

# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2005 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

California has several food assistance programs designed to help alleviate the problem of food scarcity for women and their families. The cornerstone of this food safety network is the Food Stamp Program (FSP) administered in California by the Department of Social Services.

The California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) asked women if they had received assistance from the FSP at any time during the 12 months preceding the survey. The women were also asked about their race/ethnicity (self-identification), age, marital status, and family income. The data used in this analysis combined responses from the 2004 and 2005 surveys.

This analysis examined the participation in the FSP by women who were at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), which is the gross income criterion for participating in the FSP (and only one of several criteria used to qualify). The 2004 and 2005 surveys included 1,923 women (23.0 percent of the total surveyed) with this income level. Among them, 425 women (22.1 percent)

reported they had received food stamps at some time during the preceding 12 months.

## RACE/ETHNIC GROUPS

The rate of income-eligible women who reported they received food stamps varied significantly among race/ethnic groups (chi-square test, 91.4,  $P < .0001$ ). Black/African American women had significantly higher rates (52.0 percent) than other race/ethnic groups (which did not vary from one another significantly): Whites (20.9 percent); Hispanics (19.6 percent); and Asians/Others (19.1 percent).

## AGE GROUPS

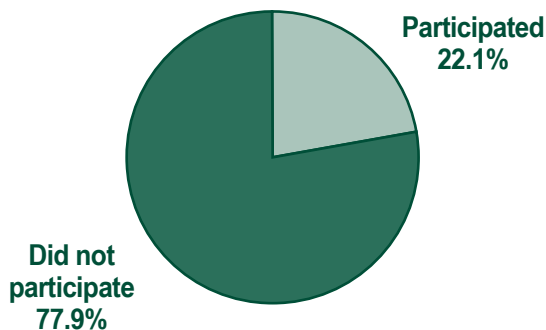
Women in certain age groups also participated in the FSP at significantly different rates (chi square test, 120.5,  $P < .0001$ ). Women in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups were most likely to report participating in the FSP, (33.5 percent and 30.2 percent, respectively). Women least likely to have reported participating in the FSP were those aged 65 years and older (1.0 percent).

## Participation in the Food Stamp Program by Women Who Are at or Below 130% of Poverty

Department of Social Services  
Research and Evaluation Branch

**Public Health Message:**  
*Almost one-third of women who were income-eligible for the Food Stamp Program in the 2004 and 2005 CWHS indicated that they did not know about the program or how to apply for benefits. Programs that supply food to families in California should be aware of the potential reasons why women do not apply for food stamps in order to focus outreach efforts. Survey responses indicate that promotional efforts might realize the greatest gains if they were targeted towards Hispanic women, unmarried women, and women aged 22 to 29.*

### Participation in Food Stamp Program by Women With Household Incomes At or Below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level, California, 2004-2005

