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

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

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## Abstract

**Background**. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) program funds states to improve nutrition and physical activity in low-income populations. States vary in how they structure SNAP-Ed programs. California substantially restructured its program in 2012 concomitant with several key federal program changes (e.g., addition of Policy, Systems, and Environment (PSE) change strategies to the program goals, and converting funding from a match to a grant program). A major feature of California's reorganization was a move to position local health departments (LHDs) as the programmatic lead for their jurisdictions, and to reduce the state's role for some key functions.

**Research Objective**. This study sought to determine whether California's reorganization of SNAP-Ed program management to LHDs aligned with desirable attributes of decentralized public program management.

**Data Sets and Sources**. Transcribed, coded responses from key informant interviews.

**Study Design**. In-person key informant interviews will be held with approximately 50 program managers and leaders at federal, state, and local levels. A diverse group of local agencies representing all seven of California's SNAP regions will be included. The interviews will be guided by a semi-structured interview protocol developed from a systematic, multi-disciplinary literature review that identified elements of successful decentralized public program management. Interview topics will include the nature of the changes for the respective agency and their impact, characterization of which program elements remain state or federally-directed and which are locally determined, communication and coordination issues, local resource availability and constraints, efficiency, innovation and quality, sharing of challenges and best practices, and experience with PSE change strategies.

**Analysis**. All interviews will be reviewed and coded to identify common themes and evaluate response variation based on respondent characteristics. Coding and qualitative analysis will be done using Atlas.ti v7.

**Principal Findings**. Key informant interviews began in October 2014 and will continue through March 2015. Transcription and data analysis will commence once interviews are complete. Initial impressions from 26 completed interviews (comprising a total of 35 respondents) suggest that the state's nutrition education and obesity prevention activities benefit from having a strong centralized structure to ensure that messaging is consistent and evidence-based. The current LHD model does not appear to fully realize the benefits of decentralized governance, since flexibility to tailor the program to specific local needs is limited and local administrative barriers are high. LHDs vary substantially in their resources and readiness to lead SNAP-Ed efforts countywide, and those least experienced with the SNAP-Ed program need more support.

**Implications**. California is unique in its use of a LHD-based model to lead SNAP-Ed work. The lessons learned from its experience will inform USDA and other states about SNAP-Ed program management.

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

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**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

**Public Health Systems and Services Research Program**

**Keeneland Conference**

**April 21, 2015**

**UCDAVIS**

**INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION HEALTH IMPROVEMENT**

# Study Objective

To evaluate whether California's restructuring of its Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), 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

