



DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND SUPPORT SERVICES
CITY OF CHICAGO

Food Access Services Overview

As the lead City department dedicated to serving Chicago's most vulnerable residents, DFSS focuses on strengthening the safety net for low-income and other vulnerable populations through its food assistance programs. Over the past three years, the department has increased the availability of fresh produce across its programs and worked to provide more flexibility for clients in terms of locations and food options. The department also implements enrichment and job training programs focused on nutrition education and urban agriculture, and works at a citywide level to develop policies and strategies to increase food access. In all, DFSS provides more than eight million meals each year to residents in need.

DFSS Programs with a Nutrition Component

- DFSS provides over 1.5 million individuals with **food assistance** each year through 100 Greater Chicago Food Depository pantries located near DFSS' six Community Service Centers. Nutritious choices include fresh produce, meat and dairy products.
- DFSS provides fresh fruit and vegetables on a bi-weekly basis through its 60 **overnight shelter and interim housing shelters**. The program serves over 28,000 people each year.
- DFSS sponsors and manages the administration of **Chicago's Summer Nutrition Program** at over 200 locations across the city. The program provides residents, 18 years and younger, with over 400,000 free, nutritious breakfasts, lunches and snacks at community sites across the city including Chicago Park District, Chicago Housing Authority, and faith-based facilities.
- **The Golden Diners Program**, administered by DFSS each weekday, provides Chicago's seniors with hot, nutritious lunches in a communal setting at nearly 60 sites throughout the city. The program provides approximately 750,000 meals annually to over 20,000 older adults.
- The **Head Start** and **Early Head Start** programs provide educational and early childhood development activities for 18,000 children under five years of age from low-income families. The program offers children free health services, nutrition education, and healthy meals.

Mobile & Alternative Food Assistance Programs

- DFSS' **Home Delivered Meals** program provides approximately 3.2 million home delivered meals to over 9,000 homebound older adults each year. Frozen or hot meals are delivered to a resident unable to obtain meals on their own and without a support system to assist with shopping or preparing meals.
- The **Older Adult Markets** initiative provides non-perishable food and fresh produce at five DFSS senior centers across the city twice monthly.
- DFSS partners with Experimental Station to provide the necessary equipment and staff to accept **LINK cards at key City farmers' markets**. The City has increased the number of farmers' markets that accept LINK in each of the past three years to a total of fifteen. The program provides services to over 4,000 LINK card users each market season.
- DFSS's **Human Services Mobile Outreach** crews respond to requests for shelter placement and transportation, well-being checks, emergency food assistance to victims of fire and natural disasters. As part of this program, DFSS provides 10,000 emergency food boxes per year.

Job Training & Education Programs

- **DFSS' youth development programs** provide young people with opportunities to engage in year-round nutrition education and food production activities. For example, the **One Summer Plus** summer jobs program provides youth at risk of violence with the opportunity to maintain school gardens during summer break. The Gary Comer Youth Center provides young people with the opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables on the Center's 8,000-square-foot rooftop garden and 1.75-acre youth education garden, learn cooking skills and sell the produce.
- DFSS provides funding to several **workforce training** organizations to implement programs for adults interested in gaining job readiness skills through horticultural production.
- DFSS provides funding to implement a job preparation and training program for vulnerable populations as part of **Neighbor Carts**, a mobile vending cart program that sells fresh produce at 20 sites throughout Chicago, with 50% in communities underserved by mainstream grocers.

Chicago's Food Plan: A Recipe for Healthy Places

- In 2012, the Chicago Plan Commission officially adopted "A Recipe for Healthy Places," a plan developed by the City of Chicago in partnership with hundreds of community stakeholders to improve the nutrition of Chicago residents and confront escalating obesity rates and related diseases. The plan's six strategies offer concrete steps toward a healthier food environment in Chicago and include an educational component to further support this process. Several of the recommendations focus on improving data analysis to better target communities with elevated risk for obesity-related diseases; creating productive landscapes to grow more food; and supporting businesses that produce and distribute healthy food. Others focus on supporting low-income individuals and providing education to improve eating habits.