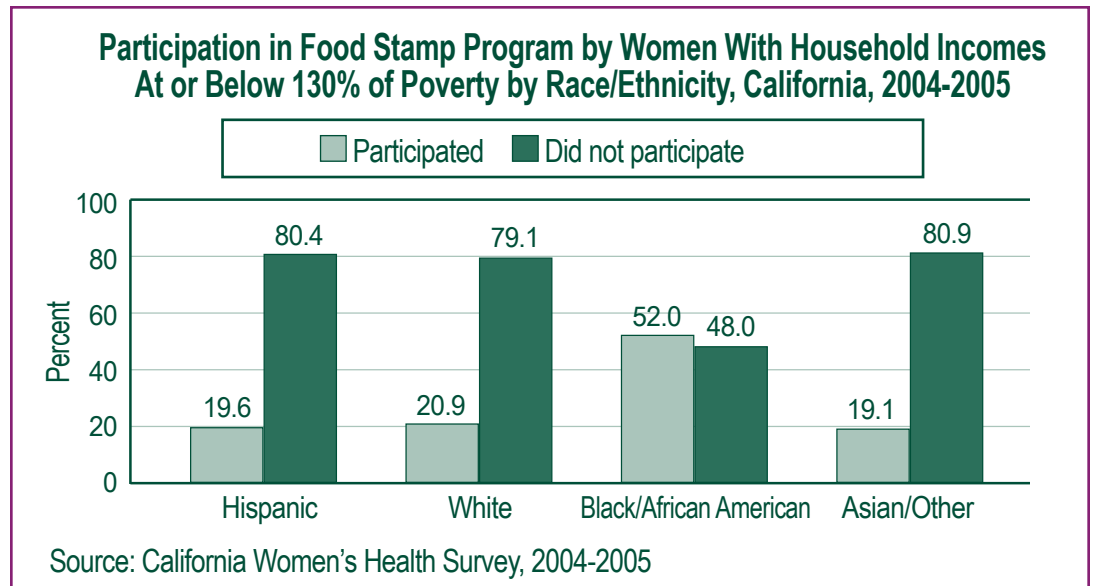


Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2004-2005

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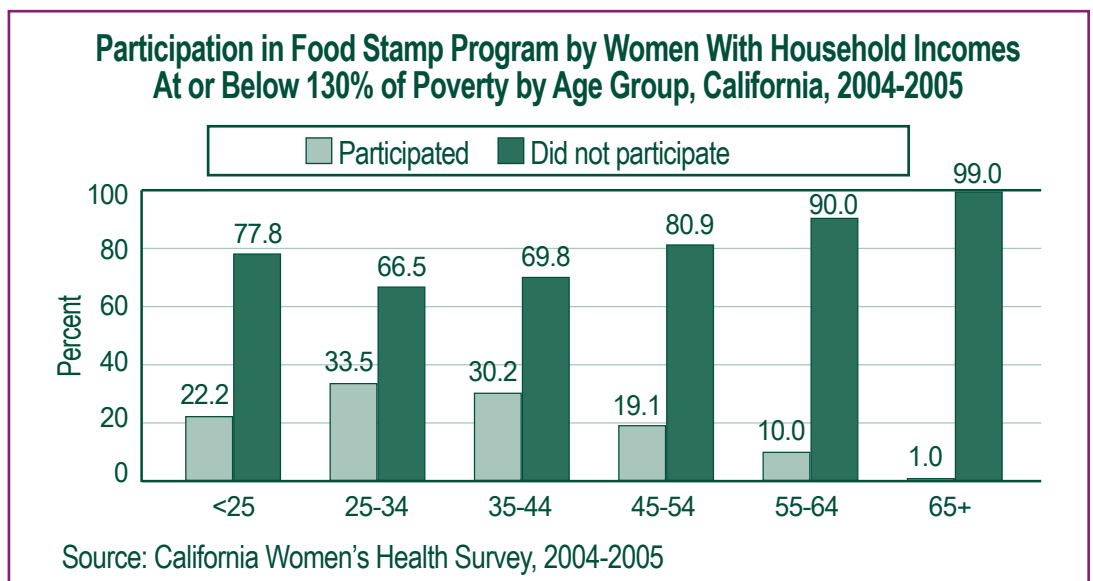
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Low-income seniors who qualify for food stamps have historically had very low participation rates nationally. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently established a demonstration program in six states to determine if additional assistance would improve participation by seniors.<sup>1</sup> The demonstrations were organized around one of three strategies: (1) Simplifying eligibility requirements for women aged 65 and older; (2) Directly assisting seniors with the application process; or (3) Offering food each month instead of the benefits transfer card.

