
Public Assistance Programs is a series of publications that describe state and federal programs that provide assistance in the form of healthcare, income, food, housing, and child care. Each work in the series describes an individual program. Please see the list on the last page for other works in this series.

Overview

Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA) is a state program that provides supplemental cash assistance to people who are aged, blind, or disabled and SSI recipients, or who would qualify for SSI except for excess income. MSA recipients must meet income and asset limits set by the state legislature and the Department of Human Services. The amount of monthly cash grants vary depending on marital status and living situation. In fiscal year 2023, an average of more than 30,000 people received MSA monthly. The majority of people who receive MSA are disabled.

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Administration

Congress

When Congress established the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, it mandated that states supplement the payments of SSI recipients who had previously received higher benefits under the former Old Age Assistance (OAA), Aid to the Blind (AB), and Aid to the Disabled (AD) programs. The MSA program delivers this mandated supplement to Minnesota recipients of SSI.

Congress also offered states the option of supplementing the income of two other groups: (1) SSI recipients who had not received OAA, AB, or AD; and (2) those who would have qualified for the former programs but are ineligible for SSI due to excess income or resources. Minnesota offers both optional supplements to Minnesota residents through the MSA program.

Congress has set general SSI program requirements for citizenship, disability determinations, and resource limits.¹ States with state-administered supplement programs, such as Minnesota, set their own eligibility requirements within the general framework of the federal requirements.

Minnesota State Legislature

The legislature established the MSA program in the [Laws of Minnesota 1974, chapter 487](#). The state law was revised in 1989 as the Minnesota Supplemental Aid Act and is codified at [Minnesota Statutes, sections 256D.33](#) to 256D.54. The state law includes:

- application procedures;
- eligibility requirements, such as real and personal property limitations and income limits;
- standards of assistance and methods of payment;
- appeal rights; and
- duties of the commissioner.

State Department of Human Services (DHS)

DHS supervises program administration. DHS maintains MAXIS, which is the centralized computer system for determining an applicant's eligibility for MSA and MSA grant amounts. DHS also assists counties in MSA administration by providing them with technical assistance on eligibility requirements and other program components.

Counties

The counties administer the MSA program. The county human services agency, through the MAXIS computer system, determines if an individual meets the state's eligibility requirements and calculates the amount of each recipient's MSA cash grant.

Eligibility Requirements

MSA helps persons who are aged, blind of all ages, and persons with disabilities age 18 or older, whose income and resources are insufficient to meet the costs of their basic needs. An individual who is aged, blind, or who has a disability qualifies for MSA if his or her income and assets are below the limits established by the state legislature and DHS.

¹ States with federally administered supplement programs must adhere strictly to these requirements.

Income Limits

Under the direction of the Minnesota Legislature, DHS limits eligibility based upon maximum income levels for MSA recipients. The limits apply both to earned and unearned income.

To be financially eligible for MSA, an individual must meet both a gross monthly income test and a net monthly income test. (“Gross monthly income” means a household’s total nonexcluded income, before any deductions have been made. “Net monthly income” means gross income minus all deductions allowed by the program.)

To be eligible for MSA, the applicant must have **gross** income no greater than 300 percent of the SSI federal benefit rate (600 percent for a married couple). In calculating an applicant’s gross income, state law also specifies that the MSA program excludes the same sources of income that the federal SSI program excludes in determining SSI eligibility.²

In addition, the applicant’s **net** income must also be below the MSA benefit standards in order for the applicant to be eligible for MSA. The applicant’s net monthly income is calculated by subtracting all of the applicable allowed income disregards and deductions from the applicant’s gross monthly income.

In calculating net income for individuals who are SSI recipients, the county agency counts the full amount of their SSI federal benefit rate as gross unearned income. The county then allows for a \$20 general income disregard.

For individuals who are not SSI recipients, the net monthly income calculation depends upon whether the individual lives in a long-term care facility where the Medical Assistance program pays the cost of care. For these applicants, the following disregards and deductions are calculated:

- a deduction for guardianship fees to a legally appointed guardian or conservator, up to 5 percent of the person’s monthly gross income to a \$100 maximum
- allocations allowed under the MA program for long-term care facility residents

For all other MSA applicants, the county disregards or deducts the following amounts to calculate the applicant’s net monthly income:

- for students who are blind or disabled and under age 22, an earned income disregard of up to a maximum of \$2,290 per month, not to exceed \$9,230 in a calendar year
- a \$20 general income disregard
- \$65 of earned income; if both spouses are recipients, the disregard is \$65 of the couple’s combined earned income
- an impairment-related work expense deduction for disabled individuals

² Income exclusions include an earned income exclusion, impairment-related work expenses of persons with disabilities and work expenses of the blind, income set aside or being used to pursue a plan for achieving self-support by an individual who has disabilities or is blind, state or locally funded assistance based on need, certain rent subsidies and the value of SNAP benefits, and certain infrequent or irregularly received income.

