

Talking About Hunger: Some Key Points

Values and Fairness

We must protect children and other vulnerable people from going hungry. It is a question of fairness.

- Our most vulnerable citizens – particularly our children, the elderly, disabled citizens, and our veterans -- need us to speak up for them and help make sure they are able to obtain the basic necessities like housing, food, and medicine.

Hardworking people should be able to afford housing and still have money for food, medicine, and other necessities.

- Wages in Oregon have not kept up with skyrocketing costs for housing, utilities, transportation, medical care and child care.
 - ✓ *In 2003, when the minimum wage was \$6.90 per hour, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition found that a family in Oregon needed to earn \$13.59 per hour to afford a 2 bedroom housing unit at fair-market rent.*
 - ✓ *During the winter months when cold forces heating bills higher, food budgets are squeezed and families face a “heat or eat” dilemma.*
- High housing costs are a major burden for many families experiencing hunger and food insecurity
 - ✓ *51% of respondents to Oregon Food Bank’s 2004 Hunger Factors Survey, a statewide survey of emergency food box recipients, reported spending more than 50% of their income on housing. 30% is considered affordable by federal standards.*
 - ✓ *The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco found that Oregon has one of the most difficult rental housing markets in the country, ranking us 49th in rental affordability.*
- Having a job no longer guarantees that a family will be free of hunger.
 - ✓ *Oregon Food Bank reported that 43% of recipient households surveyed had at least one member working.*
 - ✓ *A minimum wage job no longer lifts a family above the poverty level like it did in the late 1970s.*
 - ✓ *In 2000, about 62 percent of Oregon households in poverty had full-year workers. Only about 18 percent of households in poverty had no worker present.*
- If a family does not have enough money to pay their housing costs, their food budget is often the first place they look for savings.
 - ✓ *The landlord will evict you if the rent isn’t paid. The electricity will be turned off if the power bill isn’t paid. The grocer is not going to knock on your door to ask why you haven’t bought enough food this month.*

Using Hunger Statistics

Hunger is still a huge problem in Oregon.

- Although improvements have been made, the fact that so many people are still going hungry in a state with an agricultural bounty like ours should be a cause for concern.
 - ✓ *Oregon’s hunger rate: 4.3% National average: 3.4%.*

- Efforts to connect people to resources have helped alleviate the most immediate symptoms of hunger, but the basic conditions that cause hunger still persist.
 - ✓ *The food insecurity rate has not decreased significantly, indicating that many people still do not have adequate financial resources to pay for their basic necessities.*
Rates: 1997-99 = 12.3% 1999-01 = 13.7% 2000-02 = 13.7% 2001-03 = 12.9%

We must not let our slight gains in hunger slip away.

- Services like the Food Stamp Program, child nutrition programs, housing and child care assistance, and Oregon Health Plan have helped provide the basic necessities for many Oregonians, keeping small problems from turning into the emergencies that cause hunger.
- We should protect these services so that we do not lose the progress we have made.

Hunger is an income issue.

- Oregonians do not go hungry because of a lack of food in the food system. They are hungry because they cannot afford to pay for all their basic needs and still purchase a sufficient supply of food.
- If a family does not have enough money to pay for all of their other basic needs, they will always be at risk of hunger because food is often the only flexible part of their household budget.

Connect to Education and Health

To succeed in life and school, children need a home, three square meals, and a good education.

- Children from food insecure households are more likely to experience problems at school that can impair their ability to grow, learn and mature into productive, stable citizens as adults.
 - ✓ *Studies found that children from food insecure households exhibit behavior problems, experience impaired cognitive function, and show higher levels of aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety.*
 - ✓ *The younger a child is when exposed to severe hunger, the more serious the long-term health consequences are likely to be.*
 - ✓ *Studies show that children who are undernourished early in life have a greater risk of school failure later on and are at far greater risk of having problems in the job market. (Dr. Deborah Frank, quoted on thebostonchannel.com, December 27, 2004)*

Childhood hunger and malnutrition – even at a very early age – can result in irreversible health problems later in life.

- Studies have shown
 - ✓ *Children from homes experiencing hunger and food insecurity “get sick more often, have much higher rates of both iron deficiency anemia and serious ear infections and are hospitalized more frequently,” (Dr. Larry Brown, Brandeis University)*
 - ✓ *One national study found that food insufficient preschool and school-aged children had higher rates of stomachaches, headaches and colds. Other studies also found higher rates of doctor and emergency room visits.*
 - ✓ *Fetal under-nutrition affects the development of the kidneys, liver, pancreas and the skeletal muscle mass of the baby. And faltering growth as an infant can affect coronary heart disease later in life. (Dr. Susan Bagby, OHSU)*

Solutions

- To eliminate hunger, we must focus on its root causes.
- When we invest in the programs and services that support our most vulnerable citizens, such as children, seniors, veterans, and disabled individuals, we are helping to strengthen families and rebuild communities that have been hard hit by the recession.
- We believe in public investment in services for the common good such as education, housing, healthcare, food security, etc. rather than private investment for the personal gain of a few individuals. This will pay off in dividends of stronger families, increased self-sufficiency and complete communities.
- Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force's five year action plan, "Act to End Hunger," outlines a four pronged approach to end hunger, proposing solutions targeting family economic stability, community food security, participation in federal food programs, and support for emergency food services.
- For more information on federal and state actions that will impact hunger in Oregon and ideas for how *you* can get involved, visit www.oregonfoodbank.org or www.oregonhunger.org.