

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. This publication provides a brief discussion of the role of federal, state, and local governments in the administration of the state's human services programs.

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 appropriates 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 2020 the federal government contributed 68 percent of the state's total child support enforcement funding. In order to receive this federal 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. For example, the MA program covers population groups and health care services that federal Medicaid law designates as optional for states, rather than required.

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. DHS supervises human services program administration, promulgates rules, and develops program manuals and bulletins governing the administration of the programs. DHS also provides training, program evaluation, and technical support to counties and maintains centralized computer systems relating to the programs.

DHS is 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 is 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. 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 parents to help establish and enforce child support obligations, and with families in child protection cases.

For certain human services programs, counties also contribute to program funding through local property tax revenue. For example, in fiscal year 2020, counties provided 23 percent 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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