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# Shaping Minnesota's Human Services *Future*

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A MACSSA Policy Vision



**MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATORS**

**[WWW.MACSSA.ORG](http://WWW.MACSSA.ORG)**

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## A MACSSA Policy Vision

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# Shaping Minnesota's Human Services Future

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## A MACSSA Policy Vision

### Executive Summary

Delivery of critical human services in the state of Minnesota takes place in a complex atmosphere characterized by rapid and continuous change. Moreover, policy decisions are compounded by a multitude of intertwining and sometimes competing social, political, economic, and demographic factors. Shaping Minnesota's human services future to meet the challenges posed by this environment will require leadership and collaboration from all stakeholders.

The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) has conducted an environmental scan of current factors and trends impacting human services, examined the role of government in response to those trends, and herein provides a vision of the unique role counties are positioned to and should fulfill in the delivery of human services in the state of Minnesota moving forward.

As a result of this work, MACSSA recommends the following foundations to guide future policy:

- **Equity and Fairness:** all Minnesotans deserve access to quality services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, residency, or circumstance.
- **Effective State-County Partnership:** responsibility for serving the needs of vulnerable populations is a joint undertaking between the state and counties. Therefore, a strong state-county partnership is vitally important to achieving our shared objectives.
- **Continued Focus on Performance and Outcomes:** the human services system must continue to focus on measuring and improving outcomes for the people we serve.
- **Consumer Oriented:** policy must take into account expectations of consumers and promote ease of navigation to the greatest extent possible.
- **Local Delivery of Critical Services:** counties should retain the role of delivering critical human services that ensure safety and meet basic needs.
- **Recognition of the Uniqueness of Local Communities:** counties must be empowered to tailor delivery of services to meet unique local needs
- **Maintaining the Value of Local Service Integration:** the ability of counties to integrate services across a variety of disciplines is an asset that must be sustained moving forward.
- **Freedom to Innovate:** counties must continue to be given opportunities and incentives to innovate
- **Leveraging of County Human Service Expertise:** counties have direct experience and knowledge of which interventions are yielding results at the local level and this expertise should be utilized in shaping policy.
- **Alignment of Resources and Expected Outcomes:** state human services mandates and expected outcomes for county government must realistically with the available resources and funding.
- **Sufficient State Resources:** providing for the welfare and safety of citizens in need is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and must be adequately resourced.
- **Return on Investment:** in the current fiscal environment it is increasingly paramount that future policy developments in the human services system deliver increased value per tax payer dollar.
- **Managing Health Care and Long Term Care Costs:** Minnesota must address the rising costs of health care and long term care for the elderly and disabled.

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## A MACSSA Policy Vision

### Introduction

The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) created this document to provide leadership in the future delivery of Human Services in Minnesota with state and county policy-makers, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and community service partners.

MACSSA's mission is to promote and integrate a proactive, adequately funded, cost-effective, and community based human service system that improves the health and well-being of families, children and adults. The ultimate goal is to assure that Minnesotans are safe, healthy, independent, and able to support themselves and their families.

To meet that goal, innovation and continuous change are necessities. Political, economic, and social forces rightly demand new and improved service models to better achieve the goal and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

*MACSSA believes ensuring that vital human services are provided to citizens is a shared responsibility of all levels of government. As such, government must continue to hold the primary authority and responsibility to assure that citizens' critical needs are met, when they are not able to meet those needs themselves.*

MACSSA believes that the Association and its members have an important leadership role to play in determining the future of human services. MACSSA believes ensuring that vital human services are provided to citizens is a shared responsibility of all levels of government. As such, government must continue to hold the primary authority and responsibility to assure that citizens' critical needs are met, when they are not able to meet those needs themselves. Moreover, MACSSA believes that there must be mutual respect for the roles and responsibilities of government at all levels, and that all parties must interact as partners. MACSSA commits to working collaboratively with all partners to expand, develop, and strengthen relationships that will lead to the most effective service models possible.

The question before us is, "how do we ensure that future development of the human services system best meets the health and safety needs of vulnerable populations?" We believe this paper sets forth a vision to answer this question.

## Environmental Factors and Trends

The delivery of human services takes place in a complicated environment in which political, economic, demographic and social trends intertwine and rapidly evolve. Human services are not and should not be immune from these trends. MACSSA has identified the following factors and trends as critically impacting the future of human services and the County role in human service delivery.

