

Press Release

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MINNESOTANS MADE 3.6 MILLION VISITS TO FOOD SHELVES IN 2021, HITTING PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS THANKS TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC RELIEF PROGRAMS

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Food Shelves in Minnesota stayed busy throughout 2021, reaching 3,632,243 visits last year according to data from Hunger Solutions Minnesota and the Department of Human Services. Adults made up 51% of all visits with 1,859,129 visits. Children accounted for 35% of total visits with 1,265,599 visits made. Adults aged 60+ made 510,515 visits to food shelves in 2021, accounting for 14% of the total visits.

Overall total visits in 2021 were down 5% from the record 3.8 million visits made in 2020, however senior usage of food shelves stayed consistent throughout the year, despite the overall decrease. Senior visits to food shelves have increased 31% since 2019, continuing a trend in rising senior visits since the 2008 recession. **“Every other group saw a decrease in visits except seniors.”** Says Colleen Moriarty, Executive Director with Hunger Solutions Minnesota, **“There was a lot of support available to families throughout the pandemic, and this just shows that seniors on fixed incomes truly depend on their food shelves.”**

Last year’s food shelf statistics prove the effectiveness of pandemic relief measures put in place by state and federal government to support families struggling during the COVID-19 crisis. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 9 Minnesotans faced food insecurity. Programs like the Child Tax Credit, Emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (E-SNAP), and waivers allowing schools to provide no-cost meals to all students helped lessen the burden on food shelves when unprecedented need hit Minnesota. Close to \$800 million of Emergency SNAP was issued to low-income Minnesotans since March of 2020, and over 600,000 Minnesotan families received support from the enhanced Child Tax Credit payments, 85% of whom report using the monthly Child Tax Credit payments to cover basic needs, including food costs.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, my clients were getting by with the stimulus checks, Child Tax Credit payments, and additional SNAP dollars in their account. Now with inflation and heating bills, there isn’t much left over to buy food.” Says Doris Mezzenga with the Crosslake Food Shelf, **“We are seeing our clients return and visit numbers are increasing.”**

In addition to rising food costs and winter-time utility bills, COVID-19 relief programs have already, or are set to expire this year. The looming expiration date for these programs is causing a lot of concern for food shelves in our state who are already seeing an increase in families needing support. In a recent survey conducted by Hunger Solutions Minnesota of food shelf leaders in the state, 70% of food shelves are seeing a recent increase in food shelf visitors and new clients. Keystone Community Services in St. Paul has seen an increase in visits starting in the last few months of 2021. **“In the last quarter of 2021, we provided food resources to 2,195 new participants, double the number of new people who received services in the 4th quarter of 2020.”** Says Mary McKeown, President/CEO of Keystone Community Services.

“These pandemic relief programs provided much needed solace to food shelves in 2021 after a year of having a record number of visits, needing to completely shift their service models, and trying to stay afloat with labor and volunteer shortages.” Colleen Moriarty says, **“Now, we need to make sure our food shelves are set up for success when these programs come to an end.”**

Hunger Solutions Minnesota is asking the Minnesota State Legislature to support additional resources for food shelves in Minnesota this legislative session to prepare for and meet the increased need once pandemic relief programs come to an end. To learn more about Hunger Solutions work at the state legislature or to view the statewide food shelf statistics, visit <https://hungersolutions.org>.

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*Hunger Solutions Minnesota works to end hunger in our state. We take action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting programs and agencies that **provide food** to those in need, advancing sound **public policy**, building **grassroots advocacy** and **informing and educating** critical stakeholders about the status of hunger in Minnesota.*