

CALIFORNIA'S LOW-INCOME ASIAN AMERICANS AND CALFRESH:

Enrollment Surge and Persistent Gap During the Pandemic

ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER POLICY INITIATIVE

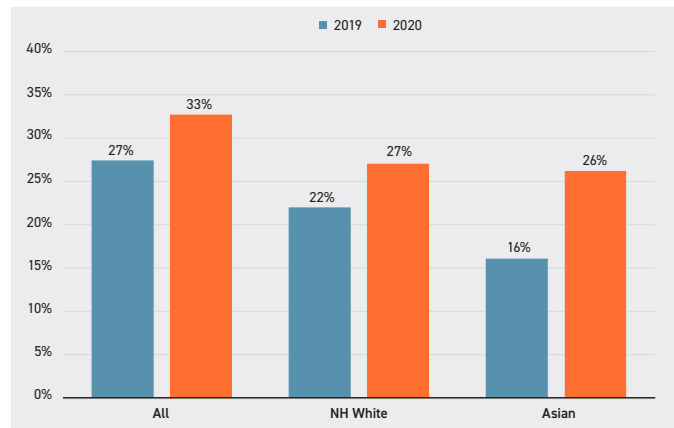
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest food assistance program in the nation and provides benefits that lower out-of-pocket food expenses. When the pandemic crisis began, the government responded by passing the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (March 2020), which allowed for the adaptation of SNAP to quickly provide assistance to Americans with food needs. This study examines SNAP (known as CalFresh in California) enrollment among California's low-income Asian Americans prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

The overall conclusion is that *CalFresh has been critical to helping low-income Asian Americans in California during the pandemic but underutilization among Asian Americans remains a problem.* Furthermore:

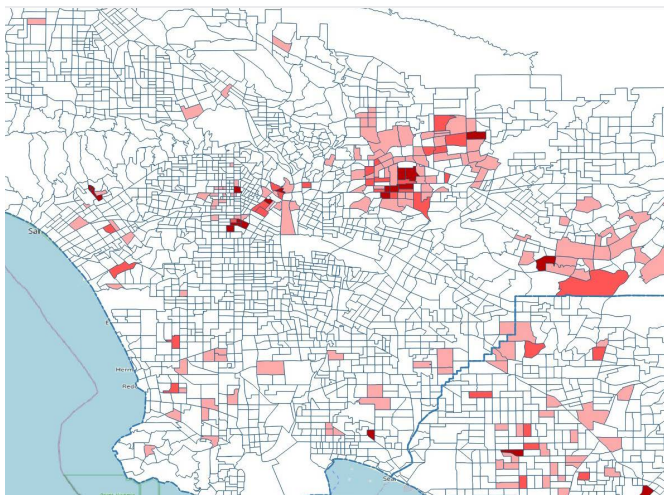
1. The pandemic has disproportionately hurt low-income Asian Americans, with well over half experiencing loss of employment and earnings.
2. CalFresh has met some of the greater pandemic needs, with Asian American enrollment increasing by a third in CA and to nearly a half in LA County from 2019-20.
3. Nonetheless, a SNAP GAP persists, leaving about 200,000 poor (below 130% of FPL) Asian American households without CalFresh benefits.
4. Barriers to enrollment and usage remain, including transportation limitations, lack of in-language information, and burdensome application and renewal processes.

Poor Households Receiving CalFresh, 2019 and 2020

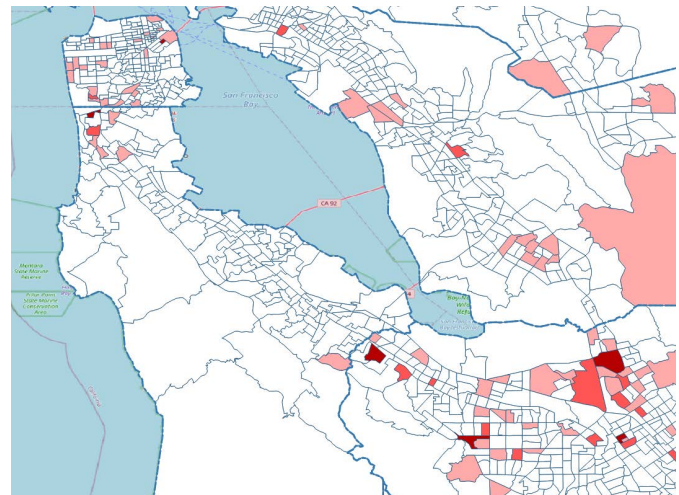


Source: Tabulated by Authors from 2019 and 2020 American Community Survey Public Use Micro Samples. Poor households are defined as households with total income less than 130% FPL.

Southern California Neighborhoods Experiencing Asian American SNAP GAP



San Francisco Bay Area Neighborhoods Experiencing Asian American SNAP GAP



Note: SNAP Southern California Gap Areas include Chinatown, Koreatown, Cambodia Town, San Gabriel Valley, parts of the South Bay, and Westminster. SNAP San Francisco Bay Area Gap Areas include Chinatown, Richmond and Sunset neighborhoods. Source: Compiled by Authors from 2015-19 American Community Survey by Census Tract.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following lists key recommendations. A more extensive and detailed list of recommendations is provided in the report.



Overall recommendations

1. Simplify and streamline the SNAP application and renewal processes.
2. Apply a client-centered approach to reduce the interruption of receipt of SNAP benefits, e.g. use text messaging to communicate with participants, offer “on-demand” recertification interviews” or allow interviews to be scheduled online, and allow telephonic signatures
3. Advocate for the elimination of public charge policy deterring non-citizens who plan to obtain green cards or temporary visas from accessing food and nutrition programs.

Recommendations for improved language access

1. Ensure all CalFresh application and recertification processes (e.g. phone and online interfaces) serve the needs of individuals with limited or no English language proficiency, e.g. by determining the most linguistically isolated or underserved Asian American groups in California and ensuring all existing online application and recertification portals provide user-friendly interfaces in these priority languages; and establishing a monitoring system to ensure that all in-language informational materials and messages are accurate, non-demeaning, non-threatening, culturally sensitive, and informed by user experience.
2. Improve customer service and expand language assistance to better serve those with limited English language proficiency, e.g. by developing a statewide program for training staff in best practices to maximize enrolment.
3. Increase resources to reach underserved Asian American populations with limited English proficiency, e.g. by providing adequate resources to community-based organizations that assist with enrolling individuals with limited English language proficiency.

Data recommendations

1. Disaggregate data for the most linguistically isolated or underserved specific Asian American populations.
2. Establish partnerships among community-based organization, government organizations and universities improve the quantity and quality of data for Asian American subgroups to better inform programs and policies.



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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University of California, Los Angeles. The authors alone are responsible for the content of this report.



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