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Increased demand for food stamps, cash assistance continues

The need for food stamps and cash assistance increased by more than 25 percent over the past year, and forecasts from the Department of Human Services predict an additional 24-30 percent increase in Oregonians needing food stamps and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) payments in 2009-11.

"We have now started on the second year of record-breaking demand," said Erinn Kelley-Siel, interim Director of DHS Children, Adults and Families. "Oregon's unemployment remains at high levels, and that means families continue to need support to feed their families and keep them safe. We don't see demand decreasing any time soon."

Increase in food stamp recipients

A total of 590,062 Oregonians now count on food stamp assistance, and 16,571 additional people applied for and received food stamps last month alone. The number of Oregonians receiving food stamps increased by 119,200 people over last year, an increase of more than 25 percent.

Increase in Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients

Over the past year, the number of parents with children receiving TANF cash assistance benefits has increased 29 percent, for a total of 25,178 households. That is an increase of 658 families since last month and an increase of 5,656 since April 2008.

Background information:

To be eligible for food stamps, families must earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, along with other factors. For a family of four, the income limit is less than \$3,400 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. Food stamp 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 average food stamp benefit totals \$200 per month, and the maximum benefit totals \$668 per month.

To be eligible for TANF, parents with children must earn less than the total monthly income limit of \$795 for a two-parent family with two children, 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. Benefits for the family of four total \$647 per month.

- To learn if you might be eligible for food stamps, TANF, Oregon Health Plan or other services, visit your local DHS food stamps office.
- To download applications for TANF and food stamps, 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).
- For a breakdown (by region) of demand for food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, visit: www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/data/main.shtml