### **GOVERNMENTAL FUNDING WILL CONTINUE TO BE UNDER STRESS FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE**

Demographic trends point to a future in which Minnesota's population continues to age, with increased numbers of "baby boomers" retiring, growth in the number of children, and not as many people in-between these two age groups. The "dependency ratio", the percent of those who are economically dependent (e.g. children, aged) over those who are active and productive in the labor force, continues to rise. Minnesota will see a relatively smaller number of workers support an increasingly larger number of retirees and children.

At the same time, health care costs have been and are projected to continue to rise at a rate faster than inflation and currently account for the single largest area of growth in the state general fund expenditures<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, of the approximately \$11 billion state health and human services budget, spending on health care and related long term care services for the elderly and disabled make up approximately 80% of the budget. We also know that health care costs are on average greatest for older residents. Over the next ten years, Minnesota will see large increases in the number of persons aged in their 50s and 60s, with healthcare costs increasing significantly starting at age 55.<sup>2</sup> Many retirees are not financially positioned to be self-sufficient for health care. The combination of increased older Minnesotans with higher health care costs that will impact government has major implications for overall governmental funding.

Retired older Minnesotans will contribute relatively fewer income tax dollars due to lower income. Higher numbers of youth will continue to require education and other funding support. The result will be fewer people of working age paying taxes. Then consider that government tax structures are increasingly outmoded, e.g. revenue from sales taxes declines as more goods are purchased via the Internet.

While believing that human services must be *adequately funded* – MACSSA also recognizes that human services must also provide a return on investment to taxpayers. These long term demographic and financial trends make it clear that human services financing will continue to be under significant stress and that service delivery systems will have to adapt to what state economist Tom Stinson and state demographer Tom Gillaspay refer to as "the new normal."<sup>3</sup>

*The combination of increased older Minnesotans with higher health care costs that will impact government has major implications for overall governmental funding.*

<sup>1</sup> State of Minnesota, *Budget Trends Study Commission (January, 2009). Commission Report to the Legislature*. Retrieved on September 28th, 2011 from: <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/doc/budget/trends/report-09.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Gillaspay, Tom, & Stinson, Tom, *Minnesota and the New Normal (November, 2010)*. Retrieved on September 28, 2011 <http://www.slideshare.net/MNagrigrwth/stinson-gillaspay>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

### **FOCUS ON OUTCOMES WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE**

At the federal level, increasing focus on outcomes has come in the child support, food support and child welfare service areas. At times this focus includes financial penalties and rewards.

At the State level, 2009 Legislation designed and supported by MACSSA created a State/County/advocate Steering Committee on Performance and Outcomes. The Committee was charged by the legislation with developing performance measures for essential services within the human services delivery system for which all counties will be accountable. A structure of remedial actions has been identified to improve county human services performance where needed. Additionally, the legislatively created Council on Local Results and Innovation has developed a standard set of ten performance measures, including human services measures, for counties who will be provided incentives if they voluntarily choose to participate in the standard measures program.

County Boards are increasingly focusing on making difficult budgetary decisions by using outcome and performance measurement data.

With governmental budgets increasingly under strain, we expect the focus on outcomes to continue and strengthen. MACSSA welcomes and supports increased accountability through performance measurement directed at improving program outcomes for Minnesotans in need.

### **PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE**

The expectations of those receiving human services along with the families, friends and advocates who support them, have changed and will continue to change. The general direction is toward increased control by the participants themselves through provision of more service options as well as through consumer-directed programs. Consumers are demanding not only more choices but more control in decision making. Accompanying this trend is an increased expectation that recipients of services be supported in and integrated into the community rather than in facilities or institutional care.

*Consumer expectations around the use of technology will shape the way the human service system operates in the future*

In addition, consumer expectations around the use of technology will shape the way the human service system operates in the future. Persons receiving human services, like the general population, are increasingly interacting with people and businesses through the internet and emerging technologies such as “smart phones.” The expectations for interaction with government are no different. Consumers will desire and presume to receive government services through emerging technologies and customer friendly approaches.

At the same time, counties are finding new ways to deliver services that are based on research, are evidence based and achieve results. Human service programs in Minnesota and across the country continue to change and improve as more and more is learned about “what works” – our practice models are changing. Examples include increased focus on recovery-oriented and strength-based programs.

Human service programs and systems must remain flexible and adapt as expectations change and expertise improves.

## **HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE**

Health care reform will bring significant change to the delivery of health care in Minnesota. The expansion of Medicaid (Medical Assistance) and health care exchanges will bring organizational change and require significant resources and energy. At the same time, Minnesota will initiate changes in the role of health plans, bringing additional change, e.g. Accountable Care Organizations, Health Care Homes. Challenging issues are coming to the fore including how to align accountability for results with “who pays”, aligning risk with reward.

