Reducing stigma and increasing food stamp use

Experimental Estimates of the Barriers to Food Stamp Enrollment, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach

Can the stigma associated with using the Food Stamp Program be reduced by the simple device of renaming it? This study suggests that it can.

In an experiment by Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, the Food Stamp Program was relabeled as the “Golden State Alliance” in outreach materials. The intervention was then tested by assessing whether take-up increased relative to that secured under the conventional outreach materials currently distributed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The relabelling did indeed appear to modestly reduce stigma. More non-enrolled eligibles expressed interest in applying for Food Stamps in the no-stigma condition (25.8%) than in the control condition (20.9%). In addition, Whitmore found that, when eligible recipients received application assistance and had their application filed directly by H&R Block staff, they were nearly 18% more likely to apply for benefits.

Are people going hungry in the Great Recession?

Fighting Hunger in San Francisco and Marin: An Analysis of Missing Meals and the Food Landscape over the Great Recession, Christopher Wimer and Lucas Manfield

There’s been much concern about the effects of the Great Recession on hunger and food insecurity. The USDA estimates that 14.5 percent of all U.S. households were “food insecure” in 2010 (which means that at least some household members didn’t have access to enough food for an “active, healthy life”).

But what about the Bay Area? Are people going hungry even in the Bay Area as the Great Recession continues to play out? In a recent study, Christopher Wimer and Lucas Manfield sought to measure unmet food needs in San Francisco and Marin counties and to assess whether government and nonprofit organizations are meeting those needs.

The news is not all bad. Although food needs of course rose during the Great Recession, both government and nonprofit organizations successfully increased their assistance to meet this need. As a result, the number of missing meals held fairly steady between 2007 and 2009, despite increased numbers of people finding themselves in need.
WHY DON’T ALL POOR WOMEN USE FOOD STAMPS?
_Why Do Low-Income Women Not Use Food Stamps?_  
Lucia Kaiser

It might be thought that, if you’re poor and eligible for Food Stamps, of course you’d want to take advantage of them. But in fact Food Stamp participation among eligible individuals is problematically low in California.

Why is this? As a reasonable hypothesis, one might suppose that the “eligible non-appliers” are objectively less needy and, by virtue of this, wrongly suppose that they are ineligible for Food Stamps. Or perhaps they think they simply haven’t any need for Food Stamps. Is this hypothesis on the mark?

In an important study, Lucia Kaiser shows that, to some extent, it indeed is. The “eligible non-appliers” are objectively less needy: They are less likely to be unemployed, uninsured, or have psychosocial and health problems. And a main reason they gave for not applying was that they didn’t think they needed the benefits. They also sometimes thought—wrongly—that they weren’t eligible for benefits.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE WHO DON’T PARTICIPATE?
_Food Within Reach: Strategies for Increasing Participation in the Food Stamp Program in California_,  
Scott Graves and Jennifer Tucker

If we want to figure out how to raise Food Stamp participation rates, an important prerequisite is first to learn more about those who are and aren’t participating. And there are of course a great many non-participants. The CalFresh program is one of the largest anti-hunger programs in the nation, but even so only about 48 percent of eligible Californians use it.

So what types of households do use the program? In a study by Scott Graves and Jennifer Tucker, we find that Food Stamp recipient households are more likely to have children, to include non-citizens, and to live in poverty. And recipient households are also less likely to include disabled individuals and those over the age of 60. This profile of users and nonusers suggests that participation rates might be ramped up by eliminating or modifying fingerprinting and asset tests (and indeed some of the recommendations in the Graves-Tucker report have now been passed into California law).

WHICH CALIFORNIA COUNTY HAS THE LOWEST FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION RATE?
_Measuring County CalFresh Participation in 2009_,  
Tia Shimada

CalFresh’s participation rate is quite low compared to other states. But are there some counties in which non-participation is especially striking?

To answer this question, Tia Shamada has introduced the Program Access Index (PAI), which measures the use of CalFresh among low-income individuals. The PAI can be used to compare differences in CalFresh utilization and administration among counties.