- one-half of the remaining earned income
- income set aside by a recipient who is disabled or blind (for up to 36 months) under an approved plan to achieve self-support (PASS)
- a limited work expense deduction for recipients who are blind

Asset Limits

Federal and state law and regulations also set the value of assets an individual may possess and be eligible for the MSA program. A single MSA recipient who is also receiving SSI can have no more than \$2,000 in net counted assets after all allowable exclusions. A married couple who are also receiving SSI can have \$3,000 in net counted assets.³ Certain assets are excluded from consideration in calculating the value of an applicant's assets. Examples of excluded assets are the following:

- the value of the homestead, if it is owned and occupied by the recipient or the recipient's spouse
- the value of one vehicle per household is totally excluded
- household goods and personal effects
- certain assets used for self-support (such as liquid assets used in a trade or business necessary for the person's ability to earn income)
- one burial space for each eligible person and each member of that person's immediate family; up to \$1,500 in burial funds for recipient and recipient's spouse
- life insurance policies with a combined face value of \$1,500 or less
- up to \$100,000 in an Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account established through a state ABLE program

For individuals who are not SSI recipients, the equity value of an assistance unit's personal property must not exceed \$10,000. Personal property is limited to: (1) cash; (2) bank accounts; (3) liquid stocks and bonds that can be readily accessed without a financial penalty; (4) nonexcluded vehicles (one vehicle per assistance unit member age 16 or older is excluded when determining the equity value of personal property); and (5) the full value of business accounts used to pay expenses not related to the business.

If an applicant's net counted assets exceed the limits, he or she is not eligible for MSA. State regulations prohibit an applicant from transferring property for less than adequate compensation in order to qualify for MSA. Property thus transferred is presumed available for the applicant's support.

³ For persons who reside in a long-term care facility where the MA program pays the cost of care, the MA program's asset provisions and limits apply.

Additional Eligibility Requirements

In addition to financial need, the following conditions must be present to establish eligibility. An MSA recipient must also be:

- a recipient of SSI; or be eligible for SSI except for excess income and be:
 - aged—defined as those age 65 or older;
 - blind—defined as having vision no better than 20/200 with glasses or a limited visual field of 20 degrees or less. There is no age requirement for this basis of eligibility; or
 - disabled—a person must have a disability within the meaning of the federal Social Security Act, Title II. The person must be 18 years of age or older, and must be unable to work and support him- or herself because of a permanent and total physical or mental impairment;
- a citizen of the United States. Noncitizens may be eligible under some circumstances. However, undocumented immigrants, and noncitizens who are in the United States legally on a temporary basis and are not immigrants, are not eligible for MSA. Persons who are not eligible for the federal SSI program because of their noncitizen status are also not eligible for MSA; and
- a resident of Minnesota.

The MSA grant is canceled whenever a recipient is absent from the state for one calendar month or more.

Benefits

MSA Monthly Cash Grant

MSA recipients receive a monthly cash grant to supplement their income. The amount of the MSA grant is computed by subtracting an individual's net monthly income from the MSA assistance standard that applies to the recipient. A county may set higher standards than the state, as long as the county pays the additional costs.

Certain MSA recipients are only eligible for a monthly personal needs allowance of \$125. The following MSA recipients receive this personal needs allowance:

- individuals who receive a monthly SSI benefit of \$30 because they live in a long-term care facility
- individuals who live in a nursing facility or other medical facility where the MA program pays the cost of care
- blind children who meet certain requirements

Below is a table that shows the 2024 MSA monthly assistance standard for various types of recipients.

**MSA Assistance Standards
(Before Income Deductions)**

Type of Recipient	2024 Monthly Assistance Standard
Individual recipient living alone	\$1,004
Individual recipient living with others	\$721
Married couple, both receiving MSA prior to 1/1/94 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ living with others ▪ not living with others 	\$1,270 \$1,521
Married couple, both found eligible for MSA after 1/1/94 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ living with others ▪ not living with others 	\$1,007 \$1,506
Individual eligible for personal needs allowance only	\$125

For some MSA recipients with special needs, their MSA assistance standard also includes amounts for these ongoing special needs.

Examples of ongoing “special needs” that are recognized by the program are:

- prescribed diets,
- guardian or conservator service fees,
- representative payee service fees, and
- restaurant meals.

MSA recipients with disabilities receive an additional amount to help cover housing costs if they: (1) are under age 65; (2) apply for rental assistance if eligible; (3) are relocating into the community from a residential facility, eligible for personal care assistance, or receiving MA waiver services and living in their own place; and (4) are considered “in need of housing assistance.”⁴ An individual who receives this benefit prior to age 65 may continue to receive the benefit after the age of 65.

Monthly MSA cash grants are paid directly to program recipients, except for persons in institutional settings. The county may also make payments to a protective “representative payee” instead of the recipient if the recipient cannot manage his or her funds. The representative payee may be any person or agency concerned with the recipient’s welfare.

⁴ In need of housing assistance means that the recipient’s monthly housing costs are more than 40 percent of his or her gross income.

Nonrecurring Special Needs

The MSA program also makes available additional cash payments for a recipient's nonrecurring special needs such as necessary home repairs and necessary repairs or replacement of essential furniture or appliances.

