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New Jersey Perspective: Economic Security Eludes Many NJ Seniors

Clearys Notebook

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Thirteen percent of New Jersey's population is over 65 but for many, retirement is not a time to relax. Many elders face financial challenges daily because of New Jersey's high cost of living. These challenges have been further exacerbated by the current economic downturn which has eroded their assets and incomes - threatening more than ever before their financial security.



New Jersey has the sixth highest cost of living in the nation. Rental housing alone accounts for 45 percent of a single senior's expenses. Senior homeowners with mortgages spend approximately twice that of seniors who have paid off their mortgages. Seniors are further pressured by high health care costs, fuel and utility expenses and rising food prices. These expenditures make it difficult for many seniors on limited incomes to make ends meet.

The [New Jersey Elder Economic Security Initiative](#) recently released a report on the financial challenges facing New Jersey senior citizens. It found that for over 25 percent of seniors, Social Security is their sole source of income. The average annual Social Security income for a single female senior citizen is \$12,741, approximately \$13,000 less than she would need to be economically secure. This payment, however, is enough to disqualify her from participating in critical public assistance programs such as nutrition assistance.

New Jersey has the most millionaires in the country and ranks second in median household income, yet 8.4 percent of New Jersey elders live in poverty. When the cost of basic needs far outweighs income, it's time for changes such as those recommended in the New Jersey Elder Economic Security Initiative's report.