It turns out that California counties vary widely in their participation rates. The PAIs for California’s 58 counties ranged from .191 to .689, with Fresno having the highest PAI and San Mateo the lowest.
BIRTH, DEATH, AND FOOD STAMP PARTICIPATION

Did the Introduction of Food Stamps Affect Birth Outcomes in California? Janet Currie and Enrico Moretti

The long-standing presumption behind Food Stamp take-up studies is that non-participation is harmful to non-participants and their children. But Janet Currie and Enrico Moretti pose the troubling possibility that, when Food Stamps are denied, even the as-yet-unborn may be harmed. Without Food Stamps, the mother’s nutrition and health will presumably suffer, and infant mortality and morbidity may increase as a result.

In a fascinating study, this hypothesis is explored by testing for a link between (a) the introduction of Food Stamps in the 1960s, and (b) a change in infant mortality rates. The results are teasingly suggestive. Among whites, the Food Stamp program had small positive effects on the probability of fetal survival in Los Angeles, although the same effect is not found in the state as a whole. Among blacks, the introduction of the Food Stamp program was associated with a decline in the probability that a surviving infant was underweight, though again this effect was found in Los Angeles but not in the rest of the state.

A SIMPLE PATHWAY TO INCREASING “UPWARD-STICKY” TAKE-UP RATES

Informing, Enrolling, and Reenrolling CalWORKS Leavers in Food Stamps and Medi-Cal, Jacob Klerman and Amy Cox

So what’s to be done? The take-up problem is well known, and we might therefore usefully turn to the question of how to increase take-up. As a companion study to “Program Take-Up Among CalWORKS Leavers,” Jacob Klerman and Amy Cox now ask how we might go about informing CalWORKS leavers about Food Stamp programs and, better yet, how we might go about enrolling them. Two straightforward approaches appear to be key: (1) Inform them about the benefits; and (2) Simplify the Food Stamp enrollment process.

The results of this two-prong approach are promising. The authors find that take-up indeed increases when eligible individuals are informed about the benefits of Food Stamp programs and when the enrollment process is made easy and efficient.

PROFILING USERS AND NON-USERS

California Food Stamps Characteristics Report, Alexis Fernandez

This study provides another useful portrait of households that are participating in the Food Stamp Program and of households that are eligible but are not enrolled. The comparison between the “participating” group and the “eligible-but-unenrolled” group is carried out in terms of such factors as income, enrollment in other social welfare programs, and the ages of individuals living in the households.

Non-participating eligible families had more income than participants, were more likely to report at least some earnings, were less likely to have children in the household, and were also eligible for smaller benefit levels. For many more results, explore the database yourself at https://c-well.stanford.edu/welfare-db!
Cal-Learn
Required for CalWORKS participants who are under 19 years old, are pregnant or parenting, and who have not yet graduated from high school. It provides services that encourage and help pregnant or parenting teens to complete their high school education so that they can become self-sufficient adults.
http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG84.htm

CalWORKS/TANF/AFDC
CalWORKs is California’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. It provides temporary financial assistance for low income California families that have children.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/calworks/

Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI)
Provides immigrants who do not qualify for SSI/SSP with financial support. This program is limited to individuals who are disabled, blind, or aged and entered the US legally.
http://www.ladpss.org/dpss/capi/default.cfm

Child Care (Stages I, II, III)
Child care services are provided to CalWORKs parents who are required to work or attend training and who are otherwise eligible for these benefits. The program is administered in three stages. Stage 1 is provided by county welfare departments under the supervision of the state Department of Social Services. Stages 2 and 3 are administered by the state Department of Education.

Stage 1: begins when a family begins the CalWORKs program and generally ends at six months or when their situation is stable and a stage 2 slot is available.

Stage 2: begins once the family’s work situation has stabilized and the family begins to transition off of aid from CalWORKs. A household may receive benefits for up to two years after leaving CalWORKs.

