



Oregon Hunger Issues: Finding #4 from OCPP's Analysis of a State Health Survey

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Oregon Latinos More Likely Food Insecure

Fourth in a Series of Five

This issue brief is part of a series of five briefs based upon OCPP's analysis of a new source of information on hunger in Oregon, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey (BRFSS). In 2001 and 2002, this random telephone survey of adults in Oregon sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and the Oregon Department of Human Services asked a series of hunger-related questions as part of a larger health status survey.

Definitions

Food security for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Food insecurity is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods.

Hunger is an uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The sort of hunger measured in the BRFSS means involuntary hunger that results from not being able to afford enough food.

OCPP analysis of new state health survey data shows that forty-five percent of Latino adults in Oregon lived in food insecure households in 2002.¹ By contrast, just 12 percent of non-Latino adults lived in food insecure homes (Table 1).

Food insecure households were sometimes on the verge of running out of money for food. In addition, help from other resources – family, friends, food banks, and government assistance – was not enough to assure that these adults and their families would avoid hunger.

Some of these adults and their families managed to avoid going hungry, despite the uncertainties. Others were unable to avoid hunger. About 15 percent of Latino adults either went hungry themselves at times or lived with someone who did, or both, in 2002.

Policy implications

More than one in four (27 percent) of all adults living in food insecure homes in Oregon are Latino, even though Latinos make up just 6.5 percent of all adults in the state.² If Oregon is going to improve its hunger and food insecurity rates, it will have to design policy responses that effectively help Latino families.

Policy solutions that improve low-wage jobs held by Latinos are crucially important, particularly because most Latino adults in food insecure homes are working. OCPP analysis of the health survey shows that 72 percent of working-age Latino adults in food insecure homes were employed in 2001 and 2002 compared to 56 percent of non-Latino working-age adults in food insecure homes.

Legislators should increase Oregon's Earned Income Tax Credit and make it refundable to assure its benefits reach the lowest income workers. In addition, legislators should extend collective bargaining rights to farm workers.

Repairing the safety net for immigrant Latino families should also be a high priority. Most adult immigrants who have been in the country less than five years, even those with proper legal documentation, are not eligible for Food Stamps or the Oregon Health Plan. Under federal rules, Oregon could provide these benefits to legal immigrants, but the state has chosen not to do so.

| Table 1: Percent of Oregon adults living in food insecure households, households with hunger, by ethnicity, 2002 | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| | In food insecure households | In households with hunger |
| Latino adults | 45% | 15% |
| Non-Latino adults | 12% | 5% |

Source: OCPP analysis of BRFSS data.

Endnotes:

¹ Because the BRFSS is a telephone survey, it probably misses a relatively high percentage of Latino adults, especially farm workers and other transient Latino adults who lack access to a working telephone. Hence, the actual percentage of Oregon’s Latino adults in food insecure homes is probably somewhat higher than 45 percent.

² Percent of Oregon adults who are Latino is from OCPP analysis of 2000 Census data.

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