Restructuring a State Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Program: Implications of a Local Health Department-Led Model

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Study Objective

To evaluate whether California's restructuring of its SNAP-Ed program, which established local health departments (LHDs) as the local leads for Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention (NEOP) grant implementation, aligned with desirable attributes of decentralized public program management

SNAP-Ed Goals

To improve the likelihood that persons eligible the for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will:

✓ Make healthy food choices within a limited budget

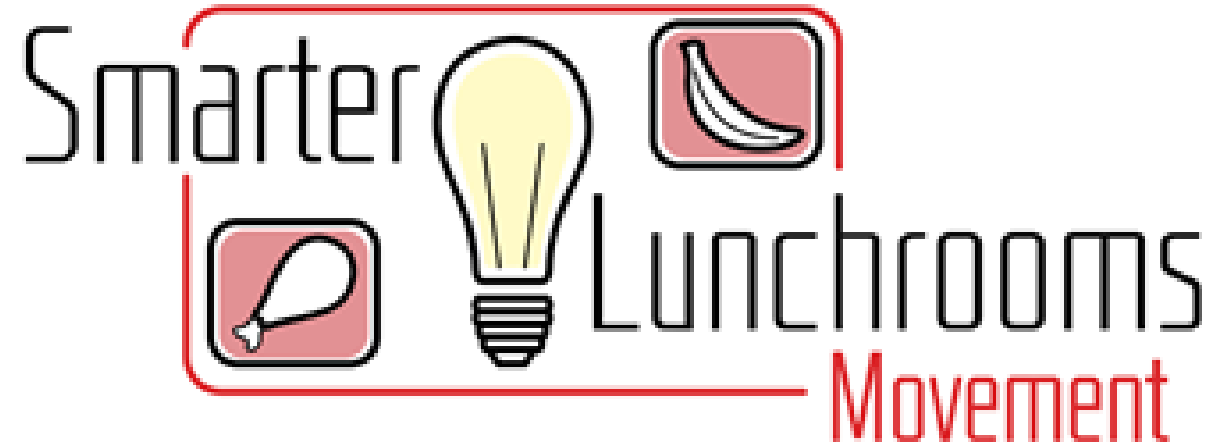✓ Choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate

