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Federal funds help Oregonians in need

SALEM - New figures released from the Oregon Department of Human Services show that assistance to Oregon families through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the food stamp program, continued to increase in September. The increases over the past months are unprecedented for Oregon, and officials expect to see continued growth in the need for assistance to individuals and families.

Since Oregon's economic downturn began more than a year ago, the number of SNAP recipients has increased by nearly 34 percent. There were 482,407 individuals on SNAP in July 2008, and that number increased to a total of 645,234 individuals last month.

SNAP is funded by federal dollars, and Oregonians are receiving an additional \$247 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). State officials said the increase helped in two ways – by providing more resources to help people who are feeling the impact of the economic downturn and by putting additional money back into the local economy.

“Without these federal dollars we would not be able to help all the people who need us and communities would be struggling more,” said Dr. Bruce Goldberg, Director of the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Over the past 15 months, an average of 540 new recipients per day received SNAP/food stamp benefits. In order to keep up with the increased pace, the Children, Adults and Families Division at DHS has transformed its intake process to reduce wait times and eliminate backlogs. (more)

“The services we provide touch the lives of many Oregonians every day, and that is why it is so important that we continue to do our jobs well. Because of our streamlining efforts, Oregonians receive their benefits an average of nine days sooner than they did before. In most places across the state, it’s same-day service,” said Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director of the DHS Children, Adults and Families Division.

Kelley-Siel also praised partner organizations, such as food banks and faith-based organizations, for their help in addressing hunger in the state.

“It takes all of us in our communities to ensure that Oregonians meet their most basic need – food for their families,” she said.

Like SNAP benefits, demand for cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has also increased since last year. In September, a total of 24,632 families with children received this benefit in Oregon, an increase of 22 percent over last year. TANF is available only to parents with children 18 years of age and under; the program provides cash assistance to very low-income families and builds personal responsibility and self reliance through job preparation and on-the-job training.

Attached: chart of Oregon recipients by region

Background: To be eligible for TANF, parents with children must earn less than the total monthly income limit. For a two-parent family with two children that maximum is \$795, along with an asset limit of \$2,500 (not including the family home, or the first \$10,000 value of family vehicles). TANF provides temporary assistance and case management services for families struggling due to unemployment, underemployment or incapacitation of a primary wage earner. TANF and TANF-related programs also provide employment and training services, child care while looking for work or other alternatives, assistance seeking SSI/SSDI, and help to flee or stay free from domestic violence. The maximum benefits for the family of four with no other income would be a total of \$647 per month. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale based on household income, and are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card," which is used like a debit card.

(more)

To be eligible for SNAP benefits, families must, along with other factors, earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, the income limit is less than \$3,400 per month. The maximum benefit for a household of four totals \$668 per month. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, based on household income, and are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card" that is used like a debit card to purchase food. SNAP benefits are intended to act as a supplement to a family's overall food budget, not to cover it entirely. In many households with little or no income, it can be the primary means to meet the nutritional needs of the family. The overall average SNAP benefit per household is approximately \$250 per month. Approximately three-fourths of all SNAP households have some form of income, which results in the actual benefit received being less than the maximum.

The name of the federal food stamp program is being changed to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, but the benefits remain the same. The Oregon Legislature also changed the name of the program from "food stamps" to "Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program." This name change officially takes effect in January 2010.

- To learn if you might be eligible for SNAP benefits, TANF, Oregon Health Plan or other services, visit your local DHS office. You may also go online to OregonHelps and see if you may be eligible for these and other programs at <http://oregonhelps.org/>
- To download applications for TANF and SNAP benefits, go to: www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/.
- DHS also partners with SafeNet to help people to find local resources such as local food pantries or other assistance. The number is 800-SAFENET (800-723-3638).

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	Individuals Receiving SNAP Benefits (Food Stamps) September 2009	Percentage Increase Over July 2008 Baseline		Families Receiving Cash Assistance (TANF) September 2009	Percentage Increase Over One Year Ago
District 1 (Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook)	18,007	40%		400	9%
District 2 (Multnomah)	128,689	34%		7,127	25%
District 3 (Polk, Marion, Yamhill)	94,098	32%		4,235	26%
District 4 (Benton, Lincoln, Linn)	41,940	31%		1,335	9%
District 5 (Lane)	68,808	32%		1,953	22%
District 6 (Douglas)	23,372	25%		835	-1%
District 7 (Coos, Curry)	18,117	26%		676	16%
District 8 (Jackson, Josephine)	61,562	33%		2,011	23%
District 9 (Hood River, Gilliam, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler)	8,223	21%		191	-1%
District 10 (Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson)	36,646	41%		995	22%
District 11 (Klamath, Lake)	16,006	25%		393	21%
District 12 (Morrow, Umatilla)	15,861	18%		465	11%
District 13 (Baker, Union, Wallowa)	8,498	26%		255	25%
District 14 (Grant, Harney, Malheur)	9,523	23%		173	7%
District 15 (Clackamas)	38,582	46%		1,255	15%
District 16 (Washington)	57,302	47%		2,333	42%
STATE TOTAL	645,234	34%		24,632	22%