Emergency Assistance

MSA recipients and individuals presently residing in Minnesota who meet all MSA eligibility requirements may receive emergency general assistance to meet emergency needs. Receipt of emergency general assistance is limited to once in a 12-month period. "Emergency need" is defined as a need that threatens the person's health or safety. Individuals must apply all available resources, even those normally excluded, toward the emergency. Emergency general assistance is limited to available funding. DHS allocates funds to counties. No county receives less than \$1,000 in a fiscal year.

Eligibility for Other Assistance Programs

- **Medical Assistance** (also called Medicaid or MA). All MSA recipients are eligible for services available through the state's MA program.
- **Social Services.** State laws mandate that certain social services be available to MSA recipients.

Funding and Expenditures

The state finances MSA grants with general fund appropriations.

In state fiscal year 2023, the state spent \$54,581,396 to supplement the income of aged, blind, and disabled persons through the MSA program. A monthly average of 30,152 individuals received MSA in state fiscal year 2023.

MSA Monthly Average Recipients and Payments, Fiscal Year 2014 – 2023

Fiscal Year	Monthly Average Recipients	Monthly Average Payments	Total Annual Payments
2014	30,454	\$99.82	\$36,478,561
2015	30,441	101.47	37,066,951
2016	30,509	103.07	37,735,036
2017	30,576	104.41	38,309,226
2018	30,885	105.41	39,065,624
2019	31,782	107.84	41,128,443
2020	32,379	111.96	43,502,787

Fiscal Year	Monthly Average Recipients	Monthly Average Payments	Total Annual Payments
2021	32,467	128.53	50,075,641
2022	30,495	136.80	50,059,850
2023	30,152	150.85	54,581,396

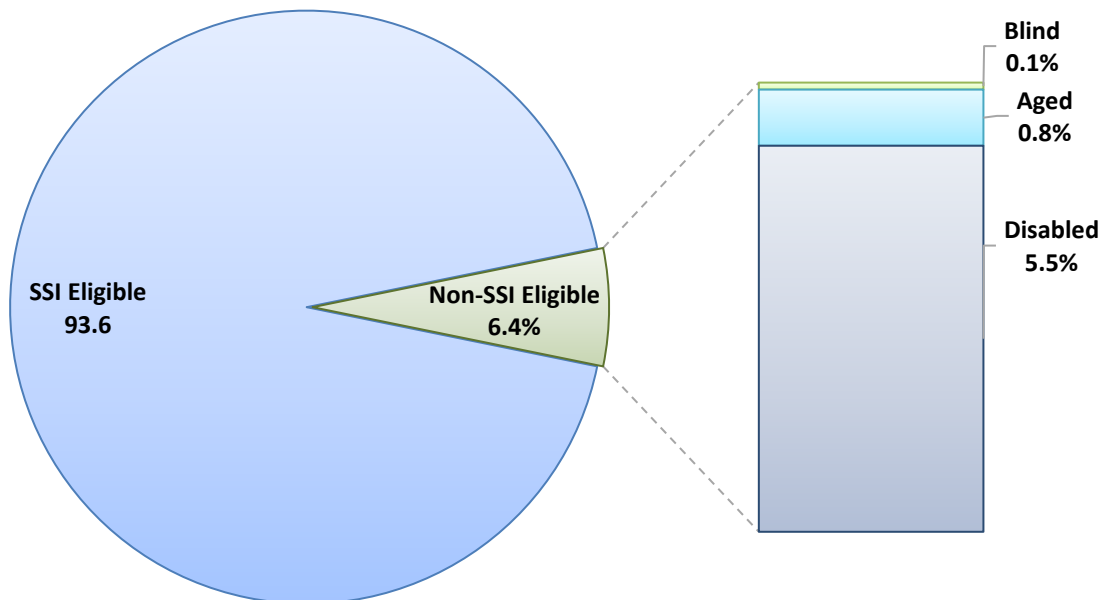
Source: Department of Human Services, February 2024 Forecast of Revenues and Expenditures, Background Tables

This table shows MSA monthly average recipients increasing slightly each year until fiscal years 2022 and 2023 when average monthly recipients declined. Monthly average payments and total annual payments have increased over the past ten years.

Recipient Profile

The MSA basis of eligibility for fiscal year 2024 was as follows: 6.4 percent of MSA recipients were non-SSI eligible, including less than 1 percent who were aged, less than 1 percent who were blind, and 5.5 percent who were persons with disabilities. The remaining 93.6 percent of MSA recipients were SSI-eligible.

MSA Recipients by Category, FY 2024



Source: Department of Human Services, MAXIS data

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Current works in this series include:

- Overview of Public Assistance Programs
- General Assistance (GA)
- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Medical Assistance (MA)
- MinnesotaCare
- Subsidized health coverage through MNsure
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Food Support
- Housing Support

Please see the health and human services area of the House Research website for more information about these programs and related topics.

Earlier Versions

Information in the series was originally published as the *Minnesota Family Assistance: A Guide to Public Programs Providing Assistance to Minnesota Families*, which was a comprehensive guide to these programs.



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