

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Non-Minor Dependents & CalFresh

1) Will being in foster care disqualify a NMD from eligibility for CalFresh benefits?

Answer: Being in foster care does not disqualify a NMD from eligibility for CalFresh benefits. Eligibility for CalFresh benefits is made on a case by case basis and considers the individual’s earned and unearned income, including any portion of the foster care payment they receive directly; assets; household composition; the amount of rent and utility expenses; student status and other factors.

2) What are the income requirements for CalFresh eligibility?

Answer: CalFresh eligibility is based on gross and net income determination tests. Gross income is all non-excludable income from any source including both earned and unearned income. Net income is what you are left with after deductions are applied to your gross income. Income deductions are described in question 5.

The maximum gross income allowed is 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The maximum net income allowed is 100% of the FPL.ⁱ (For a chart showing maximum household incomes for each household size, see right-hand column). How to count any portion of a foster care payment a NMD receives is addressed in the next question.

3) Should a NMD count their foster care payment as income?

Answer: Any stipend or allowance that a NMD receives *directly* should be counted as unearned income. Below are some examples by placement:

- **Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP):** A NMD’s monthly SILP payment is counted as unearned income when they receive it directly. If this payment is going directly from the county to a landlord to pay for rent, then the amount is considered a vendor payment, and is excluded from income consideration.
- **Transitional Housing Placement (THP+FC):** The monthly THP+FC rate the provider receives per youth is *not* what is counted as income. The monthly stipend that a NMD in a THP+FC placement receives *directly* from the provider is the amount that is counted as unearned income, whether spent, held or put into personal savings.ⁱⁱ While the THP+FC rate is set and providers all receive the same monthly amount per youth, the amount that the providers choose to pass on *directly* to the youth varies across the state. Note that any amount that the provider pays directly to a landlord for rent (the youth does not receive this) would not be

WHAT IS A “NON-MINOR DEPENDENT”?

A “non-minor dependent” or “NMD” is a person who is 18, 19 or 20 years of age and is participating in extended foster care (under dependency, transition, or delinquency jurisdiction). Extended foster care was established in 2010 by the passage of California Assembly Bill 12, The Fostering Connections to Success Act and was implemented starting in 2012. More information at www.cafosteringconnections.org.

WHAT IS CALFRESH?

The CalFresh Program, federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and known formerly as food stamps, issues monthly electronic benefits that can be used to buy most foods at many markets and food stores. More information at www.calfresh.ca.gov.

| GROSS MONTHLY INCOME ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS FY2017 (130% Federal Poverty Level) | |
|--|--------------|
| Household Size | Gross Income |
| 1 | \$1,287 |
| 2 | \$1,736 |
| 3 | \$2,184 |
| 4 | \$2,633 |
| 5 | \$3,081 |
| 6 | \$3,530 |
| 7 | \$3,980 |
| 8 | \$4,430 |
| Each add'l member | +\$451 |

| MAXIMUM MONTHLY ALLOTMENTS FY2017 | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Household Size | Maximum Allotment |
| 1 | \$194 |
| 2 | \$357 |
| 3 | \$511 |
| 4 | \$649 |
| 5 | \$771 |
| 6 | \$925 |
| 7 | \$1,022 |
| 8 | \$1,169 |
| Each add'l member | +\$146 |

These tables, in addition to the net income eligibility table are provided by the USDA on their [website](http://www.usda.gov), and by CDSS, as an attachment to [ACIN I-68-16](http://www.cdss.ca.gov) (COLA for 2016-17).

counted as a direct stipend, and therefore would be excluded from income consideration.

4) If a NMD lives in a household where other individual(s) are already receiving CalFresh benefits can they still apply?

Answer: In shared living arrangements where meals are purchased and prepared *together*, the Head of Household would apply for CalFresh benefits on behalf of the entire household (i.e. foster/relative caregiver, guardian homes). In shared living arrangements where meals are purchased and prepared *separately*, each individual may apply for CalFresh benefits separately (i.e. THP+FC, renting a room in a SILP).

5) What are income deductions, which are more common to NMDs, and how do they work?

