Assessment of Food Establishments and Participation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in an Urban University Setting

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Background
• Food insecurity (FI) is associated with negative impacts on college students’ academics and health1.
• FI can be mitigated by expanding food access by enrolling and using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits2.
• Assembly bills recently passed in California have focused on increasing college students’ access to SNAP (CalFresh) benefits3,4,5.
• Campaigns have advocated for Electronic Benefits Transfer (C-EBT) to be approved as payment on college campuses to combat increased FI among students6.
• Campus faculty, staff, and administrators are unaware of the eligibility criteria and waivers allowed for college students regarding SNAP7,8.
• This study, guided by the Social Ecological Model framework, aimed to conduct an assessment of acceptance of EBT on campus and within 0.5 miles of campus9.

Methods
• For this observational study, an assessment was conducted to determine:
  • the types of food establishments on and around campus
  • retail participation in the CalFresh program on campus and within 0.5 miles of campus
• Descriptive statistics were used to assess types of food establishments and retail participation in the CalFresh program.

Results
• Food establishments (n=30) on campus and off-campus that met the distance criteria were assigned to these categories: Cafes (36.7%), Markets (30.0%), and Restaurants (33.3%).
• In the “Markets” categories, which included grocery stores, 20% accepted C-EBT, where 3.3% were on-campus markets and 16.7% off campus.
• One market accepts C-EBT on campus, however none of the cafes and restaurants on campus accepted C-EBT.
• The 2 campus dining halls included in the “Restaurants” sample did not accept C-EBT but distributed emergency meal plans to students in need.
• At the time of this study, the A.S. Farmers Market was not operating.

Conclusions
Most food establishments on campus do not accept C-EBT card which suggests the need for campus markets to consider participation in the program to improve students’ food security.

Future Directions
• Creation of a program focused on educating food vendors about the CalFresh Program and how to apply to be a C-EBT retailer to improve food security for the campus community.
• Examine steps taken at Southwestern college which fully accepts C-EBT at all food establishments on campus.

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References

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