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Technical questions:

October report: More Oregonians turning to state for help in tough times

Central and Southern Oregon hardest hit by economic downturn

[Salem] - Tough economic times are when Oregonians count on the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) the most, and new figures for October show marked increases in applications for assistance.

Requests for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and food stamps have increased statewide. The number of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is up approximately 16 percent over October 2007, providing assistance to approximately 2,900 more Oregon families than a year ago. Households receiving food stamps increased by approximately 13 percent, for an additional caseload of about 29,000 households.

The current overall caseload for TANF is about 21,500 families. The overall caseload for food stamps is currently about 258,600 households: that is approximately 499,000 individuals, or about 13 percent of Oregonians.

While every county in Oregon saw an increased number of people receiving services, Central and Southern Oregon saw the most marked increases. The city of Bend alone saw a 46 percent increase in TANF and a 24 percent increase in food stamps. DHS District 10, which includes Bend, Redmond, Prineville, Madras and Warm Springs, saw a 29 percent increase in the TANF caseload and a 25 percent increase in Food Stamps since last year.

"This last year was tough for a lot of people," said Patrick Carey, CAF district manager for Jefferson, Crook and Deschutes counties. "Even for people who haven't lost their jobs, expenses have jumped for so many things in the last year --

food, fuel, tuition, prescriptions, health care – which can be disastrous for folks with low or fixed incomes. It’s a challenge for us to keep up with all the new cases. The good news is we’re not turning eligible people away.”

Southern Oregon’s District 8, which includes Medford, Ashland, Grants Pass and Cave Junction, saw a 26 percent increase in the TANF caseload and a 19 percent increase in food stamps since last year.

In the Portland Metro area, Clackamas County had a 22 percent increase in TANF and a 16 percent increase in food stamps over last year. Washington County had a 25 percent increase in TANF and a 15 percent increase in food stamps. Multnomah County had a 13 percent increase in TANF and an 8 percent increase in food stamps.

Another marked increase in TANF caseload since last year occurred in Klamath Falls at 22 percent. For a complete list of caseload increases go to: <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/data/main.shtml>.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provides cash assistance to families who have children under the age of 18. To qualify for TANF, families must have very few assets and little or no income. The current maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$528 and clients are expected to participate in the JOBS employment and training program.

In Oregon, food stamp benefits are distributed through the “Oregon Trail Card,” which works like a debit card. Many working families turn to these benefits when their monthly income does not stretch enough to cover rent, health care, food and other basics. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, from \$14 to \$426 per month for a family of three.

Together, these services provide needed assistance for families who face sudden job loss or other economic challenges. Unemployment figures for Oregon released Monday show the current unemployment rate is 7.3 percent, up from 6.4 percent in September, and from 5.4 percent at this time last year.

“People who a year ago would never have imagined turning to the state for help are now coming to us on a daily basis,” says Erinn Kelley-Siel, DHS assistant director for the Children, Adults and Families Division, which oversees the TANF and food stamp programs.

To determine eligibility for food stamps, TANF, Oregon Health Plan or other services, go to: www.oregonhelps.org. To download applications for TANF and Food Stamps, go to: www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/