



## 2014 Food Shelf Report

### A snapshot of hunger in Minnesota: 9,000 visits a day and rising

April 2015

As part of the agreement to receive state and federal funding, food shelves across the state of Minnesota report their monthly client statistics to Hunger Solutions Minnesota. The following is an analysis of the 2014 food shelf visits, a review of other hunger factors and policy recommendations. In 2014, there were 3.34 million visits to 300 food shelves across the state. **That is 9,000 people a day seeking food assistance.** This represents a 4% increase over 2013.

#### Who visits food shelves?

- 38% - Children
- 54% - Adults
- 6% - Seniors

#### Seniors

In 2014, there were 263,386 food shelf visits by seniors. While senior visits are the lowest percentage of food shelf service, senior's needs for food assistance have greatly increased. The 2014 number is a 13% increase from 2013 levels. This indicates more seniors are hungry and seeking out help as well as evidence that concerted outreach efforts have been effective. Hunger Solutions Minnesota and our network of food shelves have been focusing on reaching this population for the last several years.

#### Child Summer Hunger

Food shelves report increased child visits in the summer. When school is out of session and low-income families cannot rely on free school meals, they turn to local food shelves to obtain the food to replace those meals. This summer meal gap is increasing too. There were 305,000 summer child visits to food shelves in 2013, an 8% increase over 2012. Last summer, there were 313,000 summer child visits – an increase of an additional 10%.

#### Adults are struggling too

In 2014, there was a staggering 97,000 increase in adult visits. Food shelves report chronic unemployment and low wages are the primary reasons. Other factors include homelessness, disability, and reduced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

#### Congress weakened the strongest part of our nutrition safety net

Because of dramatic shifts in nutrition policy, last year SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) benefits decreased and thousands lost their eligibility. Currently in Minnesota, each of the 495,000 SNAP recipients receives \$1.24 per meal (Minnesota Department of Human Services). This is down from \$1.32 in 2013. Also, in the fall of 2013, Minnesota lost the federal waiver to enroll able bodied adults without dependents between ages 18-50 in SNAP for longer than three months. When this waiver expired, 89,000 individuals lost their SNAP benefits, more than twice as many as forecasted. Many have turned to the strapped network of community based food shelves for service as a replacement.

## **The new normal**

Increasing incidences of hunger in Minnesota are tied to the new economic normal. In the 2015 FRAC/Gallup Healthways survey, 11% of Minnesotans reported having a food hardship or not having enough money to buy food in the last year. In the post-great recession economy, many of the families that visit food shelves have jobs. These jobs don't pay enough to cover expenses. "Making Work Pay in Minnesota", a 2014 Minnesota House of Representatives report, revealed that 1 in 4 jobs in Minnesota pay poverty wages and don't offer benefits like healthcare and sick leave. The United States Census Bureau's numbers bear this out. Too many Minnesotans are living in poverty. According to a 2013 US Census analysis by MN Compass, 14% of all children and 11% of all adults in Minnesota are living in poverty. This closely matches the rate of people visiting the network of food shelves or enrolled in the SNAP program.

## **The charitable response is limited**

Charity alone will never be able to end hunger. The most local response, the network of Minnesota food shelves, was designed to be a temporary, emergency response to a community crisis. Old operational models, less donated food and fundraising challenges are hampering the ability of food shelves to meet the needs on main street Minnesota. How much more can this grass roots system expand? Besides the sheer volume of new clients, food shelves are expected to respond to the demand to provide more, healthier foods and be open additional hours in multiple locations. They also have to upgrade their storage and distribution systems to accommodate an increasing amount of garden fresh produce and recruit new volunteers to help operate at the same time they are facing a rapidly aging workforce of staff and volunteers. As evidenced in a recent Star Tribune article, long time food shelf volunteer staffer, 84 year old Dorothy Johnson described one of the biggest concerns that local food shelves face is human capital. Said Johnson, "The people doing the volunteering are elderly. We can't get the new ones because they have to continue to work and support themselves."

