



Wider Opportunities for Women

NEWS RELEASE

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The Atlantic Philanthropies Awards Wider Opportunities for Women a Multi-Year Grant to Support the Elder Economic Security Initiative

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), has been awarded a five-year grant of \$3.4 million to expand its Elder Economic Security Initiative (EESI), a national campaign to ensure that all older Americans are able to age in place with dignity and economic security. The grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies, an international foundation with an ultimate goal of making lasting changes in the lives of older adults, will expand the project to 20 states and produce a national database with information on all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The Elder Economic Security Initiative seeks to build economic security for older adults through a multi-pronged approach that includes organizing, advocacy and research. The EESI is an initiative to enable policy makers, aging advocates and others develop policies and programs to help seniors age with dignity while promoting their economic security. A key component of the initiative is the Elder Economic Security Standard, a measure of well-being that determines the income and supports needed for older adults to live modestly depending on their health and life circumstances.

The EESI was launched in July 2005 with an award by the Retirement Research Foundation, which continues to offer critical support. WOW and its national research partner, the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston, have joined with local and state organizations in five pilot states to shape policies and programs to promote the economic well-being of senior citizens, whether or not they have the capacity to be fully self-reliant or are in need of certain public supports. These pilot state coalitions are led by the National Economic Development and Law Center (CA); the Health and Medicine Research Group in partnership with the Shawnee Alliance for Seniors (IL); the Massachusetts Association of Older Americans, Inc. (MA); Pathways PA (PA); and Wisconsin Women's Network (WI).

According to 2005 U.S. Census data, 3.6 million older Americans live in poverty. Ten percent of individuals aged 65 or older live in poverty and women are almost twice as likely to live in poverty in their senior years as men. Poverty hits older women of color the hardest – 25 percent of African-American and 22 percent of Hispanic women live in poverty. For women living alone, the rates are even higher. For example, 45.9 percent of older Hispanic women who live alone also live in poverty.

“These figures are just the tip of the iceberg, given that the outdated federal poverty threshold fails to accurately document the hardship in our nation by ignoring today’s true cost of living,” said Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). “The National Elder Economic Security Standard measures the income seniors actually need to meet such basic expenses as housing and health care costs. Unlike the federal poverty threshold, the Elder Standard is calibrated to household size, geographic area and life circumstances, and broken down on a county-by-county basis. The expansion of the Elder Economic Security Initiative will have a significant impact on reshaping the public discourse about aging and public benefits in general, as well as on specific policy debates and aging programs.”

Early findings from Massachusetts, the first state to release an Elder Standard, demonstrate that elders cannot live at the poverty level or even on the average Social Security income without subsidies for housing and

health care. The Massachusetts Elder Standard illustrates that costs for even the healthiest senior citizen can be as high as \$23,600 a year, while the average social security benefit is \$12,024.

Already, the information provided in the Massachusetts Elder Standard coupled with the advocacy of the state coalition is having a significant impact. The newly elected governor has agreed to convene a statewide commission on long-term care, and innovative outreach efforts are helping seniors overcome their resistance to enrolling in public support programs. In addition, the coalition now has better equipped elder activists and aging services organizations to advocate for state and national policy reforms.

In the years ahead, the Elder Economic Security Initiative will provide important information to policy makers, providers, advocacy organizations, and activists across the U.S. as they develop programs and policies to ensure the economic independence of America's senior citizens.

For more information about the National Elder Economic Security Initiative or to schedule an interview, contact: Ramsey Alwin (202) 464-1596 or e-mail at ralwin@wowonline.org.

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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

The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Atlantic focuses on four critical social problems: Ageing, Disadvantaged Children & Youth, Population Health, and Reconciliation & Human Rights. Programmes funded by Atlantic operate in Australia, Bermuda, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Viet Nam. To learn more, please visit: www.atlanticphilanthropies.org.