

Reaching Immigrant Populations: Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)

Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative Best Practices Report

April 2020

Introduction

Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC) was founded in 1972 by a group of energetic college and high school students. They worked as part-time volunteers in a tiny donated space in Chinatown to fulfill community need. The early focus was on helping non-English speaking elderly in the community. Later, CISC broadened its scope and added adult and youth employment programs, ESL and naturalized classes, family and youth services, domestic violence and crime victim services, and a community technology center.

We target to support immigrants and their families by creating opportunity for them to succeed in their new community by providing information, referral, advocacy, social, and support services.

CISC's Outreach Strategy

CISC enrolls seniors in SNAP by delivering a one-stop service through integrating and coordinating efficiently across programs. All frontline staff are trained to facilitate SNAP applications for older adults if they are involved in any elderly programs. This outreach model helps to streamline the referral process and allow efficient follow-up with individuals as the clients have an already established connection through other services with the program staff. As almost all CISC staffs are bilingual, we are able to address language, technology, and cultural barriers during the application process.

The CISC approach includes:

- Providing initial screening for new immigrants who visit CISC for general information
- Assisting in the application process to apply for SNAP
- Distributing a newsletter with SNAP-related topics for general education purposes
- Providing follow-up/renewal assistance if needed.

Challenges

Many immigrants have heightened awareness about sponsor deeming and public charge [revised rules expand the benefits under consideration for certain immigrants]. These issues were circulating in the community and clients were hesitant to apply or renew their SNAP, as they see that their citizenship is more important than the SNAP program.

CISC has been training our frontline staff on sharing information about public charge and sponsor deeming only based on credible sources published by the government when questions were raised during initial screening or renewal process. We continue to gather updates and collect feedback from the community regarding those concerns to have a better outreach strategy in the future.

Best Practices

CISC has been assisting many immigrants throughout the years. We have an established reputation among Chinese speaking immigrants for helping them to apply for food benefits. We aim to provide a one-stop service to apply for different sources of assistance to meet all their family needs.

- One of the successful outreach strategies we have used is to publish a Chinese community newsletter that outlines SNAP eligibility and what other programs (such as school lunch program and employment assistance program) are available to them after they enroll into SNAP. Our newsletters are very popular among the community; we are able to reach at least 1,000 audience members with every SNAP-related article.
- Another successful outreach strategy has been to host nutrition and healthy eating presentations in community centers and libraries, since many elderly care about their health and want to learn more about healthy eating. We have combined SNAP concepts with the nutrition talks to raise awareness about the program and it has been successful to do a mass screening for SNAP at those presentations.

SNAP Client Stories

- Mr. Gu was diagnosed with cancer at the Swedish hospital and was told that he needed to go through an expensive cancer treatment plan. All of Mr. Gu's family members live overseas or out of state, so he could not receive any other financial support from them. Since he became ill, he also lost his job and hence could not receive any income. Mr. Gu felt helpless as he was worried about his living expenses after not receiving any active income. He came to CISC for help for applying for medical financial assistance. Our frontline staff determined that Mr. Gu also was eligible for cash assistance and SNAP benefit and assisted him with the applications. Mr. Gu is now able to get support for his health, nutrition, and daily living expenses.
- Mr. Chan's wife had just passed away and not long after her death, Mr. Chan found out that all his benefits from both the state and federal

level got terminated, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Social Security benefits, and his Medicare insurance. When he came to CISC for help, we investigated and found out that the Department of Social and Health Services had mistakenly reported the death of Mr. Chan (which in fact should be his wife) and thus proceeded to terminate all his benefits. Now, Mr. Chan had no food assistance nor supplemental income. He could barely sustain his life to buy food while also facing this tragic life event alone. What made things worse is that Mr. Chan has severe hearing loss, hence when he first came to CISC for help, our staff had to make many efforts to communicate with Mr. Chan. After working to comprehend and investigate the issue by all means, carefully following up, and re-applying for his benefits (after communicating with the state and federal level to confirm that Mr. Chan is very much alive), we successfully corrected the system error from DSHS to help Mr. Chen obtain SNAP again. From this case, we have learnt that clients who come to apply for benefits might be facing a very difficult situation, and it is our job to follow up with care, to analyze their situation and find out the most efficient way to assist them with their benefits through communicating with the corresponding government unit.

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