

The Nutrition Program- Related Needs of Immigrants

Presentation by Jennifer Ng'andu
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Background

- Noncitizen Participation Rates in the Food Stamp Program
- Food Security Among Noncitizens
- Food Security Among Latino Immigrants

Background: Low Participation

In FY 2004:

- Just four out of 10 (42.4%) eligible noncitizens participated in the Food Stamp Program (FSP).
- Only half (52.5%) of the eligible citizen children in noncitizen households participated in the FSP.

Background: High Food Insecurity among Noncitizens

At the height of immigrant restrictions in 2000:

- Physicians for Human Rights observed hunger in CA, TX, and IL – states with high immigrant populations.
- Only 2 out of 10 immigrant households were food secure. Hunger was reported at a rate of 41%.

Background: High Food Insecurity among Latino Immigrants

Wake Forest University School of Medicine studied Latino migrant workers in NC, an emerging population:

- Hunger was nearly twice the national rate at 8%
- Food security rates have been found to be as low as 50% among migrant populations

Background: Latino Immigrants (Continued)

- More than 25% of respondents said that children – often the last to lose access to food – were not eating, because of inadequate resources to purchase food.

Barriers to Food Stamps

- Five-year Bar
- “Qualified” Status
- Deeming of Sponsor Income
- Sponsor Liability
- Fear and Confusion

Barriers: Five-Year Bar

More than four changes in law have affected immigrant access to the FSP.

- In 1996, nearly all legal immigrants barred from food stamps, resulting in massive participation decreases.
- In 2002, a series of restorations gave legal immigrants partial access to FSP.

Barriers: Five-Year Bar (Continued)

- Legal immigrant children currently have full access to program, provided they otherwise qualify.
- Most adults currently face a five-year bar that prevents them from accessing the FSP, whether or not they are qualified.

Barriers: “Qualified Status”

Only “qualified” immigrants and victims of trafficking can access the FSP.

- “Qualified” immigrants include: legal permanent residents (green card holders); refugees; asylees; Cuban/Haitian entrants; VAWA petitioners; persons paroled into the U.S. for at least one year; and persons granted withholding of deportation or removal.

Barriers: Deeming of Income

Immigrants applying for FSP may have a sponsor's income, deemed as their own income

- Deeming currently applies until the immigrant adjusts to a permanent status.

Barriers: Deeming of Income (Continued)

- Indigence Exemption allows that essentially all immigrant FSP applicants are exempt from deeming. However, if applied, a sponsor might be reported to the Attorney General.
- Immigrants under 130% of poverty – the income limit for the FSP; legal immigrant children, battered immigrants, and immigrants without a sponsor are NOT subject to deeming

Barriers: Liability

A sponsor is liable for benefits used by an immigrant if they have signed an “enforceable affidavit.”

- The sponsor liability can be enforced as long as the affidavit is in effect (usually until the immigrant gains citizenship).
- Since sponsors are often close family members, immigrants avoid using the FSP, even when in need.

Barriers: Fear and Confusion

- Inconsistency of laws makes many immigrants unaware that they, or citizens in the household, are eligible for FSP
- Many immigrants also fear that they will suffer immigration consequences, or be determined a “public charge*” if they use the FSP or other nutrition assistance.

* Under law, use of the FSP will not hurt your chances of naturalizing.

Recommendations

Need for further simplification under the current FSP:

- At minimum, all legal immigrants should be treated equitably to citizens.
- The deterrent effects of deeming and liability should be revisited. New policies that improve participation and serve the best interests of those who are hungry should be implemented.

Recommendations

Increase investment in community-centered education:

- USDA should partner with organizations at local levels to create links to communities
- Community-based outreach and outreach efforts essential to success of nutrition programs.

For More Information

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