



**Wider  
Opportunities  
for Women**

**For Immediate Release**

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**Release of Illinois Data on Poverty Reveals Need to Establish Pathways to Economic Security for All**

State poverty data released today in Illinois shows that economic security is an elusive goal for families of all ages. Released today by the American Community Survey, the overall poverty rate for 2008 was 12.2% in Illinois and for elders age 65 and over, the percentage of those in poverty was 9.2. At a time when families of all ages are facing increased housing and health care costs, these poverty statistics reveal that growing numbers of Illinois elders are struggling to get by.

Further, the poverty rates released today fail to capture the true number of elders struggling to make ends meet. The Illinois [Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index](#) (Elder Index) provides a more realistic measure of what it costs to age in place. In 2007, the Illinois Elder Index for a single renter in good health was \$23,825 for Chicago residents and \$19,730 for elders in Champaign county, which stands in stark contrast to the federal poverty level for a person 65 and over of \$10,400 in 2008. The Elder Index demonstrates that many seniors fall short of what they actually need to meet basic needs, even though they are not considered impoverished under the official poverty definition.

Although never intended to be the sole source of income in retirement, one in five seniors in Illinois live on Social Security alone, most of whom are women. Findings from the Illinois Elder Index demonstrate that Social Security income alone fails to provide economic security. Social Security averaged just \$11,627 in 2007 for older women, providing approximately 59% of what's needed to make ends meet depending on her housing and health status.

“Because many more seniors must continue working into their retirement years, policies must be shaped to accommodate their need to develop new skills and to obtain flexible work arrangements. Like the many women who work part-time due to caregiving responsibilities, older workers deserve proportionate access to health, retirement and unemployment benefits, and they should be spared penalties on their pensions,” stated Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of Wider Opportunities for Women.

To combat poverty and bring more Illinois elders toward economic security in our state, the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group (HMPRG) recommends the following:

- Benchmark all income related assistance programs to the Elder Index rather than the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- Provide Social Security credits for caregivers.

Margie Schaps, Executive Director of HMPRG, added, “We must recognize that aging issues are truly intergenerational. Today’s economic issues facing working families and individuals will impact their economic security in later life. State policies and programs must include the long-term goal of promoting economic security across the generations.”

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*The Health and Medicine Policy Research Group has a twenty-seven year history of evaluating local health policy as an independent, voluntary policy center with a mission centering on the health of the poor and underserved. Health and Medicine has been long familiar with the developments that have shaped the availability of health care to the poor in the region, and has maintained its influence by developing groundbreaking standards for public programs. For more information, please visit [www.hmpra.org](http://www.hmpra.org).*

*Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) leads two national networks promoting economic security within the United States: the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project (FESS) focusing on the needs of low- income working families and the Elder Economic Security Initiative, addressing what income seniors require to age in place. WOW works in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and at the federal level to promote programs and policies that accurately measure the income and assistance needs of families and the elderly. For more information, please visit [www.wowonline.org](http://www.wowonline.org).*