Unaccompanied Youths’ Eligibility for CalFresh (SNAP/Food Stamps)

Young people experiencing homelessness on their own can receive CalFresh benefits, even if they are under 18, and even if they are living separately from their parents or guardians.

Q: What is CalFresh?
A: The CalFresh Program provides benefits that people can use to buy food at grocery stores, certain retail stores, and some restaurants. Participants use a debit card called an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to purchase food. CalFresh can help improve a young person’s diet by providing nutritious food and help free up resources that youth can use to pay for other important things, such as housing.

Q: Can youth under 18 get CalFresh?
A: Yes. There is no minimum age for CalFresh benefits. Youth can apply on their own or together with a household where they are living. The next question explains what “household” means.

Q: What is a “household” for CalFresh?
A: Individual “households” apply for CalFresh eligibility. Young people experiencing homelessness might be their own household, or they might be part of someone else’s household, depending on the situation.

Young people are their own household if: 1) they live alone; OR 2) they stay with other people but usually buy and prepare their own food, separate from the people they live with. CalFresh Regulation 63-402.1; 7 C.F.R. §273.1(a)(3). In these cases, youth can apply for CalFresh on their own.

Young people are part of a household where they are staying if: 1) they usually buy food and prepare meals together with the people they stay with; OR 2) the youth is under 18 AND is under the “parental control” of a person in the household. CalFresh Regulation 63-402.1; 7 C.F.R. §273.1(a)(3). In these cases, the household can apply for CalFresh benefits together, with the youth added to the application as part of the household.

It’s important to know that most unaccompanied youth are not under anyone’s parental control. A youth is not under parental control if the youth does not receive significant financial support from the household, comes and goes without approval, manages his or her own affairs, and leaves the home frequently or for extended periods of time. Also, emancipated or married youth are not under parental control. CalFresh Regulation 63-102(p).

Young people who are staying with others should discuss with the rest of the household the best way to proceed in applying for CalFresh benefits.

Q: Can an unaccompanied young person apply for CalFresh without his/her parents?
A: Yes. Since unaccompanied youth by definition are not living with their parents, they are not part of their parents’ “household”. They can apply for and receive CalFresh benefits without a parent’s or
guardian’s signature and without providing parental income information. CalFresh Regulation 63-402.142; 7 C.F.R. §273.1(b)(1)(iii).

**Q:** Can young people receive CalFresh if they don’t have a permanent address?
**A:** Yes. The CalFresh office cannot require a mailing address from people experiencing homelessness, and youth can get benefits even if they have no fixed mailing address or live on the street. CalFresh Regulation 63-401.5; 7 C.F.R. §§ 273.2, 273.3(a).

**Q:** Can young people receive CalFresh if they don’t have a photo ID?
**A:** Yes. Although CalFresh workers must verify the youth’s identity, CalFresh regulations allow for many ways to verify. For example, a school ID, a health insurance ID card, Social Security card, birth certificate, pay stub, or similar document will do. Also, the CalFresh worker can verify the youth’s identity by calling someone who knows the youth, like a school counselor, teacher, outreach worker, shelter staff, or social worker. This is called making a “collateral contact.” CalFresh Regulations 63-300.5(e)(3) and 63-300.5(h)(2); 7 C.F.R. §273.2(f)(1)(c)(vii). No one should be denied CalFresh simply because the person does not have a photo ID.

**Q:** Are college students eligible for SNAP?
**A:** They can be in certain circumstances. Students who are enrolled in college or another post-secondary institution less than half time are eligible under the same rules as anyone else. Students who are enrolled in college or another post-secondary institution half time or more are eligible for CalFresh benefits only if they meet additional criteria, such as working at least 20 hours a week, participating in State or federally financed work study, or caring for a dependent child household member.

Youth with a disability are automatically eligible for CalFresh, even if they are college students, if they receive state or federal disability benefits (for example, SSI). The specific rules for college students are in CalFresh Regulation 63-406, which is available here: http://www.calfresh.ca.gov/PG845.htm.

**Q:** How does a youth apply for CalFresh?
**A:** There are a few different ways to apply. You can mail or deliver an application to your local Family Resource Center (contact information below; offices are open Monday-Friday, 7:00 - 5:00). You can have an application sent to you by calling ACCESS toll-free, Monday - Friday 8:00am - 5:00pm, at 1-866-262-9881, or you can download and print one here: http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/ssp/food_stamps/index.html. You can call 2-1-1 for assistance applying, or you can apply on-line here: https://www.mybenefitscalwin.org/.

El Cajon - 220 S. 1st Street, El Cajon, 92019
Fallbrook - 130 East Alvarado, Fallbrook, 92028
Lemon Grove - 7065 Broadway, Lemon Grove, 91945
Metro - 1130 10th Avenue, San Diego, 92101
North Central - 5055 Ruffin Road, San Diego, 92123
North Coastal - 1315 Union Plaza Court, oceanside, 92054
North Inland - 620 East Valley Parkway, Escondido, 92025
Northeast - 5001 73rd Street, San Diego, 92115
Ramona - 1521 Main Street, Ramona, 92065
South - 690 Oxford Street, Chula Vista, 91911
Southeast . 4588 Market Street, San Diego, 92102

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1 The DSS CalFresh Handbook clarifies this idea: “For example, if the applicant household shares living quarters with another family but does not purchase and prepare food together with that family, the members of the other family are not members of the applicant household.”
March 2013.