Safety-net supports: Basic questions and answers

Children of parents with low incomes are the primary beneficiaries of Minnesota Department of Human Services programs that provide temporary assistance to families while parents look for work or complete job training. The department also administers several programs that help adults with disabilities live with dignity. Additional information about these programs is available in the “People we serve” section of the department’s website at mn.gov/dhs.

What help is available for families in poverty?

- **The Minnesota Family Investment Program** is the state’s main program for helping families with children move out of poverty through work.
- The program provides basic temporary assistance for eligible adults while they look for work or participate in job training.
- For the first time in more than 30 years, the maximum cash grant for the Minnesota Family Investment Program has been increased.
  - Most families in the Minnesota Family Investment Program and the Diversionary Work Program are now receiving a higher cash grant, as of February 2020. Families may see an increase up to $100, depending on their earned income.
  - The higher cash grant, combined with a $110 monthly housing assistance grant for many families in Minnesota Family Investment Program, still leaves a family of three with a monthly income of $742, less than half the federal poverty guidelines.
  - A family of three — two children, one adult — with no other income will receive $632 in cash and $412 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits monthly. When that family’s gross earnings reach $1,537, they will lose the cash grant, and at $2,360, they will exit the program. Some families also receive a monthly $110 housing assistance grant.
- Less than 2% of the state’s population receives this assistance through the Minnesota Family Investment Program.
  - In 2019, the program served an average of about 27,000 families a month.
  - About 40% of children in the program are 5 years old or younger.
- Some families are eligible for the **Diversionary Work Program** prior to becoming eligible for the Minnesota Family Investment Program.
  - The program helps families in crisis who are new to public assistance, or have been off it for at least one year, to move quickly to employment.
  - An average of 2,000 families a month receive assistance from the Diversionary Work Program.
Is there help paying for child care?

- The **Child Care Assistance Program** helps families with low incomes pay for child care so that parents can work or complete education leading to employment.
  - A monthly average of 16,689 children from 8,065 families received assistance from the Minnesota Family Investment Program also received child care assistance in state fiscal year 2019.
  - In a typical month, an additional 13,995 children from 7,284 families not eligible for the Minnesota Family Investment Program received Basic Sliding Fee child care assistance.
  - For state fiscal year 2019, the average monthly assistance per family on Basic Sliding Fee was $1,145; for a Minnesota Family Investment Program family receiving child care assistance, the average total monthly assistance per family was $1,547.

What about help buying food?

- The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help people with low incomes buy food, and plants and seeds to grow food to eat. The program was formerly called food stamps and food support.
  - In state fiscal year 2019, more than 393,000 Minnesotans were receiving nutrition assistance through the program every month.
  - In state fiscal year 2019, more than $515 million in federal nutrition assistance benefits were paid in Minnesota.
  - The typical monthly benefit in 2019 was $109 per person.