

Mass. elders at economic risk, report says

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Without subsidies for housing and health care, Bay State elders can't make ends meet on Social Security alone, the authors of a new report told a crowd of about 120 attendees, most of them senior citizens, in a visit to the Worcester Senior Center this morning.

The report, "Elder Economic Security in Massachusetts," co-authored by the Gerontology Institute-UMass and Wider Opportunities for Women, finds that the average Social Security payment of \$12,024 covers less than half of what is needed to meet basic housing, food and health care costs in the state.

Elder singles in Worcester County spend \$19,138 on basic expenses annually if they rent a one-bedroom apartment, \$15,480 if they own a home mortgage free, and \$26,928 if they still carry a mortgage. The expenses do not include home maintenance or the cost of public transportation. Changes in health status raise annual costs significantly, and the need for high-level long term care can approximately double the basic expense figure.

Laura Henze Russell of the Gerontology Institute says reverse mortgages may not be as effective a solution for elderly homeowners as a traditional mortgage. Reverse mortgages pay the homeowner a monthly stipend until the home is sold or the owner dies. Consumer-protection measures on the loans have been relaxed in recent years, she said today. Reverse mortgages "shouldn't be a first line of defense" for cash-poor elder homeowners, she warned.