



MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE

Finding solutions to poverty and improving the lives of people with low income in Maine.

MAINE'S SAFETY NET PROGRAMS: MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Safety net programs are more important than ever in these tough economic times. They help put food on the table for hungry children and keep families warm during Maine winters. They provide working families with critical services like health care for their children and medications for their parents and grandparents. They also provide supports such as affordable child care and education and training services so that parents can sustain gainful employment.

As the times change, we know that the programs must change as well so that they work better for families who are trying to make ends meet in today's economy. The programs are complex, however. We need to pay attention to what works and what doesn't as we find ways to improve them for Maine's hard-working families.

Here are some facts about Maine's safety net programs:

Food Supplement (FS):

- FS helps address Maine's very high level of food insecurity. Maine has the 3rd highest rate of "very low food security" in the nation.² 1 in 5 children struggles with hunger in Maine.³
- A food supplement recipient receives only \$1.35 per meal, on average.⁴
- This is a federal program that drives our local economy. This federal money translates into dollars in the pockets of local merchants and small farmers who have been hit equally hard by the recession.

Unemployment Insurance (UI):

- UI is a critical program, but it hasn't adapted to changes in the economy and Maine's workforce.
- Slightly more than 3 out of 10 workers receive UI when they are out of work.
- Low wage workers, who are more likely to be females, are 2 ½ times more likely to be out of work than higher wage earners, but they are ½ as likely to receive unemployment benefits.¹

Because many low wage workers are unable to access unemployment benefits they are often forced to turn to other forms of assistance.

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MaineCare:

- Maine has the 8th lowest rate of uninsured in the U.S.⁵ in great part because of MaineCare. This program stabilizes insurance costs for all Maine people.
- MaineCare coverage is cost effective; the cost per person is lower than the national average for all groups except children.⁶
- Costs vs. Expenditures for MaineCare Enrollees:⁷
 - Children represent 41.5% of MaineCare enrollees and represent 22.2% of the costs.
 - People w/disabilities and seniors represent 27.7% of the MaineCare population and represent 60.2% of the costs.
 - Adults (parents and childless adults) represent 30.8% of MaineCare enrollees but only 17.6% of the costs, which is the third lowest cost per person in the nation for adults.
- TANF serves children who live in deep poverty - 1 in 6 Maine children are considered poor by federal poverty standards, but only 1 in 12 Maine children who live in deep poverty receive TANF.⁹
- TANF recipients represent only 2.9% of all people living in Maine.¹⁰
- A recent survey of TANF recipients found that nearly 81% of the TANF families surveyed indicated that they would be homeless if it wasn't for the TANF benefit they receive.¹¹
- The maximum TANF benefit for a family of 3 in Maine is \$485 per month. This is the lowest in New England and nearly 20% less than the average of the rest of the New England states.¹²

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):

- TANF protects children. Currently, TANF prevents nearly 25,000 Maine children—one in twelve of all Maine children—from going without basic needs like housing, food and heat.⁸
- The GA program is a program of last resort. Applicants are eligible only when they have exhausted all other potential resources and are still unable to provide for their most basic needs.
- GA is not a cash benefit. Assistance comes via vouchers. The vast majority of vouchers (86%) go toward housing costs or housing-related needs.¹³

General Assistance (GA):

Points to Remember:

- There are different eligibility requirements for each program, so not every person/family is eligible for every program. Eligibility for these programs is based on need - a person can only receive the benefit if he/she qualifies for it. Income from one program affects eligibility for another, e.g. if a person receives TANF then he/she may not be eligible for GA and will receive less FS.
- Less than 1% of all 2010 recipients of public benefits came to Maine from another state.¹⁴
- From 2008 through July 2010, nearly twice as many aid recipients left Maine each month compared to the number who moved to Maine.¹⁵

¹ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d071147.pdf>.

² "Prevalence of Household-Level Food Insecurity and Very Low Food Security by State 2006-2008 (Average)"; Food Research and Action Center; http://frac.org/pdf/foodinsecurity_2008_rank.pdf.

³ John Cook, Ph.D., Boston Medical Center researcher, "Child Food Insecurity in the United States: 2006-2008," Feeding America; 2010, <http://feedingamerica.org/our-network/the-studies/-/media/Files/research/state-child-hunger-2010.ashx?.pdf>.

⁴ [http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg\\$PP.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg$PP.htm)

- ⁵ <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparetable.jsp?typ=2&ind=126&cat=3&sub=39&sortc=5&o=a>
- ⁶ <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparemaptable.jsp?ind=183&ct>
- ⁷ Maine DHHS "In Focus" Reference Book, January 2009.
- ⁸ <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/OIAS/reports/2010/geo-july.pdf>.
- ⁹ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=43>
- ¹⁰ <http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=uspopulation&met=population&idim=state:23000&dl=en&hl=en&q=population+of+maine>; and http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/2010/2010_recipient_tanssp.htm
- ¹¹ McLaughlin, Thomas, University of New England; report pending publication presenting results of random sample survey of Maine TANF recipients; 2010.
- ¹² <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/annualreport8/chapter14/stateprofiles.htm>
- ¹³ Data provided by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services
- ¹⁴ ibid
- ¹⁵ ibid