GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) & MINNESOTA SUPPLEMENTAL AID (MSA): TWO PROGRAMS YOU SHOULD KNOW MORE ABOUT

John Petroskas
Minnesota DHS
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When GA began in 1973 it replaced a patchwork of county and township “poor relief” programs.

GA is our primary safety net for single adults and childless couples. “Family GA” ended in 1997.

 Entirely state-funded, GA serves about 23,000 recipients monthly (2/3 in the community and 1/3 in facilities)
GA MAXIMUM MONTHLY BENEFIT

$203
(individual)

- $260 for a couple
- $250 for minor not living with parent
- $99 personal needs for residents of a licensed facility or GRH setting
State General Assistance Programs in 2015

Statewide programs by eligibility requirements

- No state program
- For unemployable only
- Not for unemployable only

Source: CBPP analysis of state General Assistance programs
## General Assistance Maximum Benefit Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>For unemployable only</th>
<th>Not for unemployable only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td>$735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>$430</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska a,b</td>
<td>$425</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>$418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada b</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York b</td>
<td>$398</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota a,b</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>$304</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>$287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>$280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>$274</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>$245</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont a</td>
<td>$232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California b</td>
<td>$221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>$212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>$210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>$203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$197</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>$189</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>$185</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>$120</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>$115</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>$90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a State has no overall maximum benefit level. Figure shown is the combined maximum benefit for rent and utilities.

b Benefit levels vary by county. The county referenced is specified in Appendix III.

Note: Indiana and Maine refer to a maximum benefit level in their manuals but do not specify the amount so are not included in this chart. This chart also excludes New Hampshire’s Local Welfare Program, through which counties set maximum levels for various components and provide only vendor payments.

Source: CBPP analysis of state General Assistance programs.
APPLYING FOR GA

Combined Application Form (CAF) DHS-5223

- Date of application determines program start date.
- Only page 1 of the CAF must be complete to set the date of application (name, address and signature)
- Interview IS required (but doesn’t need to be in-person)
- 30 day processing period
Combined Application Form

Do not use this application to apply for health care coverage. The application date or the day your SNAP (food) or cash benefits can start is the date the agency gets your application. We can set your application date if we have your name, address and signature on page 1. For your application to be complete, answer all questions on the application. Tell someone if you need help filling out this application. Be sure to sign and date the application on pages 1 and 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON 1 APPLICANT'S LEGAL NAME (first/last/middle)</th>
<th>OTHER NAMES YOU USE (maiden name, nicknames, etc.)</th>
<th>BIRTH DATE (mm/dd/yy)</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>CASE NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESS WHERE YOU LIVE (If you do not have an address, write “homeless”)</th>
<th>Apt. Number</th>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>ZIP CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAILING ADDRESS (If different from address where you live)</th>
<th>PHONE NUMBER WHERE YOU CAN BE REACHED (include area code)</th>
<th>DO YOU LIVE ON A RESERVATION?</th>
<th>RACE (optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT PROGRAM(S) ARE YOU APPLYING FOR?</th>
<th>DO YOU NEED AN INTERPRETER?</th>
<th>WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED SPOKEN LANGUAGE?</th>
<th>MARITAL STATUS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER</th>
<th>MOST RECENTLY MOVED TO MINNESOTA (mm/dd/yy)</th>
<th>U.S. CITIZEN OR U.S. NATIONAL</th>
<th>ETHNICITY (optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED WRITTEN LANGUAGE?</th>
<th>(optional)</th>
<th>LAST SCHOOL GRADE COMPLETED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* Before applying for Emergency Assistance, check with your agency regarding funding and specific eligibility criteria.

** Before applying for Emergency Assistance, check with your agency regarding funding and specific eligibility criteria.

Do you need help right away? Questions 1-4 below will help us decide if you can get help with food right away.

