



PRESENTATION TO THE 2025 BIENNIUM
LEGISLATIVE INTERIM COMMITTEES

Human and Community Services Division

Human Services Practice

Department of Public Health and Human Services

THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ARE COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- **Overview**
- **Summary of Major Functions**
- **Recent Highlights and Accomplishments**

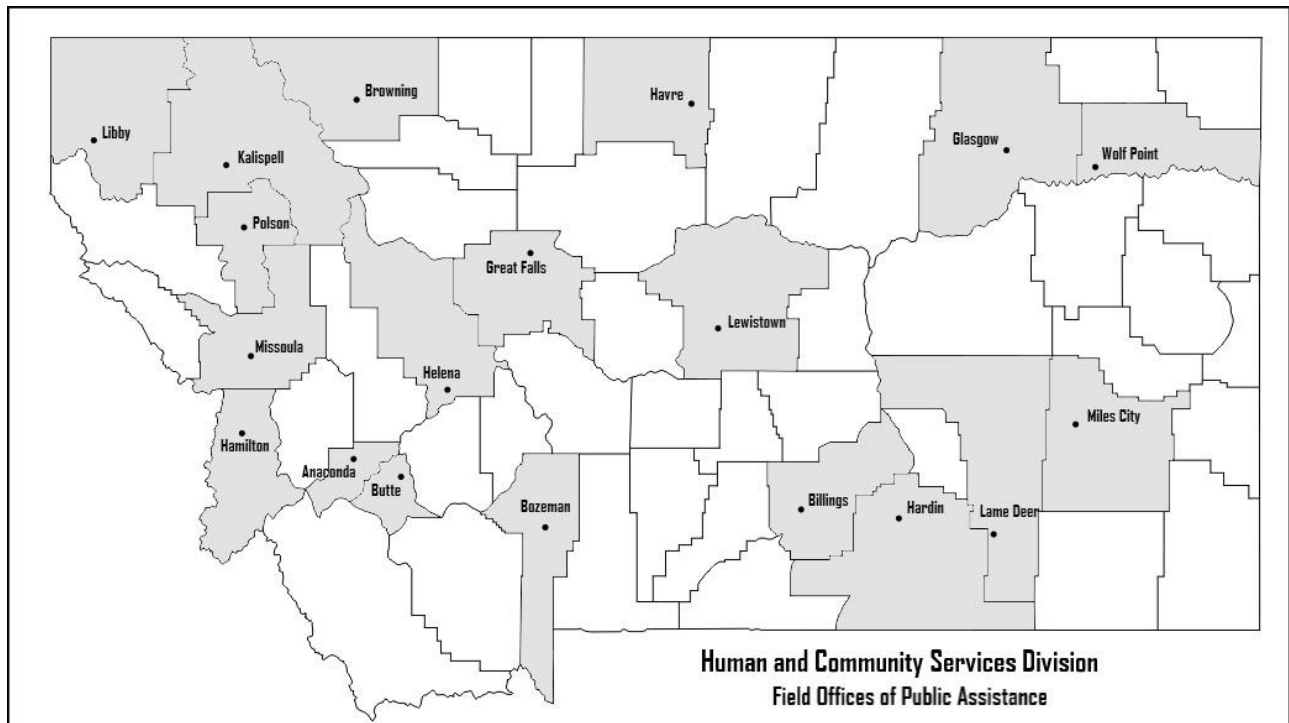
OVERVIEW

The Human and Community Services Division (HCSD) offers economic safety net programs for eligible Montanans. In total, HCSD programs provide services to more than a quarter of Montanans. These programs are designed to help households with no or limited income to meet basic human needs for food, shelter, water, heat, and healthcare. Many of the division’s programs include expectations to work or to engage in work training and education programs, with the goal of helping households to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

The division manages eligibility for both block grant programs and entitlement programs. An entitlement program guarantees benefits to those who meet the federal eligibility requirements; therefore, expenditures vary depending on program enrollment. Examples of entitlement programs include Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). For block grant programs, states receive a set amount of funding and have greater flexibilities over program administration, including how funding will be allocated and the eligibility requirements for the program. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are examples of block grant programs.

