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HUNGER, HOMELESSNESS STILL ON THE RISE IN MAJOR U. S. CITIES

Hunger and homelessness continued to rise in major American cities over the last year according to a new survey released by the U. S. Conference of Mayors. In particular, families with children requesting food assistance and emergency shelter also increased substantially over last year.

Even with an improving economy, overall requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of 14 percent over the past year with 96 percent of the cities registering an increase. Also during the past year, requests for emergency shelter assistance increased by an average of six percent with 70 percent of the 27 cities surveyed showing an increase.

“These are not simply statistics,” said Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell, who co-chairs the U.S. Conference of Mayors Taskforce on Hunger and Homelessness. “These are real people, many are families with children, who are hungry and homeless in our cities. Unfortunately, the results of this year’s survey tell us that we are still far short in meeting the challenges of our neediest citizens.”

The findings of the 27-city survey include:

Hunger

- During the past year, requests for emergency food assistance by families (children and their parents) increased by an average of 13 percent.
- On average, 20 percent of the requests for emergency food assistance have gone unmet over the last year.
- Forty-eight percent of the cities surveyed reported that emergency food assistance facilities may have to turn away people in need due to lack of resources.
- Fifty-six percent of those requesting emergency food assistance were families, and 34 percent of the adults requesting food assistance were employed.
- The causes of hunger include unemployment and other employment-related problems, low-paying jobs, high housing costs, poverty, medical or health costs, substance abuse, high utility costs, mental health problems, homelessness, reduced public benefits and high childcare costs.

Homelessness

- During the past year, 78 percent of the cities surveyed reported that requests for emergency shelter by homeless families increased by seven percent.

- Fifty-six percent of cities reported that families may have to break up in order to obtain temporary shelter.
- Eighty-one percent of cities surveyed reported that emergency shelters may have to turn away homeless families and other homeless people due to lack of resources.
- An average of 23 percent of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people have gone unmet over the last year.
- People remained homeless for an average of eight months. Forty-six percent of the surveyed cities reported that the length of time people are homeless increased during the last year.
- Single men comprised 41 percent of the homeless population, families with children 40 percent, single women 14 percent, and unaccompanied youth five percent.
- The lack of affordable housing, mental illness and the lack of needed services, substance abuse and the lack of needed services, low-paying jobs, unemployment, domestic violence, poverty and prisoner re-entry were the leading causes of homelessness.

"These survey results indicate, as they have in the past 19 years that we have done this survey, that there is still a great deal to be done to address the serious issue of homelessness in America," said Cedar Rapids Mayor Paul Pate, co-chair of the Taskforce on Hunger and Homelessness. "Again this year, the Hunger and Homeless survey shows that the demand for homeless shelters in our communities continues to increase. It is important that we all take seriously the challenge of eliminating chronic homelessness over the next ten years."

The complete survey is available on the U.S. Conference of Mayors' website at www.usmayors.org.

TAX FIRM PROVIDES FOOD STAMP OUTREACH

H&R Block, a major tax-assistance firm, announced the creation of a new client assistance program designed to help millions more low- and middle-income families and individuals take advantage of the federal Food Stamp Program.

Between now and April 15, H&R Block tax offices in 12 of the most populous states will provide clients with food stamp applications, local contact information and brief "what to do next" instructions, all free of charge.

Food stamp officials in the participating states have agreed to accept and process the applications distributed by H&R Block. The states included in the program for 2005 are California, Texas, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Georgia, Michigan, Massachusetts, Virginia, Missouri and North Carolina.

"We are excited about this opportunity to help our clients enroll in the Food Stamp Program," said Susan Stanton, Vice President of Client Experience at H&R Block. "Because we're in a unique position as tax professionals to assist our clients in assessing their financial situations, we think it only makes sense that we take the next step to help ensure that they're taking full advantage of programs that can improve their lives."

H&R Block's outreach effort comes at a time when federal officials estimate that only 54 percent of those eligible nationally for food stamps are receiving the benefit. This equates to millions of Americans nationally who may be eligible, but are not claiming and receiving valuable food stamp assistance.

"We appreciate H&R Block's efforts to improve food stamp participation for those eligible for this critical nutrition program," said Roberto Salazar, Administrator for the Food and Nutrition Service.

Under the H&R Block food stamp outreach pro-

gram, tax professionals will provide food stamp applications to clients who want them, along with state contact information and simple instructions about how to continue the application process. Tax offices will not submit or fill out the food stamp applications.

“By helping our clients learn more about this valuable benefit program and begin the application process, H&R Block is furthering its mission of helping our clients achieve their financial objectives by serving as their tax and financial partner,” said Stanton.

H&R Block opened nearly 1,000 new locations in tax season 2005 and now operates more than 11,000 tax preparation offices in the United States company officials said.

