

Data-Sharing to Increase Young Mothers' Benefits Enrollment in Central California

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Executive Summary

This project recommends that the California Department of Health Care Services integrate federal and state nutrition benefits enrollment information directly into the case management systems used by state managed care providers' clinics to provide benefits assistance to young mothers. Right now, there are several different available benefits programs, all with their own data systems; these include the federal nutrition program "WIC," California's food assistance program "CalFresh," and California's Medicaid program "Medi-Cal." Displaying up-to-date enrollment information for these programs in the same place would allow clinics to more efficiently connect Central Valley mothers to benefits. If adopted, this approach could serve as a model for leveraging California's existing data infrastructure to reduce administrative barriers to benefits access and ultimately provide young mothers with more support.

Problem

Thousands of young mothers in California's Central Valley are missing out on nutrition benefits for which they are eligible. For example, in 2022, just 68.9% of eligible Californians were enrolled in the federal benefits, despite Medi-Cal enrollment automatically making people eligible for these programs. This gap is particularly pronounced in the Central Valley, where barriers such as transportation hurdles and complex household circumstances can make cross-benefit enrollment more difficult. States including Colorado and Virginia, as well as California counties such as Santa Cruz and San Francisco, have piloted data-sharing and outreach efforts to help close this enrollment gap. These approaches have not yet reached the Central Valley.

To learn more about this project, visit [aspenpolicyacademy.org](https://www.aspenpolicyacademy.org). Please note that all authors' opinions published here are their own. This publication does not reflect the views of the Aspen Policy Academy or the Aspen Institute.

Solution

This project recommends that the California DHCS create and maintain a new “Enrollments” interface in existing systems that would notify managed care provider-affiliated clinics when young Central Valley mothers are eligible for additional benefits but not yet enrolled. The secure interface would work within current data-sharing agreements for Medi-Cal systems, allowing existing enrollment data to “talk” to each other to determine young mothers’ eligibility. The system would then display an alert to flag cases where mothers are eligible but not enrolled. The project argues that this alert system would give providers more opportunities to address enrollment gaps with clients during their appointments.

“By increasing data sharing and supplying up-to-date eligibility data, [providers] would be able to address enrollment gaps face-to-face during client visits.”

If you’d like to learn more, see the full project at aspempolicyacademy.org/project/california-nutrition-benefits-2026.



About the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI)

This project was completed as part of TELI, a partnership between the Aspen Institute’s Policy Academy and the Tech Talent Project. TELI is a multiweek skills-building initiative that prepares experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Learn more at aspempolicyacademy.org/teli.

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