



MAKING ENDS MEET: ELDER ECONOMIC SECURITY

The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act
SPOTLIGHT ON: One-Time \$250 Social Security Payment

Tools and Information
From the Elder Economic Security Initiative™

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Update on the National Initiative

Greetings from Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). The work of promoting program and policy change to build pathways to economic security for elders and their families continues, and there are many exciting updates to share from the Elder Economic Security Initiative!

First and foremost, WOW is delighted to announce the launch of its *Building Bridges to Economic Security Campaign (the Campaign)*. Through an award from Atlantic Philanthropies, WOW received funding to create a new framework for public policy and public discourse that can be used to set both aspirational and concrete measures through the broad lens of economic security across generations, rather than the narrow lens of poverty. This analysis and framework will be used to help groups with different strategies, but a shared goal of economic well being, develop language that can be used to promote a holistic rather than a silo-approach to problem solving.

The project will be grounded in the voices and experiences of individuals that lay the basis for organizing and advocacy on policies and programs deemed necessary by local communities to assure that their residents are on a path to economic well-being. During the course of the project, we hope to find language that will bridge race, class, age and gender differences so that we can build a messaging frame work that will be embraced by communities as a whole.

The Campaign will complement and expand upon the efforts of WOW and its state partners in the Elder Economic Security Initiative (Initiative). In the last few months, the Initiative's partners have been successful in spreading the message of elder economic security and applying the Initiative's framework and tools, including the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index), in multiple arenas, such as direct services for seniors, ongoing advocacy efforts, media outreach and policy change. See below for a few highlights:

- **New Jersey:** Passed legislation to revise the eligibility period for the state's Senior Property Tax Freeze program from three years to one year
- **Michigan:** Co-sponsored a legislative briefing with Michigan AARP on the Initiative, the Elder Index findings, and Benefits Quick Link with over 60 attendees, including policy makers and legislative staff
- **Wisconsin:** Partnered with WOW and the Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER) to pilot test regional financial planning seminars and trainings for college-age and mid-career women

WOW's "[Tracking Our Successes and Strategies](#)" details more exciting developments at the national, state and community levels.

In other news, just last month, WOW was delighted to invite its state partners to Washington D.C. for a series of workshops and activities on Capitol Hill. WOW's state partners participated in trainings on coalition building, fundraising and federal policy. In addition, they communicated with staffers from the Senate Special Committee on Aging regarding their priorities for 2010, with an emphasis on income security and supporting family caregivers and the direct care workforce. In addition, WOW's state partners visited Senate staff and communicated the importance of [extending the one-time \\$250 payment to Social Security](#) authorized under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) and of including the [Community Living Assistance Services and Supports \(CLASS \) Act](#) in final health care reform.

WHAT and WHY it Matters

WHAT is the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act?

The [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) (Recovery Act) was signed into law on February 17, 2009. Since then, \$246 billion has been distributed to federal, state and local agencies and community-based organizations. The legislation has multiple goals:

- To create new jobs and save existing ones,
- To jump start the economy in the short- and long-term,
- To foster accountability and transparency in government spending, and
- To provide aid to struggling individuals and families.

Accordingly, the Recovery Act is being implemented through a multi-pronged strategy, with funds targeted in multiple ways, such as improving income support programs for low-income families, workers and elders and building job training networks for infrastructure development.

WHAT is in ARRA for elders?

The Recovery Act aims to help low-income groups across the age spectrum, including children, families, workers and elders. [Several provisions](#) of the legislation specifically address the needs of elders. This month's newsletter will be the first in a series focusing on provisions of the Recovery Act that directly affect seniors. Included in this issue is an overview and update on the \$250 one-time payment to Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries, including retirees, disabled persons, dependent survivors and others, made available through the Recovery Act.

WOW looks forward to making additional information available to its state partners, coalition members and other allied groups about the opportunities available to low-income families, workers and elders through the Recovery Act. For up-to-date information, [sign-up](#) for WOW's weekly ARRA e-updates.

Sources: www.recovery.gov

WHAT is the one-time payment and WHY does it matter?

In 2009, a one-time payment of \$250 was provided to elders, disabled persons, and other beneficiaries of Social Security and SSI. The payment was intended to serve a dual purpose, both to provide additional income to those struggling to make ends meet and to stimulate the economy through spending on consumer goods. This one-time payment reflected an important step forward in helping low-income elders close the income gap.

Check out the
website!

Visit:

www.wowonline.org

Fundraising Spotlight:

Our work would not be possible without generous support from funders in our partner states and communities.