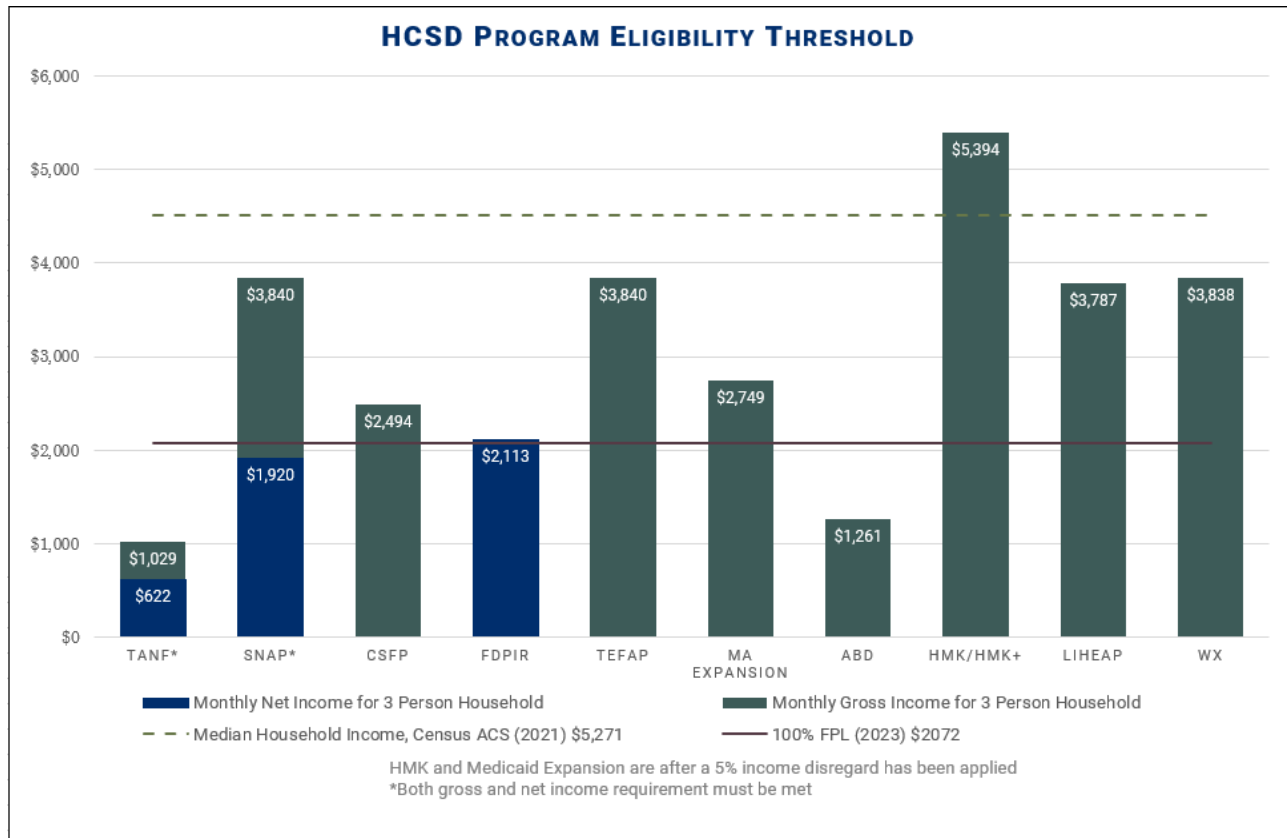
HCSD employs just under 500 FTE with expenditures for personnel, operation, and distributed benefits just below \$300,000,000. Approximately 85 percent of the division’s FTE are dedicated to local offices throughout the state.

There are 19 Offices of Public Assistance (OPA) across three regions.



GENERAL PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

The following chart shows the various programs and maximum “countable” income for a family of three to qualify for assistance. Note: program eligibility is not based solely on countable income, other qualifying conditions may exist depending on the specific program.



- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- Medicaid Expansion (MA EXPANSION)
- ABD (includes Aged, Blind, Disabled; Medically Needy; Long-term Care)
- Healthy Montana Kids (HMK/CHIP) and Healthy Montana Kids Plus (Medicaid)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Weatherization Program (Wx)

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FUNCTIONS

ELIGIBILITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The division's services are accessible to the public through a variety of channels depending on the programs and services they are seeking. The following programs are accessed through the 19 Offices of Public Assistance (OPA):

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Medicaid and CHIP

In addition to visiting an OPA, individuals can apply and update their case online at apply.mt.gov, via mail or fax, and by phone.

The division contracts with human resource development councils (HRDCs) to assist applicants in applying for LIHEAP, LIHWAP, and the weatherization program. HRDCs also provide a variety of community-level services on the division's behalf, such as homelessness prevention assistance to Montanans.

