

FOCUS ON CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Weak economic conditions and rising food insecurity, especially as it affects child hunger, make it absolutely essential that we increase access to safety-net nutrition programs. This report provides an overview of some key programs that help alleviate child hunger. Hunger Solutions Minnesota supports local, state and federal responses to hunger. These safety net programs have proven to reduce poverty. We are working towards President Obama's goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015. The immediate and long-term impacts of child hunger are detrimental to the entire fabric of our state. Diana Becker Cutts, M.D., a pediatrician at Hennepin County Medical Center, warns that even subtle deficiencies in the amount and quality of food in children's diets affect their health, cognitive development, behavior, and ability to learn.



SNAPSHOT: Minnesota Food Shelves



The increase in food shelf usage during the first quarter was an historic high of 28%.



In the Twin City metro, the rise in food shelf usage during the first quarter was 50%.



Senior food shelf visits in the Metro-area increased by 84% in the first quarter.



RECESSION HITS THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA

Forty percent of school lunches served in Minnesota are free or reduced price.

Because the number of eligible students is increasing, schools in high poverty areas are struggling with increased food costs and not passing the increases on to parents.

Families earning between \$22,000 and \$32,000 are currently required to pay \$8-\$24 per month for school lunches. For many families, this is unaffordable.

This past school year, if lunch costs were not paid, children were turned away, skipped lunch or in some cases school districts pursued the debt with collection agencies.

Summer can mean hunger for low-income kids

Summer vacation means families who had to feed them only once a day during the school week now have to provide all their meals. Food insecurity and food shelf visits for families with children spike in the summer.

The Minnesota Department of Education reports that 80 percent of eligible children do not receive or have access to free meals during the summer.

The Summer Food Service Program provided 1.4 million child meals to eligible children in Minnesota during the summer of 2008. Minnesota ranked 35th among all states for reaching eligible children. If Minnesota served 40 percent of eligible children, we would gain an additional \$3.8 million in federal funding.

A lack of meal sites makes the Summer Food



Service program in Minnesota inaccessible for many eligible children.

Hunger Solutions Minnesota (HSM) is working this year to decrease this disparity. HSM is partnering with Second Harvest Heartland and the Minnesota Vikings to roll out the Vikings Children's Fund Summer Lunch Program. The program was created to ensure that up to 200,000 additional meals will nourish children this summer. The Vikings Children's Fund Summer Lunch Program has secured more than 40 additional meal sites throughout Minnesota for this summer.

Towards the End of Childhood Hunger 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act

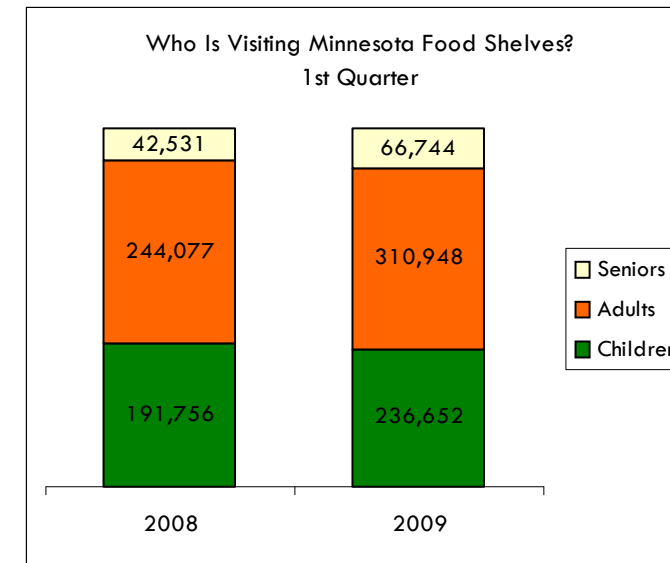
This fall Congress will reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act. This provides Minnesota's Federal Delegation with the opportunity to nourish children and honor President Obama's pledge to end child hunger by 2015.

The Child Nutrition Act, like the Farm Bill, funds the government response to hunger. School nutrition, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and The Summer Food Service Program are the major programs that work to alleviate childhood hunger.

While among the best, most efficient of Federal programs, these nutrition programs need to be improved to keep pace with the increase in child poverty, food inflation, the costs of delivering services, and updated technology.

Hunger Solutions Minnesota recommends the following improvements to reduce hunger and improve school readiness.

- Expand free meal eligibility so that children from households with incomes up to 185 percent of the national poverty line can receive meals at no charge.
- Strengthen and expand direct certification for school meals (enrollment based on data matching) and expand options that eliminate or reduce paper applications.
- Fully fund School Lunch and Breakfast at levels that allow them to be the connector between good, nutritious food and healthy children.
- Allow for Universal Free Breakfast, and promote serving breakfast in classrooms and other non-traditional locations.



The recession, high food costs and unemployment continue to take a toll on low-income Minnesota families and their ability to provide nourishing meals to their children. Out of the 614,344 visits to food shelves during the first quarter of 2009, there were well over 200,000 child visits. That is a 23% year-to-date increase.

MINNESOTA FOOD HELPLINE



1-888-711-1151

Providing a vital service to
Minnesotans at risk for hunger.

A program of
Hunger Solutions Minnesota

In response to the rising need for food assistance, Hunger Solutions Minnesota launched the *Minnesota Food Helpline*. The *Minnesota Food Helpline* (1-888-711-1151) helps enroll low-income Minnesotans in the Food Support (Food Stamps) program and helps callers find emergency food assistance. HSM provides multilingual Food Support application assistance and eligibility screening for callers statewide.

The number of Minnesotans enrolled in Food Support is 336,383 individuals—that is a 14% or 40,000 person increase over March 2008. Even with the 14% increase in enrollment, the state estimates that only 68% of those that are eligible for Food Support are participating in the program. Approximately eighty percent of eligible seniors are not enrolled due to a variety of barriers and misconceptions about eligibility.

The Helpline received calls from 39 different counties in the first month of operation. Sixty-six percent of those callers were screened for eligibility for the food support program.

- 77% were found to be likely eligible for the food support program.
- 22% of our calls have come from seniors.
- 46% of callers have children.
- 85% of callers received referrals to other food programs such as WIC, food shelves, meal programs, and Fare for All.
- 54% of callers asked questions about eligibility requirements. 44% asked for general information about the program.

Keeping Food on the Table

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"The government must take a role in ensuring our kids have access to healthy and nutritious food. By making our children's nutrition a top priority, we can help assure a healthier future."

-First Lady, Michelle Obama

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651-486-9860

hungersolutions.org

Hunger Solutions Minnesota is a comprehensive hunger relief organization that works to end hunger in Minnesota. We take action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting agencies that provide food to those in need, advancing sound public policy, and guiding grassroots advocacy. HSM advocates for the maximum use of all federal public nutrition dollars available and works to improve low income Minnesotans' access to all nutrition programs.

A Quarterly Review of the State of Hunger in Minnesota

1st Quarter—2009

Child Hunger