## **Systems Change**

Much of the work conducted by Hunger Solutions Minnesota responds to immediate needs for food, but we also focus on long term systems change at the local, state and federal levels. We support increasing the minimum wage as well as other anti-poverty measures. We work in partnership with other organizations on local food access issues and develop innovative programs like SNAP Rx, farmer's markets grants and incentives as well as the expansion of mobile food shelves. Our ramp up of mobile food shelf service is designed to meet the food needs of the disabled, seniors, and people with debilitating illnesses such as cancer. We are partnering with the medical sector via SNAP Rx to engage clinics to ask their patients if they have enough to eat and if not, to refer them to food resources.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **STATE**

**Mobile Food Shelf Grant** (Senate File 513 / House File 1843). *To get more nutritious food to seniors and others experiencing barriers to getting to their local food shelf.*

- Mobile food shelf programs increase access to free and nutritious food for individuals who experience barriers to accessing food from traditional food shelves due to: mobility issues, disabilities, lack of transportation, and proximity to their local food shelf.
- These types of programs are a cost effective delivery model compared to the alternative of building more food shelves and paying the associated overhead operating costs.

- The program models that distribute at subsidized housing serve many seniors. This model of delivery reduces stigma for seniors needing food support by bringing food to their home.

[Healthy Eating, Here at Home](#) (Senate File 316/ House File 352). Matching vouchers for SNAP participants at farmers markets, making healthy choices more affordable and accessible to achieve improved health outcomes.

- Farmers Markets incentives encourage SNAP participants to spend benefits on fresh fruits and vegetables, rather than less nutritious food that can contribute to chronic illness i.e. diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.
- Vouchers can help fill in the gaps for families during the summer when children are not receiving school meals.

[Expansion of Free School Breakfast](#) (Senate File 344 / House File 671). Increasing state aid for school breakfast.

Minnesota is currently below the national average in its rate of school breakfast participation. We applaud Governor Mark Dayton's choice to include \$28 million to fund universal free school breakfast for grades Pre- K – 3rd grade in his 2015 budget. This proposal would assist an additional 83,000 students. We are also supportive of Senator Alice Johnson's proposed legislation (Senate File 344) that would expand free breakfast to all qualified students.

## FEDERAL

### [Protect and strength SNAP](#)

The US House and Senate have both made proposals to drastically change how SNAP/Food Stamps are funded. The House Budget would block grant and slash funding for SNAP and direct the House Agriculture Committee to cut ten-year funding under its jurisdiction by \$1 billion. While the Senate Budget does not assume a block grant of SNAP nor direct the Senate Agriculture Committee to make "budget reconciliation" cuts, it does assume major cuts in social safety net programs.

Instead, we support the following:

The President's budget, which proposes \$83.692 billion for SNAP, is estimated to serve an average caseload of 45.7 million individuals and support the current 83 percent participation rate among eligible people. We support the President's new SNAP initiatives seeking

- \$9 million for state options to streamline application processes for the elderly;
- \$25 million for states transitioning off ABAWD (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) high jobless area waivers to help them bolster Employment & Training (E&T) services for certain adults facing time limits on SNAP benefits;
- \$1.5 million for SNAP E&T Center for Excellence.
- Legislation that would improve SNAP benefits, including a bill (H.R. 2384 in 2014; expected to be reintroduced in 2015) to require SNAP benefits be calculated with reference to the cost of the low-cost food plan rather than the inadequate Thrifty Food Plan.
- Legislation to ameliorate the harsh time limits on benefits for ABAWDs willing to work, in addition to funding the President's ABAWD initiative.

### [Interactive Infographic Available Here](#)

#### **About Hunger Solutions Minnesota**

Hunger Solutions Minnesota works to end hunger via the Minnesota Food HelpLine and by advancing fair public nutrition policies on behalf of hungry Minnesotans. We connect Minnesota's food shelves with funding and technical assistance to support to the 9,000 daily food shelf visits. Our work is made possible through the generous support of donors across the country, each sharing our commitment to ensuring no Minnesotan will struggle with food insecurity alone. Recognized as the most efficient civic non profit for two years running by the Minneapolis St. Paul Business Journal.

For more information visit: [Hungersolutions.org](http://Hungersolutions.org) or @hungersolutions on Twitter.