



Oregon Hunger Issues: Finding #5 from OCPP's Analysis of a State Health Survey

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Work Does Not Promise an Escape from Hunger or Food Insecurity

Fifth 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.

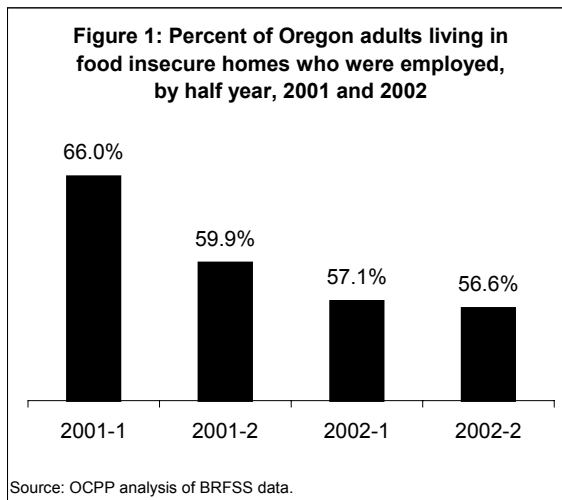
Food insecurity is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods.

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.

Work does not assure that Oregon adults will escape hunger. Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP) analysis of new health survey data shows that one in seven working adults in Oregon lived in food insecure households during 2002. Their work effort was not enough to assure that they'd have enough to eat.

The majority of adults in food insecure homes in Oregon are employed. Sixty percent of working-age adults in food insecure homes in 2001 and 2002 were working at the time the survey was taken.

Employment rates among adults in food insecure households likely would have been higher overall during 2001 and 2002 if it weren't for the economic downturn. In the first half of 2001, at the beginning of the recession, fully two-thirds of adults in food insecure homes were employed. By the second half of the year, however, their employment rates had fallen substantially, to 60 percent, as businesses around the state laid off workers and stalled on hiring. In 2002, as Oregon moved into a "jobless recovery," employment rates among adults in food insecure households evened off and remained relatively low. (Figure 1).



Since unemployed adults are particularly likely to be in food insecure households, job losses due to the recession made efforts to reduce hunger in Oregon more difficult. Nearly one-third

(31 percent) of unemployed adults in 2002 were living in food insecure homes. The percentage was no different in statistical terms in 2001, when 30 percent of unemployed adults were living in food insecure homes.

Policy implications

Given the significant level of hunger among the unemployed, the unemployment insurance system can play an important role in helping families meet their food needs, especially during economically difficult times. Regrettably, Congress has refused to extend unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed and for states with chronic unemployment problems, such as Oregon. Tens of thousands of Oregonians will lose their extended unemployment benefits over the next few months.¹ As this occurs, the chances increase that more unemployed Oregonians and their families will go hungry at times.

Endnotes:

¹ For details on what's happening to the Unemployment Insurance program, see OCPP's November 5, 2003 report, *Looking Forward to Changes in the Look-Back Rule*, available at <http://www.ocpp.org/2003/es031105.htm>.

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