Concurrently, there continues to be increased awareness and accounting for the interconnectedness of health and social services interventions. Health care outcomes impact social service outcomes and vice versa. Legislation passed in 2011 reflects this reality by requiring health care homes and counties to coordinate care and services for people who have a disability or complex medical need and are eligible for county administered services.

*The increasing cost of health care and evolving roles make change inevitable and all Minnesota systems will have to adapt*

The increasing cost of health care and evolving roles makes change inevitable and all Minnesota systems will have to adapt.

## **NEW GOVERNANCE MODELS ARE BEING CONSIDERED**

In light of changing economic circumstance and budgetary realities, both state and county government have recognized that new governance models for the delivery of human services must be considered.

MACSSA designed and is implementing 2009 legislation that increases focus on results but also allows for multi-county Service Delivery Authorities and enhanced partnership with state government. A hallmark of this legislation is its bolstering of the governance partnership through the use of memoranda of understanding between the state and counties that will clearly define roles, responsibilities and outcome expectations of both entities.

Counties are sponsoring the "Minnesota Accountable Government Innovation and Collaboration (MAGIC) Act" to redesign county services through bold local leadership, increased collaboration, improved process efficiencies, and structural changes.

Counties are partnering with the state to create an environment where state and county employees focus their energy on outcomes rather than on processes and where decisions on how best to meet local need are made by local communities to the extent possible. County Boards and employees recognize that this direction requires a heightened level of accountability for results in exchange for the freedom to innovate.

In addition to these county designed and supported changes, other proposals have emerged from the legislative and executive branches.

## The Primary Role of Government in the Delivery of Human Services

MACSSA believes that governmental entities must continue to have a paramount role in the delivery of critical human services to citizens in need. In Minnesota, this duty is a shared responsibility of the state and county governments. Both state and county government have distinct yet complimentary roles in the human services system, both of which are necessary to protect our vulnerable populations.

### PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Protecting vulnerable populations is the key role for government in Minnesota's human services system. State government is responsible for setting the majority of policy and counties have the "hands on" responsibility for implementing that policy by delivering critical human services. This responsibility is of utmost importance and can be a life and death matter. Counties ensure the survival of vulnerable people by keeping them safe and by addressing basic survival needs.

The private sector does not have the authority or responsibility to directly intervene or protect vulnerable children and adults. This activity often involves the use of coercive powers and a high level of involvement in the private lives of residents. This work requires the public transparency and accountability that can only be provided by the oversight of elected officials and the courts. Protecting vulnerable populations is statutorily defined as a mandated role for government and brings with it specialized data privacy considerations.

*Protecting vulnerable populations is the key role for government in Minnesota's human services system.*

Examples of this role in practice include civil commitments, 72 hour holds, child protection, CHIPs petitions, adult protection, chemical health, detoxification, sexual violence services, sexual perpetration treatment, problem-solving courts, child support, fraud investigations, and juvenile delinquency intervention.

### A LONG-TERM VIEW

Government has the responsibility for serving vulnerable individuals for as long as they need assistance (potentially a lifetime) and therefore must have a long-term view of service delivery and outcomes. The responsibility is holistic and continuous, leading state and county government to think developmentally about lasting client success. Government responsibility for the care of residents in need continues for as long as it is required and cannot be transferred to other entities.

It is a unique and valuable tenet that the governments' ultimate responsibility to provide cost-effective care never expires.

As a practical example, there is an embedded incentive for counties to deliver high quality community-based services to those with serious and persistent mental health issues, wherein failure to adequately meet the needs of an individual in the community can lead to commitment, a much more costly and less effective intervention that remains a governmental responsibility.

### ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PUBLICLY FUNDED SERVICES

MACSSA believes that any organization that expends public funds for human services should be directly responsible to publicly elected officials. These officials are ultimately responsible for effective and efficient expenditure of public resources. As such, making decisions about the level of public funds to be expended to address client need is a governmental function. Government holds and should continue to

hold responsibility for activities related to eligibility and service authorization, as well as those involving overall responsibility for consumer health and safety.

### **UTILIZATION AND MONITORING OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

The mission of county social service agencies rests on supporting individuals who experience dependency, abuse, neglect, poverty and disability. The public relies on a social service infrastructure that provides high quality services, keeps consumers safe, and makes efficient use of public funds. The state extends accountability to counties as a governmental entity with the appropriate authority and mission to accomplish these goals. Oversight of non-governmental entities is also necessary to accomplish these goals. This is an essential role for government because the free market does not ordinarily monitor itself, non-governmental providers do not have the mission or the statutory mandate to assume this responsibility, and the stakes are so high for ensuring safety and addressing basic needs of residents through the efficient use of tax dollars.

