



**Wider
Opportunities
for Women**

For Immediate Release

Sept. 29, 2009

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Release of Pennsylvania Data on Poverty Reinforces Need to Strengthen Housing Supports for Elders

State poverty data released today in Pennsylvania shows that economic security remains an elusive goal for families of all ages. Released today by the American Community Survey, the overall poverty rate for 2008 was 12.1% in Pennsylvania and for elders age 65 and over, the percentage of those in poverty was 9.3%. At a time when families of all ages are facing increased housing and health care costs, these poverty statistics reveal that growing numbers of Pennsylvania's 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 [Pennsylvania Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index](#) (Elder Index) provides a more realistic measure of what it costs to age in place. In 2007, the Elder Index for a single elder renter in good health was \$20,588 for Philadelphia County and \$16,353 for an elder renter living in Fayette County, which stands in stark contrast to the federal poverty level for a person 65 and over, amounting to only \$10,400 in 2008. The Elder Index demonstrates that many seniors fall short of what they actually need to meet their 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 four Pennsylvania seniors live on Social Security alone, most of whom are women. Findings from the Pennsylvania Elder Index demonstrate that Social Security income alone fails to provide economic security. Social Security averaged just \$11,679 for older women in 2007, providing less than 75% 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 care-giving 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.

These findings reinforce the need to support housing programs. Without affordable housing, attaining economic security is nearly impossible for the majority of older low-income Pennsylvanian renters and for many senior homeowners as well. In addition, reform is needed to remove application barriers. Elders face numerous barriers to successful application and receipt of public supports, including barriers caused by low income limits, misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about programs, and the stigma of using some programs.

Carol Goertzel, President and CEO of PathWays PA 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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PathWays PA began in 1978 as the Women's Association for Women's Alternatives, one of Pennsylvania's first residential programs to keep low-income, vulnerable women together with their children. It has grown to become one of the Greater Philadelphia region's foremost providers of residential and community-based services with a focus on serving women, teens and children. Each year PathWays PA serves nearly 6,000 clients with a full complement of social services; job training and employment assistance; as well as residential programs. For more information, please visit www.pathwayspa.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.