



**Wider Opportunities for Women**

## **Elder Economic Security in Action**

The Elder Economic Security Initiative and its many tools including the Elder Standard are relevant to a range of issues and arenas, providing crucial information about elder economic security to help design strategies to assist elders in aging in place with dignity. EESI tools can be used in a variety of settings: from direct service providers assessing quality of life and providing case management services; to aging organizations planning programs and policies; to local community development planning; to federal and state-level policymakers facing critical policy choices on tax policy, Medicare, Medicaid, long-term care services, and other programs essential to elder independence; to adult children assisting parents in life decisions.

At a time when many critical policy and programmatic decisions are being made at the federal and state levels in regard to elder economic security, EESI provides a means to evaluate many different options. The discussion below illustrates ways EESI including the Elder Standard could be utilized. This should be seen as a partial list of options, as new uses and applications continue to emerge.

### **Shaping Public Policy**

EESI provides a framework for analyzing the impact of local, state, and federal public policies and policy proposals in such areas as housing, retirement security, health, long-term care, and taxes. By specifically describing the interplay between seniors' expenses and income, EESI can be instrumental in debates about proposed shifts in Social Security, Medicare, long-term care, pension, housing, fuel assistance, transportation tax policy and other public programs and policies that affect seniors.

Through the EESI, state partners and coalition members will hold state and local public hearings on issues impacting the economic security of older adults. State partners will engage coalitions in developing a state and local policy agenda which is drawn from the Elder Standard and complements the national policy agenda. Presentations of the Elder Standard and policy agenda will be made to state and local commissions on aging, statewide area agencies on aging, state and local AARP representatives, community action agencies, among others. Through the EESI, state partners will outline local income need, available programs, and gaps in policy which serve as obstacles for elders in need of assistance when trying to making ends meet.

National and state aging advocates have shared that EESI will be critical in evaluating current policies and programs as well as future public policy proposals. For example, current state EESI partners have suggested that they may encourage a new Governor or a state office on aging to assess all current policies regarding elders using the new measure of elder economic security that the Elder Standard provides. They have shared that the Elder Standard would be a more realistic yardstick in which to measure the effectiveness of current policies and programs as well as to identify gaps in services.

### **Research and Evaluation Tool**

Most current research on elder poverty is tabulated using the outdated federal poverty thresholds. As a result, the incidence of poverty among the elderly is significantly



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underreported. The Elder Standard will provide a precise and up-to-date measure of elders' economic well-being. This measure can be used to conduct more realistic research on the realities and incidences of elder poverty. Updated realistic data can then be used to more effectively plan for the policy and program needs of elders. Credible universities and research entities have already expressed interest in using the WOW-GI Elder Standard when calibrating future research and evaluating current research.

### **Educational and Counseling Tool**

EESI tools including the Elder Standard can be used by case managers and direct services providers to inform lower income elders of their basic needs and costs as well as the inherent inability to meet those needs on the average annual Social Security income. The EESI tools can then be used by state EESI partners in working with service providers, housing managers, senior centers, libraries and other places that seniors gather to have meetings to inform seniors of the findings of the Elder Standard report and resources available. The purpose is to let seniors know that it is not their fault that they are unable to make ends meet and that there are programs and services already available as community services.

In addition, EESI tools can also be used by seniors themselves to objectively determine their actual costs of living, assess their current economic status and future economic security, and make more informed financial and life choices. Specifically, elders who decide to go back to school for additional skill sets can use EESI tools to assess their financial need. Adult children may also use it to objectively determine parents' actual costs of living, which will assist adult children as they make decisions about accessing benefits and/or making long-term arrangements for care. "Boomers" may use the Elder Standard to get a better understanding of what they will need to maintain their lifestyle in their retirement years. The EESI illustrates the need to develop strategies for safeguarding economic security in later years.

### **Planning/Funding**

EESI provides important new information to illustrate the basic costs seniors face and how their financial security is affected when their life circumstances change. Most federal, state and local planning is currently determined based on need as illustrated by current measures of elder poverty. In addition, funds are then allocated to programs that have income eligibility guidelines based on current forms of measurement – the federal poverty thresholds. The federal poverty thresholds are computed nationally and thus do not reflect the wide range of cost differentials across the country. In addition, the federal poverty thresholds exclude medical costs, which the elderly disproportionately face. This information can then be used by public and private funders when planning and allocating resources to programs and initiatives focused on increasing economic security for elders.

National, state, and local entities working with low-income and moderate income elders can use EESI tools to guide the development policy and regulation as well as their planning and allocation of funds. On the local level, Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and other direct service providers can use the Elder Standard data to direct their federal and state dollars.