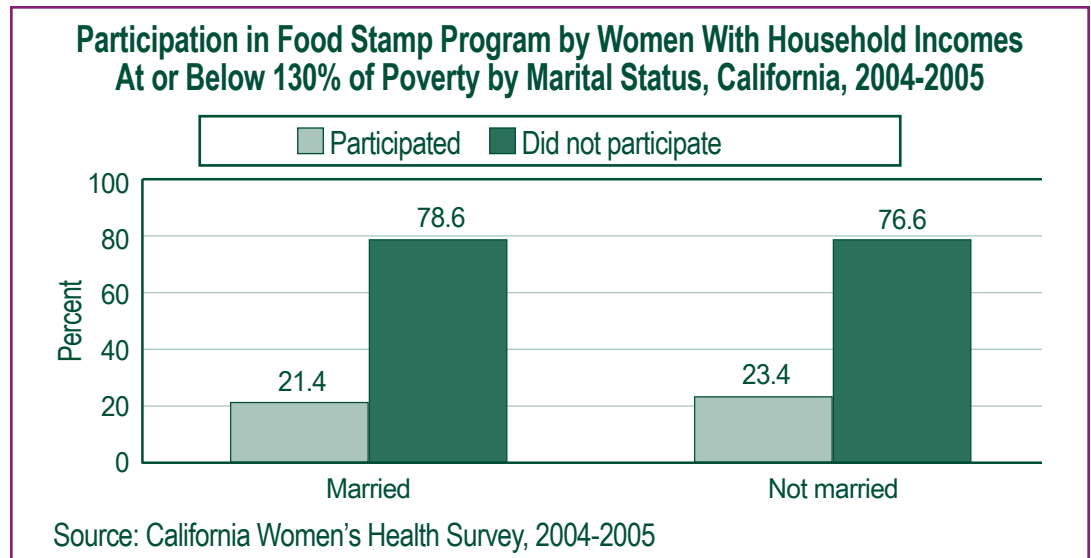
Results showed that the FSP participation by people 65 and older increased substantially

after most of the demonstrations started. As is the case nationally,<sup>2</sup> California's participation by seniors in the FSP is very low. One reason for the low use rate by women age 65 and older may be related to possible lack of eligibility for food stamps due to older respondents' receipt of financial assistance such as the federally funded Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program (SSI/SSP). According to a report from the California Food Policy Advocates, the federal Food Stamp Program does not meet the needs of many seniors in California because of special state and federal rules that make SSI/SSP recipients ineligible for food stamps.<sup>3</sup>



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### MARITAL STATUS

Among income-eligible women, no significant difference in participation rates was found between married and single women (21.4 percent vs. 23.4 percent, respectively).

### REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

Women who were potentially eligible for the FSP because they were at or below 130 percent of the FPL, but responded they had not participated in the FSP were asked why they did not participate (n=1,503 women). Answers were free form and were coded only after each respondent gave her reason for non-participation.

While food stamp caseloads declined from 1995 to 2000, more recent data (2000 forward) shows that participation in the FSP increased. The Economic Research Service of the USDA examined reasons why income-eligible women did not participate and found that while most of these non-participants were aware of the FSP and how to apply, about one-half said they did not realize they were eligible for the program.<sup>4</sup> More than one-quarter (27 percent) responded that they would never apply even if they knew they were eligible, with the main reason given being a desire for personal independence.

Juarez and Associates<sup>5</sup> conducted 10 focus groups within California to explore factors that affect participation in the FSP. Focus groups members indicated they would apply for food stamps if they were in a crisis situation, but would

first seek assistance from other resources. Lack of knowledge about the FSP appeared to be the most significant barrier preventing people from applying. Other reasons included the belief they did not qualify, that the FSP required too much personal information, or that participation might affect their legal status.

Women in the CWHS who were income-eligible for the FSP, but did not participate were asked their reasons: 41.3 percent responded that they did not need food stamps and 4.1 percent said that they did not want any government help. Sixteen percent of the women reported that they had applied, but did not qualify, and 1.9 percent had been denied food stamps.

