

Human Services Programs: Federal, State, and Local Governments

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Minnesota has a system of human services programs that provides health care, economic assistance, and social services to eligible individuals and families. The programs are operated by the Department of Human Services, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and local agencies. This publication outlines the roles of federal, state, and local governments in the administration of the state’s human services programs.¹

What is the federal government’s role in the state’s human services programs?

Congress enacts laws that set broad standards and requirements for certain human services programs. For example, federal law requires the Medical Assistance program (MA, Minnesota’s version of the federal-state Medicaid program) to cover certain population groups and certain health care services.

The federal government also distributes money to the state for the administration of certain human services programs. In order to qualify for federal funding, Congress often requires the state to enact various kinds of legislation. For example, in fiscal year 2023, the federal government contributed 66 percent of total state and local child support enforcement funding. To receive this federal match funding, the Minnesota Legislature has enacted certain child support enforcement laws that comply with federal requirements. Typically, these federal requirements are general in nature, leaving the details up to the state legislature.

What is state government’s role in administering human services programs?

The state legislature sets human services policy in Minnesota. In many cases, state policy is greatly influenced by the federal law requirements that are prerequisites to receiving federal funding. Although state law must include certain federal requirements, the state legislature may enact provisions that go beyond the minimum federal requirements. An example of a low federal law “floor” and a higher state law “ceiling” is the MA program. Federal law mandates Medicaid coverage of some health care services, but the MA program in Minnesota covers population groups and health care services that are designated as optional for states under federal Medicaid law.

In general, the state’s human services programs are state-supervised and county-administered. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is the primary executive branch agency responsible for overseeing the state’s human services programs. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is the executive branch agency responsible for overseeing programs that directly impact children and families, such as child care and early learning licensing and assistance, child safety and permanency, child support, economic assistance, and food support. DHS and DCYF supervise program administration, promulgate rules, and develop program manuals and bulletins governing the administration of the

¹ For purposes of this publication, “human services programs” include programs overseen by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families that were formerly overseen by the Department of Human Services.

programs. DHS and DCYF also provide training, program evaluation, and technical support to counties and maintain centralized computer systems relating to the programs.

DHS and DCYF are responsible for sending out cash and other assistance payments to program enrollees and for reimbursing health care providers and managed care plans for services provided to program enrollees. For programs established in federal law, DHS and DCYF are also responsible for overall state compliance with applicable federal requirements.

What is the local government's role in administering human services programs?

Counties do much of the hands-on work in administering the state's human services programs. County human services agencies process applications, determine the eligibility of applicants, and perform other administrative duties under the supervision of DHS or DCYF. For example, county staff accept applications and determine eligibility for a wide range of income assistance and health care programs. County staff also work directly with families in child protection cases and with parents to help establish and enforce child support obligations.

For certain programs, counties also contribute to program funding through local property tax revenue. For example, counties typically provide about a quarter of the state's total child support enforcement funding, and counties are required to provide a portion of the funding for publicly provided mental health services.



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