

# Social Services & The Community Social Services Act

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Social services are programs which serve people with special needs or conditions. Eligibility for these programs is based on need, not income level. Social services in Minnesota include programs for the mentally ill, mentally retarded, the abused and neglected and their families, the elderly, the chemically dependent, and children (including day care programs).

The delivery and funding of social services in Minnesota is done through a "state-supervised, county-administered" system. Federal, state and local dollars are used to fund the various programs established by state and federal law or by county discretion. The state is responsible for the distribution of federal and state funds, standard setting and monitoring, technical assistance and some training. The county is responsible for the planning, administration and delivery of social services in Minnesota. Planning must involve the community at large. Administrative options are provided to counties in state law. Delivery of services can be done directly or indirectly through contracted services.

## The Community Social Services Act

Counties have played a major role in ensuring the safety, health and well-being of their citizens since early in Minnesota's history. However, over the years, the exact nature of that duty has become more clearly defined and prescribed in state law and rule.

Under current law, the majority of county responsibilities and authorities related to social services are founded in the Community Social Services Act (CSSA) (Minnesota Statutes 256E). This law was modeled after the Community Corrections Act and Community Health Services Act with one major exception: participation in CSSA is mandatory, not voluntary.

CSSA established a system of planning and delivery of social services administered by locally elected boards of county commissioners under the supervision of the Minnesota Commissioner of Human Services. Through community involvement in public hearings, county boards determine the specific county services to be provided, who will provide these services, and how the programs will be administered. Counties prepare CSSA plans which are submitted regularly to the State Department of Human Services. The state department must approve the plan before state funding is made available to the county.

## SOCIAL SERVICES CUSTOMERS

A variety of people are eligible for social services under CSSA:

- Families with children experiencing dependency, neglect or abuse.
- Adolescent parents or adolescents who are pregnant.
- Adults in need of protection.
- Elderly persons having difficulty living independently and unable to care for themselves.
- Emotionally disturbed children and adolescents.
- Chronically and acutely mentally ill persons.
- Persons with mental retardation or related conditions.
- Drug dependent and intoxicated persons.
- Low-income families in need of child care.
- Children or adolescent individuals at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity.
- Others that the county board judges to be in need of social services.

## Meaning of "County Administered"

In order to serve these target populations, counties are required to provide the following services through direct delivery or contract.

- Public information about the problems of the target populations in order to increase public awareness and understanding as well as to assist persons seeking services.
- Assessment of the needs of the persons requesting services, including a determination of needed services.
- Protection for persons in hazardous situations.
- Appropriate supportive and rehabilitative services, preferably within the clients' home or community.
- Access for physically handicapped or impaired persons to needed activities.
- Case management of clients.

In addition, a county board must determine how to involve citizens in the planning process, approve a biennial social services plan and amendments, and distribute funding.

There are various models for county organizational structure to provide social services. A county may act individually or join with neighboring counties to provide social services. A county may act as the welfare board, may establish a separate welfare board or may establish a human services board.

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## The Future of Community Social Services in Minnesota

The Community Social Services Act was developed on the premise that involving citizens in planning for services--and having the level of government closest to the citizens manage and administer these services-- was the best model for providing effective social services. "Creeping categorization" of state and federal funding and more mandated services over the past two decades, however, have eroded the counties' ability to fully carry out this vision. In tight fiscal times, broad-based block grants such as CSSA are particularly vulnerable to reductions. For example, the CSSA grant experienced a 10% reduction as part of the resolution of the 2001 state budget shortfall. Even so, Minnesota continues to be one of several states with a strong county-administered social services system.

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