1. How much income (cash or checks) did or will your household get this month? $ 
2. How much does your household (including children) have in cash, checking or savings? $ 
3. How much does your household pay for rent/mortgage per month? $ 
   - What utilities do you pay? Heat, Air conditioning, Electricity, Phone, None 
4. Yes No Is anyone in your household a migrant or seasonal farm worker? 
5. Yes No Has anyone in your household ever received cash assistance, commodities or SNAP benefits before? 
   - If yes, When? Where? What? 
6. Yes No Is anyone in your household pregnant? If yes, Who? 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency use:</th>
<th>MEMB, MEMI TYPE, PROGRAM, SPON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible for expanded SNAP?</th>
<th>Yes No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same-day interview offered?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next-day interview offered?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intends to reside in MN?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has sponsor?</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>Verification: Registered, Unrelated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have looked over my answers and believe they are all true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT OR AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>AGENCY SIGNATURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE RECEIVED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clear Form</th>
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</thead>
</table>
GA ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. **Eligibility** – 14 categories
2. **Counted Income** - less than $203/month (or $260/month for a couple)
3. **Assets** - less than $10,000
4. **Citizenship/residency**
GA ELIGIBILITY - COMMON

Permanent or temporary illness
Placement in a Facility
Advanced Age (55 or older)
Unemployable (vocational assessment)
Developmental Disability or Mental Illness
SSDI/SSI Application/Appeal Pending
Drug/Alcohol Addiction
GA ELIGIBILITY - UNCOMMON

Performing Court Ordered Services and unable to work at least 4 hours/day

Learning Disability

Caring For Another Person

English Not Primary Language (over 18 & in high school at least half-time)

Under age 18 and not a member of a family

Displaced Homemaker and Full Time Student
CAN SOMEONE WORK WHILE ON GA?

YES! Our “earned income disregard” rewards work.

New rule: Disregard the first $65 of earned income, and 50% of any remaining earned income:
Example: Joe earns $250. $250 minus $65 = $185. Half of $185 = $93. $203 minus $93 = $110 GA benefit

Old rule: $50 disregard, 1:1 reduction thereafter.
Example: Joe earns $250. Subtract $50 = $200. $203 minus $200 = $3 GA benefit
**GA ASSET LIMIT**

Assets must be **less than $10,000**. We count only:

1. **Cash**
2. **Bank accounts**
3. **Stocks and bonds** that can be accessed without financial penalty, and
4. **Vehicles**. One vehicle is excluded for each person 16 or older in the assistance unit.

- **Vehicle** = car, truck, van, camper, motorcycle, **trailer**
- Real property is not a countable asset
- For GA, workers can waive the value of any asset that is determined **essential to the client**
APPLYING FOR OTHER BENEFITS

GA clients who appear to be eligible for other benefits (SSI, RSDI, VA, unemployment, etc) must:

1) sign an interim assistance agreement, and

2) apply for all other potential benefits within 30 days of being referred (unless the person has “good cause” not to apply).

SSA reimburses the state for GA or GRH received during months of retroactive SSI eligibility.
Qualified advocates can help with the SSI and RSDI application process (and some help with appeals)
SOAR: must be homeless or at risk of homelessness
Services are free for the client
Call the Disability Linkage Line at 1-866-333-2466 to find an advocate.
RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

Must be a Minnesota resident to be eligible for GA. A resident is someone who has lived here for at least 30 consecutive days with the intent of making MN their home.

Undocumented and non-immigrant people are not eligible for GA.

