



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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Washington's Food Insecurity Rate Drops

New data shows areas of the state where residents are most likely to be hungry

November 21, 2006 (Seattle) – The percentage of Washington residents who struggle to put food on the table has dropped somewhat over the past seven years, but hunger remains a persistent problem in the state.

The percentage of Washington residents who are “food insecure” dropped for the 2003-2005 period, when compared to 1996-98 – 11.2 percent of households struggled to put food on the table, compared to 13.2%. Hunger – now called “very low food security” – declined from 4.3% to 3.9%, but not at a statistically significant rate.

These numbers, from the annual survey of Household Food Insecurity in America, show that while Washington State has made some progress in combating the problems of hunger and food insecurity, much more remains to be done if we are to ensure that all residents have enough to eat throughout the year.

The survey, conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Census Bureau, was released this month.

“Hunger isn’t just a problem at Thanksgiving,” said Linda Stone, Eastern Washington Director of the Children’s Alliance. “We need to do more to make sure Washington families living on the edge are connected with proven anti-hunger programs like Food Stamps and school meals that offer them stable sources of food throughout the year.”

Analysis was also completed recently on 2003 data from the state Department of Health’s Behavioral Risk Factors or BRFSS survey. In addition to confirming USDA food insecurity rates for the state, BRFSS shows that the following areas had the highest food insecurity in 2003:

- Yakima, Kittitas and Klickitat Counties: 21%

- Lincoln, Adams, Grant and Lincoln Counties: 18%
- Thurston, Lewis, Pacific, Wakiakum, Cowlitz: 17%
- Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas: 16%

“Factors most related to food insecurity include low wages and educational levels, high housing costs, moving often and a high tax burden on low-income families,” said Linda Stone, Eastern Washington Director of the Children’s Alliance. “These factors are all at play in regions of the state with high food insecurity. In addition, African American, Hispanic and Native American households are much more likely to experience hunger.”

The Children’s Alliance today released “[Hungry in Washington](#),” an overview of the latest data. The new hunger data rank Washington as the 22nd hungriest state in the nation; unfortunately, the drop from number 12 last year to 22 this year is more related to a rise of hunger in other states than a significant drop here. The term “food insecurity with hunger” applies to households where at least one family member goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food. Despite decreased rates of hunger, 272,000 Washingtonians are food insecure and 95,000 hungry.

Factors leading to the drop in food insecurity include increased food stamp (Basic Food) participation. A recent USDA report indicates that 65% of eligible residents participated in the program in 2004, compared to 56% in 2002. Participation increases can be attributed in part of changes made by the legislature in the 2004 Act for Hungry Families to simplify reporting on income changes and extend benefits to families leaving TANF cash assistance. In addition, three years of legislative action to expand access to child nutrition programs is paying off this year with a 30% increase in participation by poor children in the school breakfast program, thanks to legislation eliminating the 30 cent per meal co-pay.

“It’s exciting to see that state-level efforts to address hunger pay off, though even one hungry family is one too many,” stated Stone. “Next year Congress has the chance to make an even larger difference by enacting increases in Food Stamp benefits. In 1996 Congress cut benefits – now families receive \$400 less than they would have before the cuts. This needs to change in 2007.”

Hungry In Washington, November 2006, is available online at <http://childrensalliance.org/publications/reports.cfm>

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For more than twenty years, the Children’s Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington. To learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org