Stage 3: resources permitting, stage 3 is available after a family has used 24 months of stage 2 services and is no longer receiving CalWORKs benefits.
http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG78.htm

Child Support
A federal program administered by states, the Child Support program helps to establish paternity, locate absent parents, and obtain and enforce court orders for financial support from the absent parents (usually fathers). California’s program “works with parents -custodial and noncustodial- and guardians to ensure that children and adults receive court-ordered financial and medical support.”

Child Welfare Services
Seeks to ensure the safety and well-being of children, particularly in cases of abuse and neglect. This program attempts to create a stable, safe environment with some degree of permanency. When support services are not adequate and a child is not deemed safe in its own home, child welfare officials may move the child to a relative’s home or to foster care. If attempts at reuniting the family fail, every effort is made to find a permanent home for the child, with relatives or through adoption.
http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.cfm

Earned Income Tax Credit
A federal program that issues refundable income tax credits to low income working families and their children. In cases where the household owes federal taxes, it reduces the amount to be paid. The EITC provides supplemental income for needy families.
http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96406,00.html

CalFresh/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps
CalFresh is California’s SNAP program. SNAP benefits are funded entirely by the federal government, and the federal and state governments share administrative costs. Benefits are intended to supplement a poor individual’s or household’s food budget. These benefits can be used to purchase food for human consumption and seeds and plants for home grown fruits and vegetables. An individual is not eligible for CalFresh if he/she receives SSI/SSP.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps/
California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)
Provides undocumented immigrants, who do not qualify for CalFresh, with the same benefits as CalFresh.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps/PG846.htm

Foster Care
Removes children from their families in cases of abuse and neglect. The state takes on the responsibility of ensuring that the children are safe and provides for their well-being. The state also provides services to help reunite the family.
http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG123.htm

General Assistance (General Relief)
Check to see counties are still required by the state constitution to provide GA. GA is funded entirely by counties, and benefits vary from county to county. Last time I looked, counties were permitted to time limit benefits – don’t know if this is current. Provides support for impoverished adults who do not have the means to support themselves and are not supported by other public welfare programs.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/PG132.htm

In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)
To enable poor elderly or disabled individuals to remain in their own homes rather than having to move to nursing homes, IHSS helps to pay for services such as grocery shopping, laundry, meal preparation, and personal care services.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/PG139.htm

Local Alcohol and Other Drug Grants and Subventions
Provides funding for research and projects aimed at issues surrounding drug and alcohol usage.

Local Mental Health Community Services Program
Offers services, such as mental evaluations, rehabilitation, and treatment, to adults and children with mental illnesses or emotional disorders.
http://www.dmh.ca.gov/services_and_programs/default.asp

Medi-Cal
Medi-Cal is California’s version of the federal Medicaid program. Jointly funded by the federal and state governments, Medicaid offers health insurance to low income individuals and families. Households eligible for SSI, CalWORKs, Foster Care, and IHSS are automatically eligible for Medi-Cal.
http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medica-Pages/default.aspx

Medi-Cal/ Short Doyle
Extends Medi-Cal services to individuals suffering with mental illnesses.
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1577700/

Healthy Families (California’s SCHIP program)
Provides children, teens, and pregnant mothers who do not quality for Medi-Cal with low cost health, vision, and dental care insurance plans.
http://www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov/Home/default.aspx

Supplemental Security Income (SSI/SSP)
Provides income support for poor aged, blind, or disabled individuals. This extra income can be used to purchase necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. SSI is federally funded, while the State Supplemental Payment (SSP), if available, is funded by the state.
http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Offers supplemental foods, nutrition education and referrals to other public health and welfare services. These services are aimed at low-income individuals who are at risk nutritionally including pregnant women, breastfeeding women, infants and children.
http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
Offers skill-building activities to low-income individuals. These activities help to strengthen the workforce and aim to help welfare dependent individuals become self-sufficient. This program targets job seekers, laid-off workers, veterans, persons with disabilities, and youth.
http://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/Workforce_Investment_Act.htm

New Demonstration/ Pilot Program
Studies that involve preliminary research or programs that are in their beginning stages.