Examples include licensing, executing and monitoring private provider contracts and outcomes, and consumer advocacy with health plans.

## *The Unique Role of Counties in the Delivery of Human Services*

MACSSA believes that counties are uniquely positioned for essential roles in human services delivery.

### **COMPREHENSIVE LOCAL SERVICE INTEGRATION**

Counties are the only organizations locally who bear responsibility for the well-being of all people in the community across all service areas. For-profit and non-profit organizations have narrower missions and more limited sets of services. They often carve out only a particular population to serve. In contrast, county human service agencies must play multiple roles across the service system. The County acts as a community-wide needs assessor and architect of local social services systems, as well as resource developer, service contractor, and direct service provider. This diversity of roles offers a unique and comprehensive spectrum of services to local communities that specialized service providers lack.

County Boards are uniquely positioned to integrate services across broad government functions – from human services to public health, corrections, veterans’ services and law enforcement. Counties can build collaboration due to the nature of their broad responsibilities and, in contrast to state government; they can offer innovative approaches to problem-solving using models of manageable size and scope.

For example, many counties have integrated leadership structures in combining human services, public health and in some instances, corrections responsibilities. These multi-disciplinary approaches encourage the development of more streamlined communications between departments and limit the temptation for cost-shifting between silos.

*County Boards are uniquely positioned to integrate services across broad government functions*

## LABORATORIES OF INNOVATION

As noted previously, local service needs vary by county and region. Counties are uniquely positioned to respond to these variations by experimenting with service delivery models that address these needs. But other counties, regions, and the state as a whole also benefit from these innovations by learning promising and best practices from others. Counties offer appropriately sized organizations for innovation, with a scale and scope that can experiment in ways that the state as a whole cannot. By maintaining a statewide network of county human service agencies, local need and accountability to locally elected officials, will continue to drive grass roots innovation.

*Counties offer appropriately sized organizations for innovation, with a scale and scope that can experiment in ways that the state as a whole cannot*

Recently passed laws authorizing chemical dependency pilot projects and community based “in-reach” medical care coordination provide examples of innovative interventions developed at the county level. The chemical dependency pilot projects being conducted in southeast Minnesota and Washington County are offering navigator services in addition to treatment to more holistically address the underlying factors contributing to a client’s substance abuse. “In-reach” medical care coordination provides medical reimbursement for services provided by a community based social worker stationed in a hospital emergency department. The goal is to improve outcomes by working with “frequent users” of emergency department services to identify more appropriate community resources.

## ADDRESSING REGIONAL AND LOCAL VARIATION IN NEED

Counties vary in population density, population diversity (e.g. age, ethnicity, and culture), availability of service organizations and private sector service providers. County staff and county-contracted vendors are best positioned to link individual citizens with unique and often informal local supports and community-based services. Because of this local connection and familiarity with the community, counties are readily able to identify gaps in local services, avoid duplication, and bring expertise to planning and development efforts with respect to local community needs.

In many cases, the variations are regional. Counties have proven capacity and willingness to define regional solutions through voluntary, multi-county service networks whenever the need arises.

In Metro counties, a recent trend has been to offer consumers direct service options through contracted vendors, including case management services. This provides consumers with choices on who they would like to provide services. However, in greater Minnesota the reality is often that counties are the only option – no additional resources exist to provide services. These situations in rural or semi-rural areas are clear examples of market failure, for which government must rise to fill the void. Counties should clearly continue to function as direct service providers in areas of less population, or wherever adequate vendors do not exist, in order to ensure that quality services are available.

## THE COUNTY AS A FUNDING SOURCE

Unlike for-profit and non-profit organizations, counties have the authority to levy tax dollars. Counties are, in fact, a major funder of direct services to uninsured or underinsured individuals who are in need of human services. Counties truly represent the third leg of the funding stool for public human services, along with state and federal funders. As a funding source of such services, county elected leaders must to have the authority to ensure that local tax dollars are appropriately used to address local need.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Future changes to the human services delivery system must ensure Minnesotans are safe, healthy, independent and able to support themselves and their families. MACSSA believes in the following foundations to support that end.

### **EQUITY AND FAIRNESS**

All Minnesotans deserve access to quality services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, residency, or circumstance. Currently, some populations receive an abundance of services while others receive few or inadequate services. An evolving human services system must address and work to eliminate disparate service levels and outcomes.