USDA

Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee

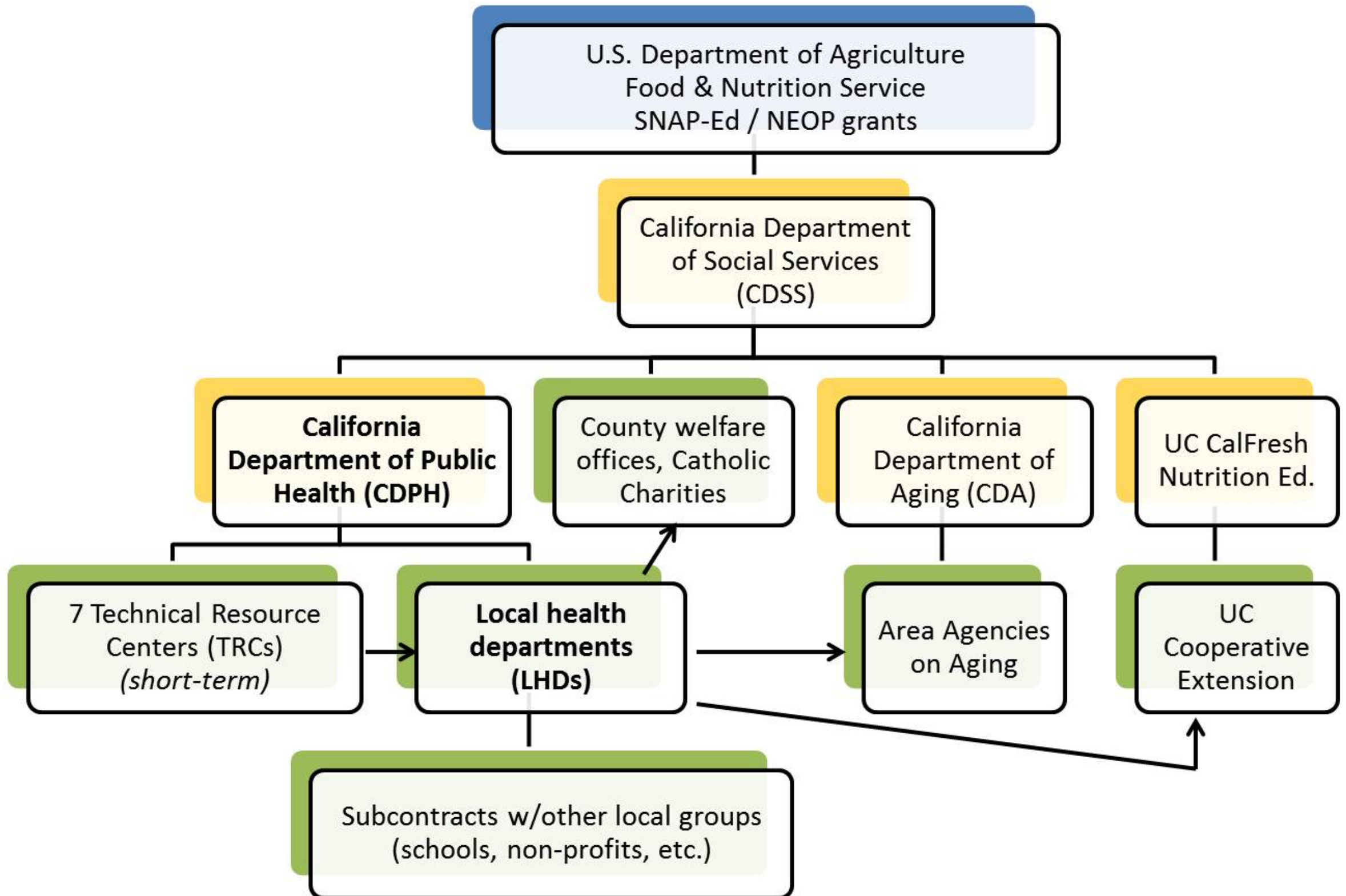Advisory Report to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Agriculture

ChooseMyPlate.gov
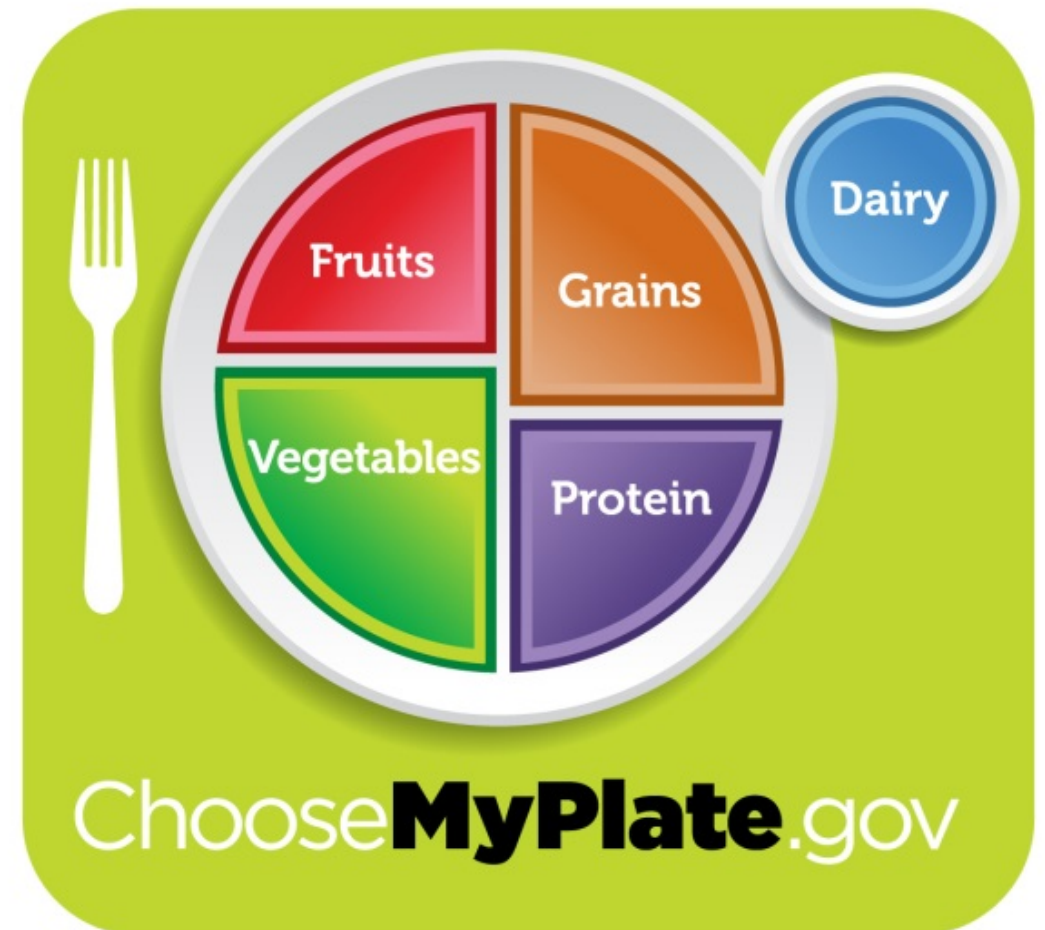
Examples of NEOP Activities

