



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Message:

Today more than 100,000 of our state's children still do not have health care coverage. Even though Oregon voters defeated Measure 50, let's not forget about the kids. And let's not let our elected officials forget them either.

Action:

Please contact your state representative and senator to encourage them to address this issue in the coming legislative session.

State Legislative Information

1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem)

(503) 986-1000 (in Salem)

www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide

To find your elected official and take action with ease...

www.oregonfoodbank.org

Click on



ADVOCATE

Feds find hunger still a problem

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently released results from an annual survey that looked at the number of households that were food insecure from 2004-2006. According to the results, 10.9 percent of U.S. households had low food security, meaning they struggled to feed their families. In Oregon 11.9 percent of households were food insecure. That's more than 220,000 Oregon households, representing more than 550,000 people.

"Too many Oregon families struggle to put food on the table," said Rachel Bristol, CEO, Oregon Food Bank. "The high cost of housing, health care, child care and fuel make it difficult for low-income individuals and families to have enough money to pay for food."

"Hunger is definitely an income issue," stated Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force. "And with the rising cost of food, food stamps are not covering as much as they had in the past. We have been losing ground in the Food Stamp Program for years because benefits were not indexed to inflation. Most people don't realize the minimum benefit of \$10 has not changed since the program started in 1977."

Federal nutrition programs such as food stamps and TEFAP (the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program) help fill the gap. "But inflation has weakened both programs since they were reauthorized in the 2002 farm bill and both programs are in desperate need of new investments," Bristol said. Since 2004,

TEFAP commodities to Oregon Food Bank have dropped nearly 60 percent, from 11.2 million pounds of food in 2004 to about 5.2 million pounds in 2007.

The U.S. Senate is debating reauthorization of the farm bill this month and will set funding for both food stamps and TEFAP for the next five years. "This is a critical time for Oregon," said Whitney-Wise. "We have made strides in combating hunger, but we still need federal programs to ensure all of our children have enough to eat."

Bristol and Whitney-Wise encourage all Oregonians to call Senators Smith and Wyden and to ask them to continue their work as Senate leaders in the fight against hunger and to pass a farm bill that improves food stamps and TEFAP.

Improvements to Oregon's TANF program

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is Oregon's cash assistance program for low-income families. Eligible families receive a monthly grant to help pay for basic living expenses, access to case management, employment and training, and other services focused on helping families become independent and stable.

In 2006, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act, which established new program requirements. This has been both an opportunity and a challenge. Oregon needed to redevelop its TANF program to satisfy the new federal re-

quirements but it was also an opportunity to produce better outcomes for low-income families in Oregon.

A number of improvements were made during the 2007 Oregon legislative session to TANF. The focus changed from primarily compliance and work-participation to a more holistic family stabilization and economic security program.

This Advocacy Alert article will give a broad overview of some of the major changes to Oregon's TANF program, implemented on October 1, 2007.

PRE-TANF PROGRAM

The new pre-TANF program is more heavily focused on identifying a family's needs and connecting them with appropriate services. As part of this process families will participate in a self-evaluation process and help develop a participation plan suited for their needs.

ON-GOING TANF

On-going TANF is intended to be more outcome oriented. For most families, the goal is still self-sufficiency through sustained employment, but a larger array of services will be available.

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STATE FAMILY PRE-SSI/SSDI PROGRAM

The pre-SSI/SSDI program is designed to help TANF families who are pursuing Social Security disability benefits. Trained liaisons work with families to help

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TANF program

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them gather documentation, apply for SSI/SSDI benefits and file appeals if they are denied.

POST-TANF PROGRAM

The post-TANF program provides a sustainability grant and support services to help families as they become employed. Families are offered a stipend of \$150 per month for up to one year. The stipend does not count against child care benefits.

Other TANF changes to be implemented October 2008 include:

Child support pass-through of \$50 per child, up to \$200 per month. A larger number of TANF recipients will be able to seek higher education through the parents as scholars program, previously called the degree completion initiative.

Upcoming Advocacy Alert issues will give more in-depth information about specific TANF programs and how recent changes will affect Oregon families.

The Advocacy Alert is published jointly by Oregon Food Bank (OFB) and the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF).

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Last month we learned once again that \$12 million buys a lot of smoke.

Opponents of Oregon's Measure 50 are skilled political professionals. And they sure had access to lots of cash. Their \$12 million was spent throughout the land spreading dire warnings about amending the Oregon Constitution. Listening to all these focus-group-tested political ads, one got the impression that only select issues of greatest importance are allowed to be amended into the constitution. Yet in all this expensive chatter about keeping the Oregon Constitution pure and safe from amendment, often lost was the true meaning of Measure 50. Health care for kids that is.

But it's puzzling that at least some of this \$12 million was not spent informing voters that the Oregon Constitution already has been amended more than 200 times. Just for one example, voters already have enshrined into the Oregon Constitution the right of adults in our state to purchase liquor by the drink at their favorite watering hole. So, clearly, opponents of Measure 50 felt compelled to spend \$12 million to ensure the Oregon Constitution remains in its current unadulterated form. But we're truly mystified why opponents didn't spend a paltry few hundred thousand letting voters know about the much-amended history of the Oregon Constitution. It was probably just an unintentional oversight. Or they ran short on cash.

Today more than 100,000 of our state's children still do not have health care coverage. Even though Oregon voters defeated Measure 50, let's not forget about the kids. And let's not let our elected officials forget them either. See this month's *Take Five*.

Depression stalks the food insecure, study finds

Oregonians struggling to put food on the table are more than twice as likely to suffer from depression than those with no such worries, according to a new report released by the Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP). In response to a statewide telephone survey, one in three adults from households facing limited or uncertain availability of food -- what the federal government calls "food insecurity" -- reported being depressed, said the Silverton-based institute. By contrast, only one in seven adults from households where access to food was not a problem reported being depressed.

"Many struggling Oregonians face what Shakespeare would have called 'double, double, toil and trouble,'" said OCPP analyst Joy Margheim, co-author of the report. "While the causal connection is complex, it is clear that food insecurity and depression are intertwined."

Suicidal thoughts are also much more common among the food insecure, according to the report Empty Cupboards, Empty Feelings. It found that among adults facing not just food insecurity but actual hunger, 23.1 percent -- nearly one in four -- reported seriously considering suicide in the previous 12 months, compared to only about one in 70 adults in households that did not have problems obtaining food.

OCPP's report analyzed data gathered primarily in 2005 by the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Oregon Department of Human Services. The BRFSS has included questions concerning food security since 2001. The report also found that women are especially at risk for both food insecurity and depression. One in six women lived in a food insecure household in 2005,

OCPP said, compared to one in seven men. That same year, one in five women experienced depression, compared to about one in seven men.

"Although the data may seem disheartening," said Margheim, "the good news is that recognizing the overlap between food insecurity and depression may present new opportunities for addressing both." She noted, for example, that while depression may be difficult to prevent, because some risk factors may be difficult or impossible to change, food insecurity can be addressed head on through food stamps and other programs. Improving food security may in turn alleviate depression.

The OCPP is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The center's goal is to improve decision making and generate more opportunities for all Oregonians.