

Budget Briefing: Human Services

The programs the Department of Human Services provides help support the well-being of Colorado’s most at-risk populations. The department is responsible for the administration of all non-medical public assistance and welfare programs in the Colorado. This includes things such as:

- Child welfare services.
- Rehabilitation programs.
- Jobs training programs.
- Drug treatment services.
- Child care subsidies to low-income families.
- Visiting nurse services for low-income first-time mothers.
- Meals on Wheels for disabled/elderly populations.

It supervises programs that are administered at the local level by counties and other agencies. The department also directly operates mental health institutes, regional centers for people with developmental disabilities and institutions for juvenile delinquents.

A large part of “human services” is federal dollars

The services that people normally think about when they hear “human services” are transfer payments in the form of food assistance (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program SNAP) and financial assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families TANF). What most people don’t realize is that all the money for those programs comes from the federal government. Only a small amount of Colorado state tax dollars are used to administer those programs at the county level.

What do state tax dollars in Human Services pay for?

A substantial portion, about 13 percent, of the human services budget goes to behavioral health programs, such as the 17 community mental health centers in the state. In addition, about 25 percent of human services funding goes to support the disabled in the form of cash assistance. About 32 percent of the General Fund dollars for human services go to supporting children through child welfare and the Office of Early Childhood. Child welfare funds go to responding to reports of child abuse and neglect.

Unlike a program such as Medicaid in which the individuals who qualify are guaranteed enrollment, the services offered by the Department of Human Services are “non-entitlement” programs, which means the funding for these programs isn’t dictated by the number of disabled, elderly individuals or children in need of help. Instead, funding for these services depends on how much general fund support is available.

