

Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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\$1.7 million aid distribution benefited food banks, communities statewide

Sept. 6, 2023 — The Department of Health has announced the successful completion of a measure aimed at alleviating the strain on Alaska's food banks.

In February, Governor Mike Dunleavy reallocated \$1.7 million from an unutilized state program as a short-term bridge towards achieving long-term goals – to update and improve the processing of applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The program was then experiencing months' long backlog in redeterminations.

The funds were an instrumental first step to bolster depleted food banks across the state, allowing them to restock dwindling supplies; the repurposed funds also assisted with distribution, enhanced logistics and strengthened outreach to remote communities.

"We are proud to announce the positive outcomes of this effort, which provided crucial support to help feed Alaskans," said Gov. Mike Dunleavy. "This successful undertaking demonstrates our commitment to the well-being of all Alaskans."

"Redistributing these funds replenished Alaska's food pantries and food banks throughout Alaska," said Commissioner Heidi Hedberg. "As a result, while we worked to eliminate the backlog and improve the program as a whole, our most vulnerable citizens regained access to nutritious meals."

Organizations worked together to ensure the aid reached communities most in need.

"The impact of this effort cannot be understated," said Food Bank of Alaska CEO Jim Baldwin. The organization distributed 567,765 pounds of food to 82 partners statewide, from Ketchikan to Bethel and Gambell. "We were able to begin responding to the urgent needs of our communities by distributing more food to those impacted. We are extremely grateful for the Governor's swift response to address food insecurity in our state."

The program brought pallets of food to the Upper Susitna Food Pantry in Talkeetna, said Executive Director LouAnne Carroll-Tysdal. “As the need kept rising and more families signed up for services, we were able ensure that there was no gap in services and families in our communities were fed,” she said.

The Fairbanks Community Food Bank, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank (based in Soldotna) and Southeast Alaska Food Bank (based in Juneau) also distributed allocations to regional partners.

“This program was a huge blessing to many folks across the Kenai Peninsula,” said Executive Director Greg Meyer of Kenai Peninsula Food Bank. “We were able to distribute food through pantries in Kenai, Soldotna, Homer, and villages across Kachemak Bay, Anchor Point, Nikiski, Tyonek, Hope, Cooper Landing, Moose Pass and Sterling. We had many people so excited and grateful for extra food support at a time of food shortages.”

“It has made a tremendous impact keeping our shelves stocked and our pantries bountiful for nutritious foods being distributed,” said Southeast Alaska Food Bank Executive Director Chris Schapp. “We average 275-300 people each week at our pantry. We also set a record in our 27 years history serving Juneau -- for food distributed in Fiscal Year 2023, with 581,500 pounds being distributed.”

The backlog of older SNAP recertifications has been cleared. Additionally, the Division of Public Assistance (DPA) staffing plan has allowed for more efficient processing of applications to stay out of backlog.

“We are really seeing the needle move now,” said DPA Director Deb Etheridge. “We’re pleased that we moved to a 12-month SNAP certification period for most households, with a more efficient interim report midway through the certification period. We continue to improve staffing and workflow with new staff, and we’re looking forward to launching an online application for SNAP within the next six to nine months.”

“There is certainly more work to be done, but it is important to recognize that we have achieved some of our milestones,” she said.



More on how funds benefited communities in this [joint video press release from DOH and Food Bank of Alaska](#).

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