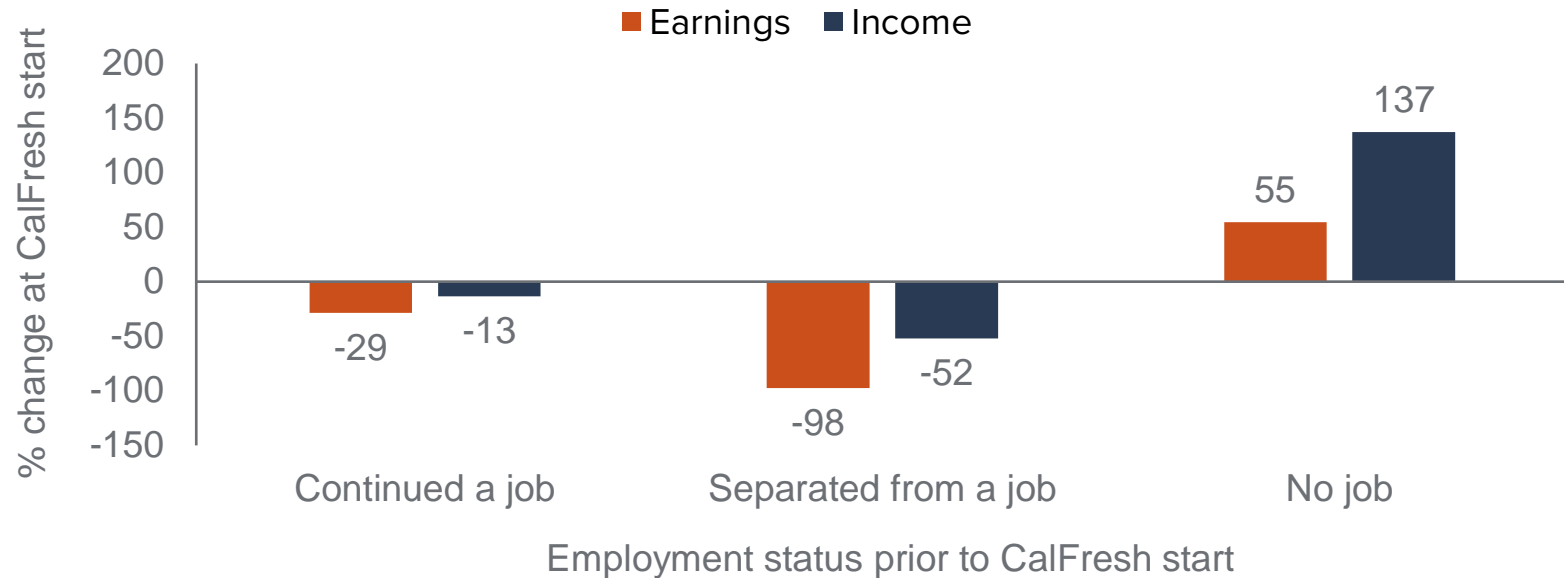
- Employment dynamics do not tend to change after a period of CalFresh enrollment
- Employment instability is greater among single, working adults than among adults with children
- Earnings rise after CalFresh enrollment for participants who are employed both before and after participation

Large income swings are common before CalFresh enrollment



Source: Danielson and Thorman (2022), The Role of CalFresh in Stabilizing Family Incomes. Public Policy Institute of California.

CalFresh reduces income loss among adults with recent or ongoing employment



Source: Danielson and Thorman (2022), The Role of CalFresh in Stabilizing Family Incomes. Public Policy Institute of California.

Key takeaways

- Income instability is common among adults accessing CalFresh
- CalFresh benefits cushion drops in earnings for participants with current or recent employment
 - Describes many adults new to CalFresh early in COVID-19 pandemic
- Many apparently still-eligible participants exit at the six-month income reporting mark
 - Single adults and those without employment prior to enrollment are especially likely to exit

Considerations for policymakers

- The vast majority of adults accessing CalFresh are workers, but many experience disruptions in employment
 - Single, childless adults particularly likely to experience instability
- Our research suggests many participants could be enrolled earlier – closer to the time they lose work
- Simplifying or further automating semi-annual reporting process could reduce substantial drop-offs among the least-connected participants

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. Findings and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Department of Social Services or the California Health and Human Services Agency.

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Thank you for your interest in this work.