

# Social Security is not enough for seniors

Barbara Quirk | Posted: Tuesday, October 20, 2009 |

Son to mother: "Mom, don't worry. You will have enough money to take care of you if you live to be 100."

Mother to son: "What if I live to be 101?"

Not so long ago that was a funny story. Today, the irony is that the mother was right. Look at the obituaries. It is not unusual for people to live to be 100, and because of the disastrous economy, many retirees have lost most or all of their retirement savings.

Although Social Security was never intended to be the only source of income for seniors, the frightening fact is that one in five Wisconsin seniors is relying solely on Social Security benefits, and no matter how frugal they may be, there is not enough to meet even basic needs.

The **2009 Elder Economic Security Standard Index** for Wisconsin, developed at the University of Massachusetts, looks at the basic cost of living for individuals and couples. The county-by-county study concludes that a large percentage of older folks cannot afford to live in Wisconsin. The situation is similar elsewhere.

In Wisconsin, the average senior needs about \$18,000-\$25,000 annually to meet the basic needs of housing, transportation and food. The average benefit for elderly Wisconsinites is only \$15,000 a year. So Social Security provides only 60 to 82 percent of what an elderly individual needs to be economically secure.

There is also a disparity between what older men and older women receive. The average annual Social Security payment for a single older woman in Wisconsin is only \$12,840.

Imagine if Social Security had been privatized, as was being urged by President Bush a few years ago. Our tenuous economic security would have gone the way of failed banks and other investments. Scary.

The Wisconsin Women's Network, working cooperatively with **Wider Opportunities for Women**, a national advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C., and with the endorsement of every major state advocacy group, has formed the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative. They are working to address problems of economic security for elders with information and advocacy, by influencing public policy and gaining public support.

Specific, measurable goals have been developed that, if implemented, would ease the situation for Wisconsin's elders, particularly in the two most problematic areas: housing and medical expenses.

Through its efforts, the Wisconsin Elder Economic Security Initiative is seeking to ensure that today's and future generations of elders can age in place with dignity.

For information about the initiative, call 255-9809.

*Barbara Quirk is a Madison geriatric nurse practitioner. [Tandbquirk@aol.com](mailto:Tandbquirk@aol.com)*