FOOD SECURITY

Commodity Food Distribution Program (includes CSFP, FDPIR and TEFAP)

Through the state-owned warehouse for food commodities, HCSD houses and inventories meals for vulnerable populations across Montana. DPHHS warehouse truck drivers delivered just under eight million pounds (nearly 270,000 cases) of food to hungry Montanans in state fiscal year 2023.

- 27% supports food distribution on Indian Reservations
- 30% supports the school lunch program through OPI
- 27% feeds low-income seniors
- 16% supports emergency food needs through food banks, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and group homes

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP provides food assistance to low-income Montanans. On average, 43,907 households receive SNAP benefits each month. The average monthly benefit amount is \$318 per household. The federal government sets the eligibility criteria for this entitlement program. One in every thirteen Montanans receives SNAP benefits, and nearly two-thirds of SNAP participants are children, elderly, or have disabilities.

Of those receiving SNAP in FY 2023:

- 40% children
- 16% disabled non-elderly adults
- 10% seniors

ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Energy assistance includes the LIHEAP and weatherization programs. Both programs, funded through a block grant, help low-income households reduce their energy burden. During FY 2023, 17,561 households received assistance with their seasonal heating bills. Based on financial eligibility, the average household subsidy through LIHEAP for the 2022-2023 heating season equates to about \$245 per month.

Of those receiving LIHEAP assistance in FY 2023 (recipients may be included in multiple designations):

- 42% disabled
- 48% elderly
- 16% households with children aged 0-5

The weatherization program benefits low-income recipients by investing in energy saving measures to reduce heating costs and lower energy consumption. Investing in weatherization lowers the cost of heating bills for the household over time. Weatherization supports low-income families in maintaining safe, stable, and affordable housing.

Houses are prioritized based on eligibility of the dwelling and high energy burden with preference provided to those households with elderly, persons with a disability, or children. Through FY2023, 498 households received weatherization assistance resulting in a reduction of annual energy costs by an average of approximately 23 percent. Seventy-seven percent of the supported households own their home.

Of those receiving weatherization support in FY2023:

- 17% disabled
- 22% elderly
- 4.4% households with children aged 0-5

POVERTY REDUCTION EFFORTS THROUGH COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and local human resource development councils (HRDCs) support community-specific efforts to address poverty through youth employment, job counseling and skills training, money management classes, transportation, and emergency assistance. In FY2023, approximately 67,034 individuals benefited from community services provided through the HRDCs. Through the efforts of the homeless assistance program in FY2023, 1,067 Montanans received rapid rehousing and homeless prevention assistance.

During FY2023, 841 low-income youth and 55 veterans and military families were served by VISTA programs in Montana. VISTA members leveraged \$652,612 in cash resources and \$176,617 in in-kind resources to support nonprofit organizations and programs. In addition, VISTAs recruited and managed 885 local volunteers, who went on to contribute 4,135 hours of service in their communities.

HEALTHCARE COVERAGE

Each month, approximately 337,000 Montanans receive healthcare coverage benefits. Eligibility for healthcare coverage, which is determined by the Offices of Public Assistance, covers a wide range of the state's population, from infants to senior citizens, to children and adults with disabilities in need of community services and long-term care. Eligibility and enrollment in Indian Country are supported through partnerships with four tribal governments: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Chippewa Cree Tribe, the Blackfeet Tribe, and Fort Belknap Tribes.

EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Montana TANF program is temporary assistance designed to help families become stable, able to work, and financially secure. To be eligible for TANF, the household must have a child or include a pregnant woman in her third trimester. The federal limitation on temporary assistance is 60 months in a lifetime. In addition to the state-run TANF program, four tribes manage their own TANF programs: the Blackfeet Tribe, Chippewa Cree Tribe, Fort Belknap Tribes, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Clients eligible for TANF services may be eligible to receive cash assistance and/or other supports to meet goals such as family stability, employability, and financial security. An average of 4,045 Montanans in 1,783 households receive TANF in the form of cash assistance each month. In FY2023, 83% of TANF participants were children.

The TANF program uses a model called the Montana Family Bridge (the Bridge), which allows advocates to work with clients to assess needs, set goals, and evaluate outcomes. The Bridge addresses three primary areas: family stability, employability, and financial security. TANF families often have barriers to employment that can impede their ability to complete training or go to work. Common categories of barriers for TANF clients include physical health, childcare, child education, housing, and caring for a family member.

