DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

News stories

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Help is available for hungry Minnesotans

Since COVID-19 pandemic hit, food needs and support have increased

November 23, 2020

Minnesotans who have recently lost their jobs and watched their incomes drop have less to spend on necessities, including food. As the struggle to put healthy food on the table has increased, there is more help available from state and local sources.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the state and its community partners have issued food benefits to more than 400,000 Minnesotans per month, including children who missed out on school meals. In most cases, the aid has been funded through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

“Our responsibility is to help hungry Minnesotans,” said Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. “Right now, the need is astronomical and we only expect it to increase as the pandemic continues. With the support of both state and federal funding, we are helping ease Minnesotans’ burdens during a difficult time.”

SNAP ensures that people have resources to buy food, and that grocery stores and farmers markets have customers, even as the economy hurts during this pandemic. Food shelves, and food banks help fill in the gaps.

Many Minnesotans may be applying for benefits for the first time during this pandemic. DHS' SNAP Outreach providers can assist with SNAP applications by providing one-on-one assistance as well as helping individuals understand their SNAP benefits. Use this list of SNAP outreach providers (https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/2020-10-20-snap-outreach-grantees-ffy-2020-22_tcm1053-434573.pdf) for assistance.

Families and individuals in need of additional food support can find links to resources on the department's website at mn.gov/dhs/food-emergency/ (https://mn.gov/dhs/food-emergency/?fbclid=IwAR25LRdrfMmOlbhb6vyp2cg54UtsVzfQpr1KXCdFUvHHVhqjBStPVQ_R5L0) or by calling the Food Helpline at 1-888-711-1151. Families with immediate needs replacing their child's school meals should contact their child's school to learn about available options.

Since the pandemic began, hungry Minnesotans have been able to take advantage of extra SNAP benefits, including for families of 267,000 school children who would have received free or reduced-price lunches but did not due to school closures; a texting pilot in multiple languages to get the word out to as many families as possible; and the chance to purchase food online at Walmart or Amazon using their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards.

"Hunger is – and always has been – a health issue," Harpstead said. "When people cannot get enough nutritious food, their health suffers. Low or no wages, difficulty travelling to get food, high housing costs and isolation for many seniors and people with disabilities puts an added strain on families' food budgets and exacerbates health concerns. All of those problems are now amplified with COVID-19."

This month, the department issued $12 million in CARES Act funding through the Minnesota COVID Food Fund Grant to 240 tribal governments, nonprofit agencies or local units of government that provide food and other items for food shelves throughout the state.

The USDA recently approved November Emergency SNAP benefits, which the department is issuing in December.

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