Legal permanent residents (including refugees, asylees, and persons in deportation withholding) can get GA, but additional conditions may apply.
GA: OTHER THINGS

Eligible for SNAP & MA

GA is paid directly to the client’s EBT card

Monthly reporting required if earned income

Report changes within 10 days

Recertification is required at least annually
SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

Federal cash assistance benefit for people who:
- Are aged (over 65), blind, or disabled, and
- Have limited income and resources

SSI benefit amounts:
- $750/month (in 2018, individual)
- $1,125/month for an eligible couple
- Known as the “Federal Benefit Rate” or FBR
- Some people get both SSI and SSDI
MINNESOTA SUPPLEMENTAL AID (MSA)

Monthly cash supplement to SSI payment
80,000+ Minnesotans ages 18-65 receive SSI
Around 31,000 people/month receive MSA
MN is obligated by a ‘maintenance of effort’ agreement with SSA to provide MSA funding
To be eligible for MSA a person must be over 18 (unless blind), and:

- Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI),
- OR
- Would receive SSI except for excess income, and:
  - 65 or older, or
  - Blind, or
  - Disabled
For **SSI recipients**: $2,000 SSA asset limit.

For **non-SSI recipients**: $10,000 asset limit.

Count only:
- Cash
- Bank Accounts
- Stocks and Bonds with no financial penalty
- Vehicles that are not excluded
Some people receiving SSI may not be eligible for MSA because DHS and SSA determine a person’s “living arrangement” differently.

However: anyone eligible for a waiver, county plan GRH placement, MSA Housing Assistance, or who is a “separate household” is considered “living alone” even if they live with others.
MSA MONTHLY BENEFIT

Individuals $81
Couples $111
Facility residents $69
(receiving $30 SSI)

Additional $ for special needs
MSA SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAMS

Special Diets  CM 23.12
Guardian/Conservator Fees  CM 23.15
Representative Payee Fees  CM 23.21
Home Repairs  CM 23.06
Home Furnishings & Appliances  CM 23.09
Housing Assistance  CM 23.24
MSA SPECIAL DIET

Must be prescribed by a licensed physician OR advanced practice registered nurse OR physician assistant (new in 2017)

New verification is required at least annually

There is not (yet) a standard DHS special diet form.
Special diets include only: anti-dumping, controlled protein, gluten free, high protein, high residue, hypoglycemic, ketogenic, lactose free, low cholesterol, and pregnancy/lactation.

Multiple special diets are allowed. If they overlap, the client gets the higher amount. If they don't overlap, they get the total of all special diets.
MSA GUARDIAN/CONSERVATOR FEES

Maximum fee is 5% of the client’s income, up to $100/month. Fee must be negotiated by the county or approved by a court.

Not allowed if G/C is a county employee.
Payment for representative payees services is allowed up to 10% of a client’s gross income or $25, whichever is LESS.
MSA HOME REPAIRS

MSA recipients living in their own home can get help to repair the roof, foundation, wiring, heating system, or water/sewer system.

The client must apply any assets they have toward the cost of the repair.

The payment must be reasonable, considering the condition of the home, and documented by at least one estimate.

Payment is made to the vendor making the repair.
MSA recipients can get help to buy/repair an item no more than once in a 3-year period (unless repairing or replacing an item due to damage, loss, normal wear and tear, or theft).

Costs based on 1996 AFDC standards. Examples: kitchen table ($24), twin bed ($72), washer ($93), bedding ($20), couch ($74), dryer ($93), lamp ($13), refrigerator ($93)…
MSA HOUSING ASSISTANCE ELIGIBILITY

Person must meet **ALL** of these conditions:

- Eligible for MSA, and
- Monthly housing costs exceed 40% of gross monthly income, and
- Apply for rental assistance (DHS-6351), and
- Under age 65 at initial eligibility, and
Meet ONE of the following criteria:

- Relocating from institution: hospital, nursing facility, RTC, ICF-DD or IRTS*, or
- Eligible for PCA services, or
- Waiver recipient in their own home or apartment.

* Adding GRH settings 7/1/2020
MSA HOUSING ASSISTANCE - EXAMPLE

$750  SSI benefit
$81   MSA benefit
+$194 MSA Housing Assistance**

$275  Total MSA benefit
$1,025 Total monthly income

This is a 38% increase in income over SSI alone!

Clients can also receive SNAP benefits

**In July 2020, this will increase to half the SSI federal benefit rate (currently $750).
MN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

GA& MSA Policy:

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