## Example Activities

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

- ✓ Make healthy food choices within a limited budget

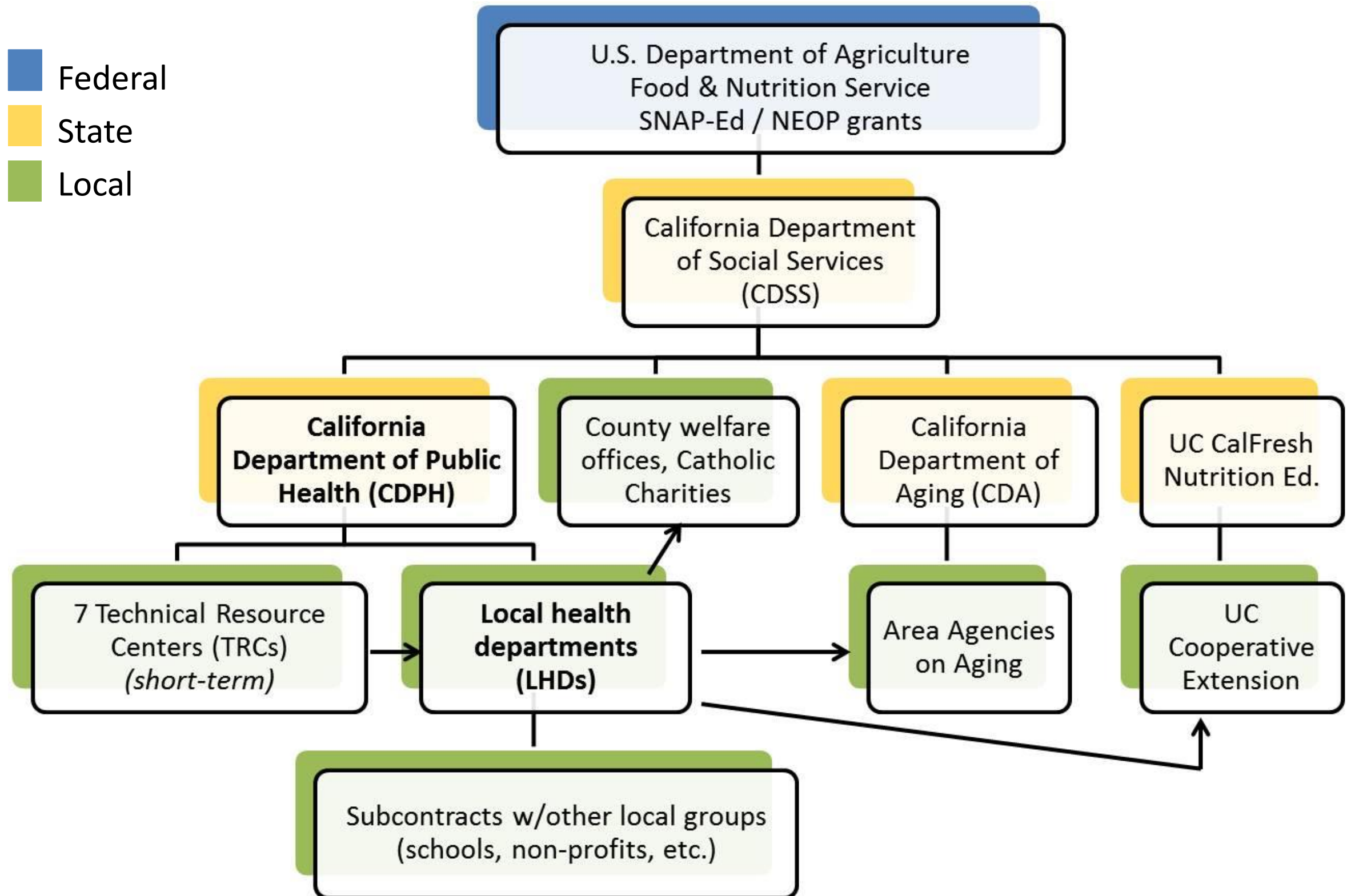- ✓ Choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate
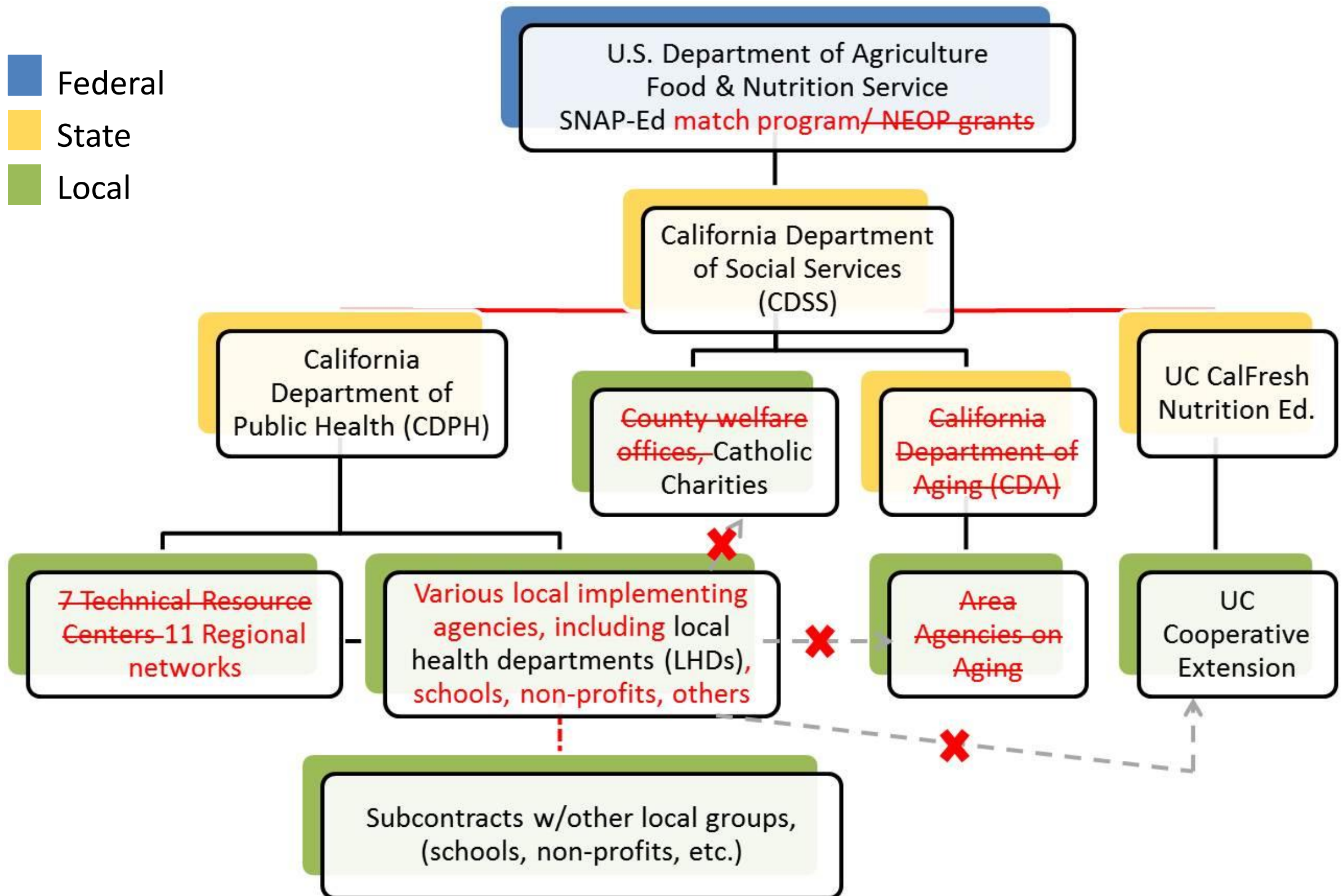