California Has a Unique Model for NEOP

The Previous Model Was Quite Different

Centralized and Decentralized Program Management: Federal, State, and Local Roles

Level	Overall Role	Examples
Federal	Set program rules for use of funds	• Work only in approved census tracts • Not for chronic disease programs
State	Interpret and ensure compliance with federal rules; set additional state rules; provide guidance, TA	• Establish LHDs as local lead agencies • Set programmatic, administrative, evaluation requirements • Approve curriculum, materials • Media and communications/PR
Local	Select and implement activities – within local/state/federal parameters	• Develop countywide work plan • Identify target populations, sites • Select/implement desired activities • Select/manage subcontracts

Methods

1. Literature review
   - Factors for successful decentralized public program management in multiple sectors
   - Identified common themes to address in interviews

2. Key informant interviews
   - In-person, semi-structured format
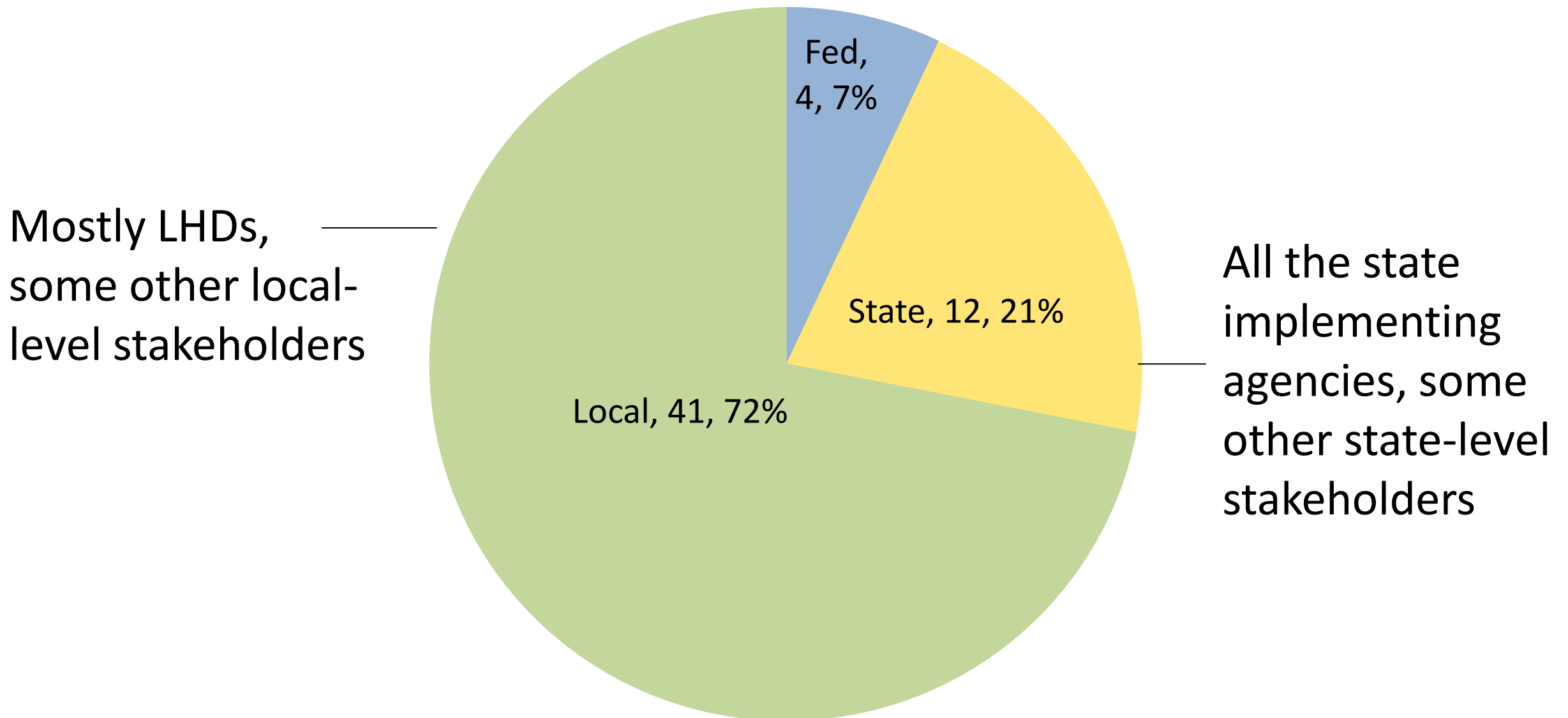   - Federal, state, and local interviewees