Answer: The net income is computed by deducting certain allowed amounts from the gross income. Four types of income deductions that are more common to NMDs are described below. Deduction amounts are adjusted annually by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the beginning of each federal fiscal year, based on changes in the cost of living. Current amounts can be found on the USDA's website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/cost-living-adjustment-cola-information>. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) also releases an annual All County Information Notice (ACIN) that includes the updated amounts based on Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs).

- **Earned Income:** All CalFresh recipients have an allowable deduction of 20%. This means that NMDs who are working can automatically deduct 20% of the amount they earn from wages or salaries to calculate their net income.
- **Standard Deduction:** All CalFresh recipients get the standard deduction. For households of 1-3 people, this deduction is \$157 for FFY 2017.
- **Standard Utility Allowance:** When utility costs are separate from the rent payment, the CalFresh recipient is eligible for this deduction. A NMD who pays any utility bill *separate* from their rent payment (i.e. making payments directly to the utility company) is allowed the Standard Utility Allowance which is \$389 for FFY 2017.
- **Dependent Care:** Actual cost of payments necessary for dependent care if that care enables a household member to accept or continue employment or training, or education preparatory for employment. A NMD who pays for childcare when that childcare enables them to work or attend training/education preparatory for work, should deduct their childcare costs to determine their net income.ⁱⁱⁱ

6) Are there any types of income that aren't counted when considering CalFresh eligibility?

Answer: Yes, there are certain types of income that are not counted when calculating gross or net income. They are listed below:

- In-kind benefits (any gain or benefit that is not in the form of money – i.e. meals, clothing, housing provided by employer, etc.)
- Vendor payments (money paid to third party for a household expense by a person or organization outside of the household)
- Deferred educational loans

- Grants and scholarships
- Cash donations from a charitable organization of not more than \$300 in a calendar quarter
- Income received too infrequently/irregularly to be reasonably anticipated but not more than \$30 in a quarter^{iv}

7) Should a NMD include “under the table” income they earn on their CalFresh application?

- Yes, all income must be reported at application. After benefits are initiated, most CalFresh households are issued an Income Reporting Threshold (IRT), which if exceeded, requires the household to report the income to the county. As long as earned income, cash or otherwise, is under this threshold it need not be reported.

8) Does being a student impact a NMD’s eligibility for CalFresh?

Answer: Students enrolled half-time in institutions of higher education are generally not eligible for CalFresh unless they meet certain criteria or are exempt from the requirement. It is important to note that some of these criteria and/or exemptions apply to many NMDs.

If a student meets any of the following criteria, they are not excluded from eligibility for CalFresh based on their student status:

- Employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week
- Approved for work study for the current term and anticipate working during term
- A parent with a dependent child under age 6
- A parent with a dependent child age 6-12 and for whom lack of adequate child care prevents from attending class and working 20 hours per week or participating in work study
- Enrolled full-time in a higher education institution and a single parent with a dependent child under age 12

If any of the following exemptions apply, the student is not excluded from eligibility for CalFresh based on their student status:

- Those who are physically or mentally unfit for employment
- High school students
- Those participating strictly in the job training portion of on-the-job training programs as opposed to the class attendance portion*
- Those enrolled in higher education institutions less than half time as defined by the institution
- Those enrolled in schools and training programs which are not institutions of higher education

*According to [All County Letter 15-70](#) (issued September 15, 2015), enrollment in Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) qualifies an otherwise CalFresh-eligible student for the CalFresh exemption because CDSS considers EOPS an employment training program. Students who provide proof of enrollment in EOPS shall be eligible for CalFresh if they meet all other conditions of CalFresh eligibility. Note that Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Services (CAFYES) programs are housed within EOPS, so any foster youth participating in a CAFYES program on campus is enrolled in EOPS.

State guidance about participation in additional programs that would qualify an otherwise CalFresh-eligible student for the CalFresh exemption is forthcoming, and will be reflected in a future version of this FAQ.

9) Are grants and scholarships counted as income when I apply for CalFresh?

Answer: No. Grants and scholarships are considered exempt income.^v They should not be included on your application as income.