### Reasons Stated by Income-Eligible Women for Non-Participation in the Food Stamp Program

| Reasons                      | Percent |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Don't need them              | 41.3    |
| Don't qualify                | 16.0    |
| Didn't think I was eligible  | 14.9    |
| Don't know how to get them   | 5.6     |
| Don't want government help   | 4.1     |
| Don't know about Food Stamps | 3.8     |
| Didn't think about them      | 3.3     |
| Too hard to apply            | 3.1     |
| Worried about citizenship    | 2.8     |
| Denied Food Stamps           | 1.9     |
| Too embarrassed to use them  | 0.5     |
| In process                   | 1.0     |
| Other reasons                | 1.7     |

Source:  
California Women's Health Survey, 2004-2005

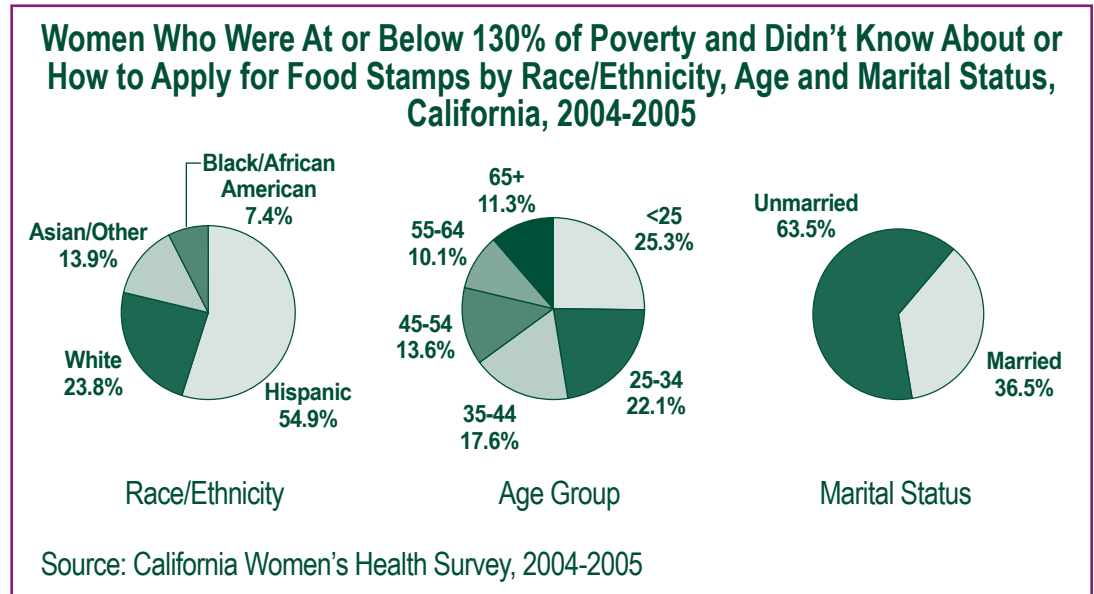
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The CWHS found that 30.7 percent of the women either did not know about the FSP, did not know how to apply for the program, did not think about getting food stamps, or did not think they were eligible. This group of women varied by race/ethnicity: Hispanic women were more likely to report not knowing about or how to apply for the program, (54.9 percent), compared with 23.8 percent of Whites, 13.9 percent of Asians/Others, and 7.4 percent of Black/African Americans.

Women who did not know about the program or how to apply for it also varied by age. Those less than 25 years of age had the highest rates (25.3 percent), followed by women aged 25 to 34 years (22.1 percent).

Unmarried women were more likely than married women to report they did not know about the program or how to apply (63.5 percent vs. 36.5 percent).



1. Cody, S. and Dagata E. Food Stamp Program—Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations. Interim Report on Elderly Participation Patterns. E-FAN-04-009, June 2004.
2. California Department of Social Services. (2002). Food Stamp Household Characteristics Survey, Federal Fiscal Year 2002, Sacramento, CA
3. California Food Advocates. "Preventing Hunger Among Elderly Californians. A Background Paper for Advocates and Service Providers". August 2003.
4. Bartlett, S and Burstein N, Abt Associates Inc. Food Stamp Program Access Eligible Nonparticipants, USDA, Economic Research Service, No. E-FAN-03013-2, May 2004.
5. Juarez and Associates and Chavez, R. Perceptions of the Food Stamp Program Among Limited-Household Income Residents of California: Results from Focus Groups, May 2002.

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