Helen Bader Foundation
(Wisconsin)

Louise H. Landau Foundation
(Illinois)

United Way of Southeast Pennsylvania

The Boston Foundation
(Massachusetts)

California Community Foundation

California Wellness Foundation

The California Endowment

The HEALTH Trust
(California)

United Way of the Bay Area
(California)

Michigan AARP

Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
(West Virginia)

Many thanks to the state and local funders supporting our efforts!

For those who must make difficult sacrifices among basic expenses, these payments help cover the cost of critical services or needs. As shown by the Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index), every dollar matters for individuals or families who must choose between food, home utilities, prescription medication or other services or goods. The one-time payment amounts to more than the typical older American's monthly health care expenses, as measured by the national Elder Index, and is almost equal to one month's worth of food costs.

Source: [Wider Opportunities for Women. \(2009\) "Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act: Talking Points."](#)

Data You Can Use

- The \$250 Social Security one-time payment made available under the Recovery Act is equivalent to nearly 10% of an elder's minimum annual food costs and nearly 9% of an elder's basic annual health care expenses, as measured by the national Elder Index.

Policy Center

In 2010, Social Security and SSI recipients will not receive a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in Social Security checks. At a time of great economic uncertainty and declines in retirement savings, the absence of the COLA will bring significant hardship for many low-income elders.

In response, members of Congress have responded by introducing new legislation, the Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act ([H.R. 3597](#) Rep. DeFazio, VT and [S. 1685](#) Sen. Sanders, VT) that will extend the \$250 one-time payment for 2010. President Obama recently [announced his support](#) for the extension of the one-time payment in 2010.

Although a short-term fix, extending the one-time \$250 payment to Social Security and SSI recipients represents a commitment to promoting economic security for those who rely on Social Security income. Extending this successful Recovery Act program would benefit millions without compromising the long-term solvency of Social Security. According to the Obama Administration:

- **57 million people would benefit.** These include 49 million Social Security beneficiaries, 5 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries, 2 million veterans benefit recipients, 0.5 million railroad retirement and disability beneficiaries, and also about 1 million public-employee retirees not entitled to any of the previous benefits.
- **The total cost of the proposal would be \$13 billion - and would not hurt the solvency of Social Security.** The President is committed to ensuring that the \$13 billion cost of the proposal does not reduce the solvency of Social Security or other social insurance programs.

Social Security is the bedrock of economic security for elders, although Social Security alone falls short of what's needed to make ends meet. According to national averages of the Elder Index, a single elder renter needs \$20,248 a year to meet his or her basic needs. Average annual Social Security income provides an older woman renter with only 56% of the income required to achieve economic security, compared to 74% for an older man.

Social security was never intended to be the sole source of income in retirement, yet a significant proportion of seniors, disproportionately women, rely on Social Security alone:

- Two in five older American women rely solely on Social Security
- Social Security provides more than 90% of income to one in three older Americans

The proposed one-time payment will assist Social Security and SSI beneficiaries in the short-term. However, there remains a growing need for reform to strengthen Social Security in the long-term. Negotiations are currently underway in Congress to develop a free-standing Budget Commission charged with fixing the nation's deficit, namely through cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Reforms suggested by the Commission would be subject to an up or down vote by Congress, thereby forgoing a deliberative process involving debate and opportunities for amendments.

WOW and many other national organizations [stand in firm opposition to the formation of a Budget Commission](#). The establishment of a Commission would circumvent traditional legislative procedures. Today's leaders must be held accountable for making sure reform to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid occurs through an open and democratic process. Over the long-term, it will be critical to advocate for the following reforms:

- Protect benefits, particularly for the most vulnerable – including low-income groups
- Improve benefits for women through caregiving credits
- Increase benefits for the oldest-old, who are disproportionately women
- Address the issue of benefit adequacy alongside program solvency

Sources: [White House Press Statement on Extension of Recovery Payment](#) ; [Wider Opportunities for Women. \(2009\) "Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act: Talking Points."](#)

State Spotlight

Congratulations Michigan!

In partnership with the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), the Region 2 Area Agency on Aging and the Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee County DHS regional offices, [Elder Law of Michigan](#) (Elder Law) was awarded Recovery Act funds to expand Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamp outreach to low-income seniors. Elder Law leads the [Michigan Elder Economic Security Initiative™](#) and is incorporating its concepts and tools in its ongoing benefits outreach programming.

The secured funding will expand the [Michigan Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly](#) (MiCAFE) program at Elder Law. The MiCAFE program assists seniors with the application process for SNAP/Food Stamps as well as other vital income support programs.

