



 **HUNGER-FREE
MINNESOTA**
A collaborative campaign to end hunger

An executive summary of the Cost/Benefit Hunger Impact study

We know that hunger is present and, in fact, prevalent in Minnesota. We also know that hunger's severity ranges from simply sacrificing the quality of food eaten to going consecutive days without eating. And, we know that hunger is typically accompanied by the uncertainty of where the next meal will come from.

While some people may believe that hunger only impacts those individuals who are hungry and impacts them only in that their stomachs grumble, research proves that the effects of hunger are actually much broader, much more complex, and much more troubling. In an effort to identify the true individual and societal costs of hunger in Minnesota as well as the possible financial benefits of ending hunger in Minnesota, a new study analyzed existing hunger-related research. This landmark research, underwritten by Target, is the first

of its kind to isolate the cost of hunger in Minnesota and to estimate the possible financial return when we invest in securing food access for all Minnesotans.

The University of Minnesota's Food Industry Center's Cost/Benefit Hunger Impact Study makes clear that hunger predisposes individuals to health problems and psychological and social dysfunction that result in higher healthcare costs and poorer education outcomes and, as a result, impose substantial monetary costs on all Minnesotans to the tune of between \$1.26 billion and \$1.62 billion per year (range takes into consideration both direct and indirect costs). The study also presents evidence that public and private interventions aimed at preventing hunger are not just humanitarian acts or civic duties that benefit hungry individuals but are sound

societal investments as well. For hunger relief organizations, the study underscores the necessity of working together to aggressively end hunger for the betterment of both those who are hungry and those who bear the cost.

Allowing people to go hungry costs each Minnesota family \$800 annually, based on total health and education consequences inflicted when our neighbors miss meals.

FOLLOWING IS A BREAKDOWN OF THE MOST RELEVANT FINDINGS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA'S FOOD INDUSTRY CENTER'S COST/BENEFIT HUNGER IMPACT STUDY.

HUNGER HURTS INDIVIDUALS

Those who are hungry experience significantly poorer health and education outcomes than do well nourished individuals. These negative outcomes define the individual cost of hunger—that is, the effect hunger has on the physical, emotional and mental well being of those who are hungry. Of particular concern is the toll hunger has on children.

- Hungry infants and young children suffer from iron deficiencies that affect their cognitive and physical development.
- Hungry children are more likely to experience headaches, stomach aches, ear infections and colds.
- Hungry teens are twice as likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to commit suicide.
- Hungry children have a heightened propensity for having isolating or anti-social behaviors and a greater need for special education.
- Hungry children are nearly twice as likely to see a psychologist.
- Hungry children tend to have lower math scores, are twice as likely to repeat a grade and three times as likely to be suspended from school.
- Hungry pregnant women are at higher risk of having an underweight baby and/or a baby with severe birth defects.
- Hungry mothers are more than twice as likely to suffer from excessive stress, depression and anxiety and to have lower self-esteem—conditions that likely contribute to multi-generational hunger.
- Hungry adults are two and a half times as likely to be obese and twice as likely to be diabetic.
- Hungry individuals report being in poor overall health relative to well-nourished individuals.

HUNGER HURTS COMMUNITIES

As noted above, hunger costs Minnesotans between \$1.26 billion and \$1.62 billion annually in direct and indirect healthcare and education costs. These preventable costs are the societal cost of hunger—the financial burden imposed on our communities and on society at large when we do not provide adequate nutrition for all Minnesotans.

Minnesotans pay an estimated \$61.7 million annually in special education programming required by many hungry children

- Minnesotans pay \$925 million annually in direct medical expenses such as hospitalizations and medications required by hungry individuals.
- Minnesotans pay \$333 million annually in indirect medical expenses to help treat mild medical conditions such as headaches, stomach aches and colds that hungry individuals experience.
- Minnesotans pay an estimated \$59 million annually in additional indirect medical expenses to help treat child mental disorders, to manage teen suicide and to care for underweight newborns.
- Minnesotans pay an estimated \$61.7 million annually in special education programming required by many hungry children.
- Because of poor educational performance and outcomes, hunger costs Minnesota an estimated \$240 million in lost wages.
- Allowing people to go hungry costs each Minnesota family \$800 annually, based on total health and education consequences inflicted when our neighbors miss meals.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF ENDING HUNGER

Without question, there are significant financial benefits to ending hunger. Most obvious: if all Minnesotans were adequately nourished, the \$1.26 billion to \$1.62 billion Minnesotans pay annually in direct and indirect healthcare

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and education costs for hungry individuals would be eliminated. In addition, there are a number of public programs designed to help prevent and/or combat hunger, such as the Supplemental Food Service Program (SNAP), which, if used to their full potential, could offer significant individual and societal benefits.

- For each \$1 invested by Minnesota in SNAP, the federal government contributes \$7.50, and Minnesota sees \$13.50 in economic activity that results from hungry individuals spending SNAP dollars in local grocery stores.
- For each \$1 invested by Minnesota in SNAP and \$7.50 contributed by the federal government, Minnesota sees \$20.55 in savings by averting some of the costs associated with hunger.
- A \$1 state investment in SNAP results in \$34 in combined economic activity and savings in Minnesota.
- It is estimated that the average annual SNAP benefit in Minnesota of \$777 reduces the odds of hunger and food insecurity by 50 percent—if a hungry person costs the state of Minnesota up to \$2,816 as noted above, that cost would be reduced to \$1,408 by participating in SNAP.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Hunger hurts individuals physically, emotionally and mentally, and it hurts communities financially. And while hunger's toll in Minnesota may seem insurmountable, there are solutions at hand to end hunger. At first blush, those solutions appear to come with a significant financial cost. But this study contends that what at first blush looks like a cost is in reality an investment—an investment in humanity; an investment in community; an investment that has the potential to provide a significant financial return for Minnesota.