



**Wider
Opportunities
for Women**



Wisconsin Women's Network



University of
Massachusetts
Boston®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 23, 2009

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Creating a Pathway to Economic Security for Wisconsin's Elders

State and County Data Shows Basic Needs are Exceeding Income

MADISON, WI – Depending on housing and health circumstances, single elders living in Wisconsin now need between \$18,154 and \$25,195 to cover basic living costs, according to the 2009 Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index (Elder Index) statewide averages released today. The average annual Social Security payment for an individual elder in 2009 is just \$15,035, providing only 60 to 82 percent of what an elder needs to be economically secure according to statewide figures.

“The numbers tell us what elders need just to get by in their communities,” said Sharyn Wisniewski, Board Chair of the Wisconsin Women’s Network. “The Wisconsin Elder Index is a reliable measurement that elders and their families, as well as elected officials and other policy makers, can use to determine how best to bridge the gap between what resources elders have and what they need,” said Wisniewski.

These findings, along with other information, were presented today at a briefing for legislators and others by the Wisconsin Women’s Network and Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), a Washington, D.C. based national advocacy organization. Representatives from the Alzheimer’s Association of South Central Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists also spoke to how the data is informing advocacy efforts at the state and local levels.

The Wisconsin Women’s Network takes the lead on the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative, a broad-based campaign offering tools and resources to promote elder economic security. One of these tools, The Elder Index, created by WOW in partnership with the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston, measures the basic income older adults require to make ends meet in their communities. It also helps strengthen financial planning for life at age 65 and older and quantifies the effectiveness of state and national public policies and programs in preserving economic security for older Americans.

“Our experience in our individual counties and tribes throughout Wisconsin confirms exactly what this report concludes: elders living at and even above the federal poverty line are struggling to pay every day expenses,” said Denise L. Grossman of the Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists.

Other key findings from the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Standard Index:

- Housing is the number one cost for elders. Those 18% of Wisconsin elders with a mortgage will pay almost three times more for housing than elders who have paid off their mortgages.
- Elder renters in Wisconsin may spend up to 43% of their income on housing in more expensive counties.
- One in five Wisconsin elders relies on Social Security income alone, though it is not enough for elders to reach economic security.
- The average annual Social Security payment for a single elder woman in Wisconsin is only \$12,840 – providing 51% to 71% of what she needs to be economically secure, depending on her location, housing and health status.

“The findings show that many elders are forced to make difficult sacrifices between basic needs, like food and prescription drugs,” said Stacy Sanders, Associate Director of WOW’s Elder Economic Security Initiative. Sanders continued, “Wisconsin is one of 12 states involved in a national movement to promote economic security for elders and their families. The Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative is informing national, state and local advocacy and outreach efforts nationwide to ensure today’s and future generations of elders are able to age in place with dignity.”

For more information about the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative call 608-255-9809 or email wiwomen@execpc.com. Additional resources, including county-by-county fact sheets on elder living costs can be found at <http://www.wowonline.org/ourprograms/eess/state-resources/wisconsin.asp>.

Wisconsin Women’s Network

The Wisconsin Women’s Network, a coalition of organizations and individuals, advances the status of women and girls in Wisconsin through communication, education, and advocacy. The Wisconsin Women’s Network facilitates communication among its members to strengthen our voices while we work together on issues promoting equity and justice for women and their families. For more information on the Wisconsin Women’s Network visit <http://www.wiwomensnetwork.org> or call 608-255-9809.

Wider Opportunities for Women

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 see <http://www.wowonline.org>.

The Gerontology Institute at University of Massachusetts Boston

The Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston addresses social and economic issues associated with population aging. The Institute conducts applied research, analyzes policy issues, and engages in public education. It also encourages the participation of older people in aging services and policy development. In its work with local, state, national, and international organizations, the Institute has five priorities: 1) productive aging, that is, opportunities for older people to play useful social roles; 2) health care for the elderly; 3) long-term care for the elderly; 4) economic security for older adults; and 5) social and demographic research on aging. For more information about The Gerontology Institute visit the website: www.geront.umb.edu.