"We are grateful to our community partners for joining with us to continue to grow and refine the MiCAFE model to help older adults access the food assistance program in Michigan. A focus of our work in the Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee county areas will be reaching adults in their 70s and 80s and older so that they can live with dignity and have adequate healthy food to eat," said Kate White, Executive Director of Elder Law of Michigan. "Despite the hard times in our state, it is encouraging to know that we can pull together to bring new money to Michigan for our families that are struggling financially," said White.

Join the dialogue!

Visit:

<http://wow-eesi.blogspot.com/>

Upcoming Events

New Mexico Elder Economic Security Initiative Advisory Council Meeting

Date: Friday, January 8

Location: TBD

- ✓ WOW will join its partners at the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston to present the draft Elder Index data to stakeholders involved in the New Mexico Elder Economic Security Initiative. For information on how you can get involved, contact Emily Kaltenbach of the Aging and Long-Term Care Services Department at Emily.Kaltenbach@state.nm.us.

Resources and Tools

From the Administration:

- ✓ www.recovery.gov

From the Social Security Administration:

- ✓ [One-Time Economic Recovery Payment \(ERP\) Plan- Administrative Expenses Recovery Plan](#)

Legislation:

- ✓ [Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act of 2009 \(S. 1685\)](#)
- ✓ [Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act of 2009 \(H.R. 3597\)](#)

From Wider Opportunities for Women:

- ✓ [Talking Points: Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act of 2009](#)

From other Organizations:

- ✓ [Statement from National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare](#)
- ✓ [Campaign for America's Future Commission Opposition Statement](#)

Skill Development: How to Meet with Your Legislator

Whether visiting Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. or talking with legislators in your state capitol or local district, meeting with your elected representatives is more than just a conversation - it is a critical component of promoting economic security for elders and their families. Given this, such meetings require thorough preparation.

To help make your next meeting more successful, follow the steps outlined below:

- As you shake hands introduce yourself and hand them your business card.
- Be sure to ask for their business card.
- Designate one person to introduce yourselves and the purpose of the meeting:

Example:

"We know that Senator Feingold is here in the district on recess, and we wanted to take this opportunity to discuss some critical matters regarding Social Security.

We represent the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative. The Initiative offers a concept and tools to measure what it really costs for Wisconsin seniors to age in place.

We want to tell you what's happening in Wisconsin with the Initiative and talk about extending the one-time \$250 Social Security payment initially made available under the Recovery Act (2009) into 2010."

- Designate one person to talk about your organization and the Initiative:

Example:

"The Wisconsin Initiative makes available research tools to measure what it really costs for elders to age in place. This chart shows (point to fact sheet or other supplemental materials you brought along) that, on average, an elder renter in Wisconsin needs \$19,242 to meet his or her basic expenses, including housing, transportation, health care, food and other miscellaneous costs.

We use these tools to help measure the gap between what seniors have and what they need. Today, we know that one in four Wisconsin elders relies on Social Security income alone. This graph shows that the average Social Security payment provides \$12,840 for older Wisconsin women and \$17,228 for older men per year. As you can see, Social Security falls short of what's needed to make ends meet in retirement.

Over 25 Wisconsin organizations, including AARP and the State Association of Elderly Benefits Specialists, have endorsed using the Elder Index to promote positive policy and program change for seniors, ultimately the kind of change that will help them close the income gap."

- Designate one person to talk about the action you'd like the legislator to take and why:

Example:

In the short-run, we'd like Senator Feingold to support President Obama's proposal to provide a one-time \$250 payment to Social Security beneficiaries in 2010. This would extend a payment made in 2009 through the Recovery Act.

Given that Social Security and SSI recipients will not have a cost-of-living adjustment this year, this one-time payment will help retirees and others cover critical basic needs. As you can see here (point to talking points), our data shows that this one-time payment could help elders afford almost a month's worth of health care or food costs.

In the long-term, as talks of deficit reduction heat up, it is critical to protect and strengthen Social Security. This is especially important in light of conversations underway to create a Budget Commission that would target cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as a means of reducing the federal deficit. We oppose this Commission and request that Senator Feingold help make sure that debates about these important programs happen in Congress through an open and democratic process.

- Ask what they are thinking and what they are hearing on these issues.
- Say thank you, and ask the legislator to attend an upcoming event in your area.
- When you get home, be sure to send a thank you letter and/or email to the legislator.
- Let WOW know the strategy and outcome so we may share your successes and challenges with our community.

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