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# California Has a Unique Model for NEOP



Federal

State

Local

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food & Nutrition Service
SNAP-Ed / NEOP grants

California Department
of Social Services
(CDSS)

**California Department of Public Health (CDPH)**

County welfare offices, Catholic Charities

California Department of Aging (CDA)

UC CalFresh Nutrition Ed.

7 Technical Resource Centers (TRCs) *(short-term)*

**Local health departments (LHDs)**

Area Agencies on Aging

UC Cooperative Extension

Subcontracts w/other local groups (schools, non-profits, etc.)

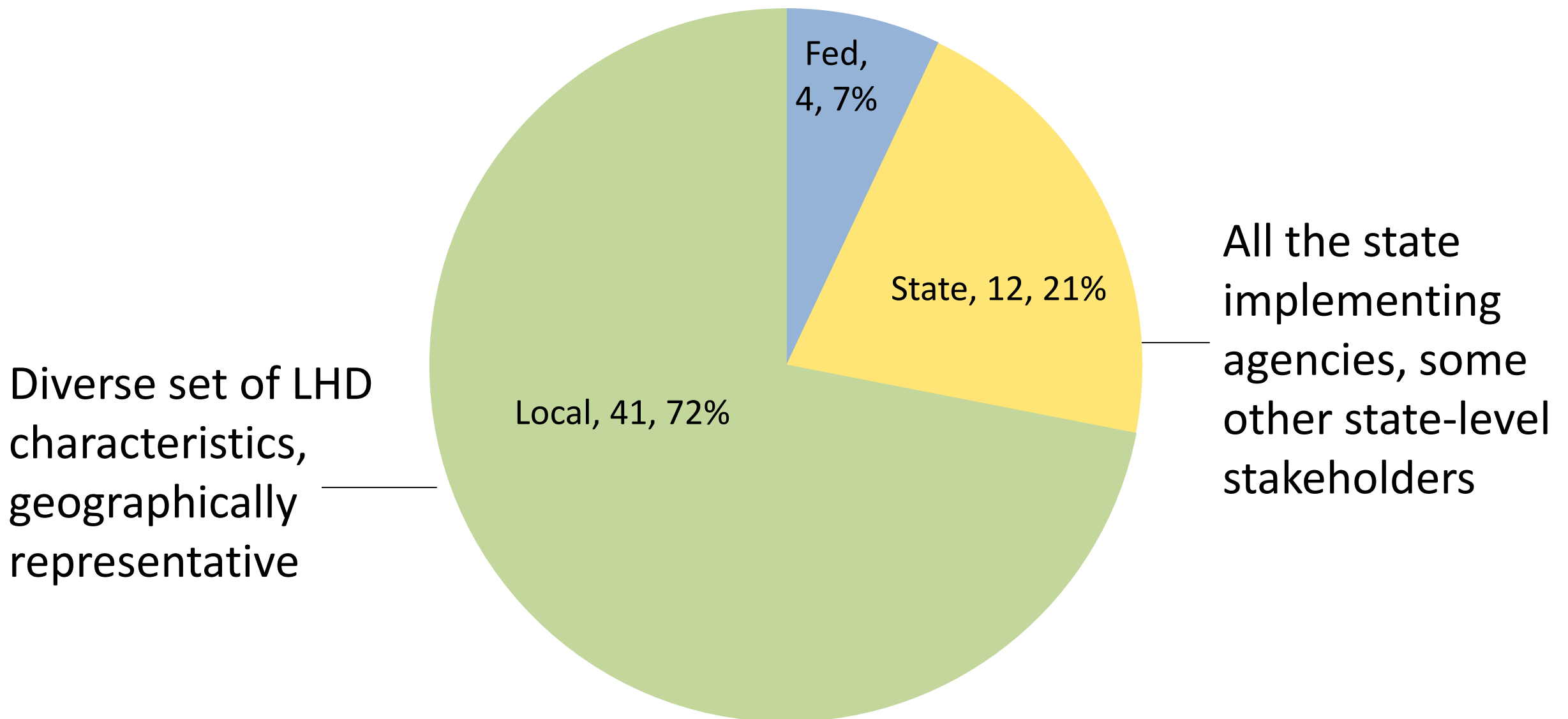# The Previous Model Was Quite Different

# Methods

1. Literature review to develop interview protocol
   - Benefits and drawbacks to decentralized public program management

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)*

# Interviewee Characteristics

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



Fed, 4, 7%

State, 12, 21%

Local, 41, 72%

Diverse set of LHD characteristics, geographically representative

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

# Interview Topics

**Benefits of local public program governance**

+ Efficient in tailoring to local resources and needs

+ Better coordination, communication locally

+ More opportunity for innovation, creativity

+ Development of local public health capacity

**Drawbacks of local public program governance**

- Less effective sharing of best practices, challenges

- More duplication of effort

- Less beneficial spillover into other regions

- 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**

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

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

**No**

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

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

# Initial Conclusions (Preliminary)


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- Supportive environment in California for NEOP work

- Building LHD infrastructure can work, but success varies

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