3. Analysis
   - Transcription, qualitative content analysis with Atlas.ti *(in progress)*

Key Informant Interviewee Characteristics

n=57 interviewees in 41 interviews
Agency leaders ● Program directors ● Nutrition educators
Administrative, fiscal, contract staff

Mostly LHDs, some other local-level stakeholders

Fed, 4, 7%

State, 12, 21%

Local, 41, 72%

All the state implementing agencies, some other state-level stakeholders

California Has Seven SNAP Regions

LHD Interviewees

- Visited all 7 regions; 14 LHD jurisdictions
- Variety of characteristics: Urban -> suburban-> rural High -> med -> low funding
- Variety of roles, experiences with SNAP-Ed/NEOP: New -> long history

Legend:
- North Coast and Cascades
- San Francisco Bay Area
- Delta and Gold Country
- Central Coast
- Central Valley
- Greater Los Angeles
- Inland Desert

Semi-Structured Interview Topics

Benefits of local public program governance

Drawbacks of local public program governance

+ **More efficient in tailoring to local resources and needs**

- **Less effective sharing of best practices, challenges, lessons**

  + Better coordination, communication locally

  - More duplication of effort

  + More opportunity for innovation, creativity

  - Less beneficial spillover into other regions

+ Development of local public health capacity

- Added administrative burden

Benefit of Local Management: Efficiency

<u>Theory:</u> Centralized programs use one-size-fits-all approaches. Local programs can be tailored to more efficiently maximize community benefit based on local resources and needs.

<u>Question:</u> *Does the model allow this benefit to be realized?*

Yes

No

- LHDs do community needs assessments & select activities, sites, populations

- LHD-developed work plans align with local resources, partnerships

- Subject to federal/state rules for site selection, approved materials – limited choices

- Resources are limited in some counties – few subcontractor options, lengthy staff recruitment

Drawback of Local Management: Sharing Lessons

<u>Theory:</u> Decentralized programs operate in silos, which limits the ability to share lessons learned, best practices, and challenges, and which may slow collective progress.

<u>Question:</u> *Does the model minimize this drawback?*

Yes

No

- LHD program directors call/email one another

- State supports info. sharing: program officers, TRCs, calls, conference, etc.

- Peer sharing is ad hoc; valuable information may not get shared

- Current state supports not effective

Initial Conclusions (Preliminary)

- Supportive environment in CA for NEOP work

- Building LHD infrastructure can work, but success varies

- Some, not all factors in place to maximize benefits, minimize drawbacks of local NEOP management