10) What amount of CalFresh benefits will NMDs likely qualify for? How might this differ for parenting NMDs?

Answer: The amount of CalFresh benefits a household gets depends on how many people are in the household and how much monthly net income remains after taking allowable deductions. The county welfare department takes the maximum amount of CalFresh benefits a household can get for the number of people in the household, and then deducts 30% of the household's net income. This means that for every \$10 of net income the household has, the CalFresh office will reduce the CalFresh allotment by \$3.

For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2017 (October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017) the maximum monthly allotment for a two-person household in California is \$357. Maximum allotments are adjusted by the USDA at the beginning of each federal fiscal year, based on changes in the cost of living (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/cost-living-adjustment-cola-information>). A chart that shows the maximum monthly allotments by household size for the current federal fiscal year is included in the right hand column on page 1. CDSS also includes this information in their annual ACIN that includes updated COLAs.

11) If a NMD is also receiving Supplemental Security Income or State Supplemental Program payments (SSI/SSP), does this affect their eligibility for CalFresh?

Answer: Those receiving SSI or SSP are not eligible for CalFresh.^{vi}

12) How do you go about applying for CalFresh?

Answer: Download an application at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CF285.pdf>, fill it out, and submit it to your local County Welfare Department, or complete it online at <http://www.benefitscal.org/>. You will be required to have an interview with the County to discuss your application, most likely done over the phone. You will be asked for proof of your income, expenses, and other circumstances to see if you are eligible. A list of proof needed to get benefits is included on the online application. The County will send you a letter to let you know if your household is approved or denied CalFresh benefits within 30 days.^{vii}

13) Where can I use my CalFresh benefits to buy food, and what can I buy?

Answer: You can use your CalFresh benefits to buy almost all foods, as well as seeds and plants to grow your own food. You cannot buy alcohol, tobacco, pet food, food that will be eaten in the store, hot foods, or anything that is not food (like toothpaste, soap, or paper towels).^{viii}

CalFresh benefits can be used to purchase food at grocery stores, farmers' markets, and even some flea markets. They cannot be used to purchase foods online.

14) How long will it take from the time I apply for CalFresh to the time I receive my first benefit payment?

Answer: It may take up to 30 days to process your application. However, you may be able to get benefits within 3 calendar days if your household's monthly gross income (income before deductions) is

less than \$150 and your cash on hand or in checking or savings accounts is \$100 or less; or if your household's housing costs (rent and utilities) are more than your monthly gross income and cash on hand or in checking or savings accounts. (*For additional circumstances less common to NMDs, visit the online application*).^{ix}

Online CalFresh Resources:

- California Department of Social Services, CalFresh Program - <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps/>
- United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>
- Legal Services of Northern California's Guide to CalFresh Benefits - <http://calfresh.lsnr.net/>
- CalFresh online application - <http://www.benefitscal.org/>

ⁱ Code of Federal Regulations § 273.9(a) <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=bc19473384f994f28453c3af21a8a305&mc=true&node=pt7.4.273&rgn=div5#se7.4.273_19>

ⁱⁱ CalFresh Program Request for Policy/Regulation Interpretation <<http://www.cdsscounties.ca.gov/foodstamps/res/pdf/CF24/THP%20PLUS%20fostercare%20REVISED%207%2012%2016.pdf>>

ⁱⁱⁱ CalFresh Regulations § 63-502.3 <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/foodstamps/entres/getinfo/pdf/fsman5.pdf>>

^{iv} United States Code § 2014(d) <<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/7/2014#d>>

^v CalFresh Regulations § 63-502.145 <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/foodstamps/entres/getinfo/pdf/fsman5.pdf>>

^{vi} California Department of Social Services Manual of Policies and Procedures §63-402.226 <<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/ord/entres/getinfo/pdf/fsman04a.pdf>>

^{vii} Application for CalFresh Benefits <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CF285.pdf>>

^{viii} Application for CalFresh Benefits <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CF285.pdf>>

^{ix} Application for CalFresh Benefits <<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CF285.pdf>>