When a client identifies a barrier to employment, the advocate works with the client to set goals and provide support through referrals or services designed to address the barrier. For example, if a client needs childcare to go to work, the client advocate will refer the family to the Best Beginnings Scholarship program for financial assistance and help finding childcare.

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

SNAP EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING EXPANSION

The SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program helps SNAP participants enhance skills, training, or work experience to obtain regular employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency. Montana currently has SNAP E&T programs in a total of nine counties. Programs in Big Horn, Deer Lodge, Flathead, Gallatin, Lincoln, and Silver Bow counties were added in September 2022, joining existing programs in Yellowstone, Missoula, and Lewis and Clark counties. A program in Cascade County was added in spring 2023. HCSD utilized ARPA funding to expand the SNAP E&T program. Montana was selected to attend the FNS sponsored State Institute for SNAP E&T programming beginning in September 2023. This program is an intensive look at program design and service delivery with technical assistance offered by FNS and other states in the program. The institute will focus on an analysis of geographic availability and best practices in addressing areas where access to services may be limited.

LOW-INCOME HOME WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Montana was one of the first states to implement the Low-Income Home Water Assistance Program (LHWAP) funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act and American Rescue Plan Act. As of August 18, 2023, HCSD has issued \$3.2 million to support nearly 4,175 eligible households to aid with paying water and wastewater expenses. This program ended June 30, 2023.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND FRAUD PREVENTION

While it is critical that eligible Montanans can obtain benefits for their basic daily needs, eligibility staff must make accurate determinations and detect potential fraud to ensure only those who meet all program qualifications receive benefits. The department has always had established and maintained internal controls to timely verify client eligibility factors for applicants and redeterminations; however, HCSD continued to strengthen quality assurance and fraud prevention processes.

Fraud Prevention

The department is working with the USDA on integrating with the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC) to identify concurrent SNAP enrollment in multiple states. If dual enrollment is identified, the state will take action that could change benefit amounts. Montana was selected as one of the first four states to connect to the NAC. The goals of the NAC are to reduce waste and inefficiencies, save money, reduce the number of overpayments, and discourage fraud. This interface is scheduled to go live in October 2023.

Accuracy

The SNAP quality control process continuously evaluates Montana on the accuracy of SNAP determinations. HCSD achieved a significant reduction in the error rate in the past 12 months, which USDA regional team praised. HCSD is committed to future continuous improvement in the SNAP error rate and for error rates for all programs administered by HCSD. Several new initiatives improved accuracy and reduced errors:

- A new quality assurance program manager targets error prone areas and works with other program managers and the training team to develop higher quality and more targeted trainings.
- The collaborative business process re-engineering group focuses on system enhancements, changes in business processes, and policy clarifications. This group consists of staff from all areas of the division, including management, policy staff, and field staff. It also includes participation from the DPHHS Office of Inspector General and SNAP federal partner Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).

SYSTEM INTEGRATION

HCSD began the process of integrating the LIHEAP eligibility functions into the CHIMES system in June 2023. CHIMES is the system used to determine eligibility for Medicaid, SNAP and TANF. The integration of LIHEAP provides system efficiencies by allowing information known to one program to be shared by the others. For example, income reported on a LIHEAP application may impact other income-based benefits. The integration also allows for a consistent level of Maintenance and Operations support moving forward. Development and testing concluded in July 2023 and the integration is live for the 2023-2024 LIHEAP season.

MEDICAID REDETERMINATIONS

Beginning in April 2023, DPHHS began the Medicaid Redetermination process for over 330k Montanans enrolled in Medicaid. Cases were distributed over a 10-month period using a population-based approach. Cases most likely to be ineligible and income-based cases were the focus for the first three redetermination cycles starting in April, May, and June. Traditional Medicaid cases began to be processed starting in the fourth month. As of August 2023, the redetermination process has begun for about 45% of individuals covered by Medicaid. The progress is being tracked on a public facing dashboard.

The redetermination process is largely dependent on recipients returning requested information to HCSD timely. To improve customer service and prevent a gap in coverage for those who remain eligible, DPHHS is currently implementing or developing strategies in the following areas:

- Launching a public service announcement campaign through radio and media.
- Addressing bottlenecks in our phone system by providing tiered layers of support.
- Responding to client needs in office lobbies by suspending telework for OPA's.
- Improving functionality of the eligibility rules engine by automating some case actions.