### **EFFECTIVE STATE-COUNTY PARTNERSHIP**

In Minnesota, responsibility for serving the needs of vulnerable populations is a joint undertaking between the state and counties. A strong state-county partnership is vitally important to achieving our shared objectives. A healthy state-county partnership is one in which policy is developed in a collaborative manner to assure that goals are practically aligned with the operational environment at the local level.

### **FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND OUTCOMES**

Building on the work begun by the Steering Committee on Performance and Outcomes, the Council on Local Results and Innovation, and other initiatives, the human services delivery system must continue to focus on measuring and improving the outcomes for the people we serve. Moreover, there must be a commitment to adequately fund and resource an effective performance management system. In order to utilize performance measurement data, a system must be resourced to allow counties to convert that data into improved outcomes for consumers.

*The human services delivery system must continue to focus on measuring and improving the outcomes for the people we serve*

### **CONSUMER ORIENTED**

Any changes to human services programs should be consumer oriented and aimed toward serving the best interests of our residents. Programs must take into account expectations of consumers and promote ease of navigation to the greatest extent possible. Consumers should not be deterred from receiving services through overly complicated requirements. Additionally, government must adapt to the changing consumer expectations regarding technology. The public will expect to access government services in the same way it accesses other services through increasingly mobile technologies such as “smart phones” and tablets. The human services system must be resourced to harmonize with this new standard.

### **LOCAL DELIVERY OF CRITICAL SERVICES**

Counties should retain the role of delivering critical human services that ensure safety and meet basic needs. Counties are uniquely positioned to administer human service programs at the local level because local elected officials are acutely aware of the diversity of needs within each community and are accountable to constituents for addressing those needs. Moreover, counties have a direct financial stake, levying over approximately \$500 million in property taxes statewide for human services, and thus should retain authority for local decision making.

**UNIQUENESS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

While many services and programs require standard statewide benefit levels, counties must be empowered to tailor delivery of services to meet unique local needs. Needs vary by county and region based on population density and diversity. Policies that do not recognize or account for that variation are not serving the best interests of constituents.

**MAINTAIN VALUE OF LOCAL SERVICE INTEGRATION**

The value of local service integration must be maintained and leveraged as changes take place in the human services system. The ability of counties to integrate services across disciplines such as human services, public health, corrections, veterans' services and law enforcement is an asset that must be protected moving forward.

**FREEDOM TO INNOVATE**

Counties must continue to be given opportunities and incentives to be centers of innovation. Counties must have the flexibility to develop creative approaches to delivering human services in order to provide our consumers improved outcomes. By virtue of their scale and scope, counties are the ideal level of government to test new ideas for system change.

**LEVERAGING OF COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE EXPERTISE**

County human service expertise should be utilized to make sound, outcome oriented changes to human services programs and structures. As the local entity responsible for delivery of human services, counties have direct experience and knowledge of what is working and what is not working in the community. This knowledge and experience should be leveraged to develop strategic adjustments where needed.

**ALIGNMENT OF RESOURCES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

Achieving expected outcomes has become increasingly difficult with decreasing state revenues and resources. State human services mandates and expected outcomes for county government must realistically align with the resources/funding available.

**SUFFICIENT STATE RESOURCES**

Allowing for increased efficiency and effectiveness, state funding for the human services system must be sufficient to address need. We know that needs left unaddressed often result in more expensive interventions downstream. Providing for the welfare and safety of Minnesotans is a shared responsibility and must be adequately resourced.

*State human services mandates and expected outcomes for county government must realistically align with the resources and funding available*

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

Tax payers demand that government demonstrate value for use of tax dollars. In the current fiscal environment it is increasingly paramount that future policy development in the human services system incorporate evidence based practices that deliver better outcomes per tax payer dollar.

**MANAGING HEALTH CARE AND LONG TERM CARE COSTS**

Future changes to the human services system must address the rising costs of health care and long term care services for the elderly and disabled. Health care and long term care are the most significant cost

drivers of the state health and human services budget, accounting for approximately 80% of expenditures.

In order to effectuate these principles, MACSSA makes the following commitments in our delivery of human services:

- We will focus on the best interests of those served.
- We will work collaboratively with all partners and stakeholders
- We will use evidence based best practices wherever possible, and change practice as needed to become more effective.
- We will deliver our services in the most cost-effective manner possible in accordance with best practices, ensuring taxpayer funding is well spent.
- We will innovate and modernize our services, taking advantage of technological changes to the extent that we can.
- We will adapt to changes in expectations of those we serve and the population as a whole.

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