OBESITY DEATHS OVERSTATED

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) said it overstated the nation’s obesity problem by as much as 20 percent in a March 2004 study. The miscalculation was due to a computer error according to an Associated Press report. The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, said that obesity-related deaths increased to 400,000 a year between 1990 and 2000 – an increase of 100,000. The correction released by the CDC said the increase was at the level of 65,000 deaths.

In a statement, CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding said the agency regretted that the computer error was not discovered earlier. “Integrity is a core value of CDC, and the integrity of our science must be protected,” she said. “We are improving our internal scientific review processes, including moving toward the adoption of electronic review processes.”

The original study put the number of tobacco-related deaths per year at just under 435,000, and contended that more Americans could soon be dying of obesity instead of smoking if current trends persisted.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-265) extends automatic free school meal eligibility to migrant children and youth.

Automatic Eligibility for Free School Meals

The Reauthorization Act confers automatic eligibility for free school meals on migrant children identified as eligible for the Migrant Education Program (MEP) as authorized under Title I, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Reauthorization Act also provides automatic eligibility for free school meals to homeless students, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and runaway children and youth served through grant programs established under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act: Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth, and Street Outreach Program.

Documentation of Free Meal Eligibility

Most school districts that have migrant children attending school have a MEP coordinator who identifies children from migrant families. The documentation of a child as migrant for free school meals is a dated list of each child’s name and the signature of the MEP coordinator or State MEP Director. This list is sufficient for school officials to approve the child’s eligibility for free school meals.

Full School Year Eligibility

For all students certified as eligible for free meals, including migrant children, the eligibility remains effective for the remainder of the school year and up to 30 days into the next school year. This policy holds even if students’ certification for the MEP expires during the school year.

For a copy of USDA's policy on this issue, go to www.frac.org/pdf/CNR2004_Migrant.pdf.

THE UPS FOUNDATION ADDS NUTRITION TO INITIATIVE TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER

To a surprising extent, say nutrition experts, hunger often leads to obesity. Families unable to afford nutritious food often end up developing unhealthy eating habits, setting the stage for obesity and a variety of other health problems. The United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation, which for 15 years has pursued a major initiative to alleviate hunger in America, today announced it was broadening that effort to address nutrition and obesity issues.

The UPS Foundation's new initiative, "The National Collaboration to Reduce Hunger and Improve Nutrition," has been launched with the award of \$2 million in grants to eight different organizations.

The organizations are based across the country from California and Ohio to Illinois, Virginia and Washington, D.C., and already are involved in various aspects of the fights against hunger and obesity. The Society of Saint Andrew in Big Island, Virginia, for example, is working to expand distribution of otherwise wasted fresh produce from local farms to local food banks. The Children's Hunger Alliance in Columbus, Ohio, is expanding access to and improving the quality of school meals.

"Millions of Americans look hunger in the face every day. They feel the consequences of poor nutrition and in many cases suffer from the effects of obesity," said Evem Cooper Epps, president of The UPS Foundation. "The connection between inadequate financial resources and poor nutrition is clear and compelling. We want to be instrumental in the fight against hunger by providing those individuals at risk with access to nutritious foods as well as information and resources."

Government reports show 36.3 million Americans, 13.3 million of whom are children, went hungry last year. Not surprisingly, there was a

double-digit increase in requests for emergency food assistance even as medical evidence continues to mount showing America's children are facing serious health threats because of widespread obesity and inactivity.

"Obesity and hunger are major public health concerns facing our nation today," said Edward Cooney, Executive Director of the bipartisan Congressional Hunger Center in Washington, D.C., and a former Agriculture Department nutrition program director. "The announcement that The UPS Foundation is launching a new funding initiative to fight hunger centered on improving nutrition and decreasing obesity is of critical importance to the nation's nutritionally vulnerable children and adults."

In addition to the \$2 million in new grants, the UPS Foundation since 1989 has supported food banks and local feeding programs through its Prepared and Perishable Food Rescue Initiative. UPS has helped local organizations by providing more than \$10 million to help recover and distribute more than 300 million pounds of food to feed hungry Americans. UPS has not only contributed financially to the initiative, but also has provided technical, logistical and managerial expertise.

Visit www.community.ups.com/ for more information about UPS's community involvement.

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MAJOR CORPORATION ANNOUNCES MARKETING CHANGES TO EMPHASIZE MORE NUTRITIOUS PRODUCTS

Kraft Foods, Inc. (Kraft) announced two new initiatives to increase the visibility, among both adults and children, of many of the more nutritious products in the company's portfolio. Using nutrition criteria that are derived from the proposed 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines, as well as authoritative statements from the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, National Academy of Sciences and other public health authorities, Kraft will:

- Introduce a *Sensible Solution* labeling program in the United States, featuring a prominent on-pack "flag" for food and beverage products that meet specific, "better-for-you" nutrition criteria that Kraft has established for each category of products.
- Shift the mix of products it advertises in television, radio and print media viewed primarily by children ages 6-11, such as many popular cartoon programs, toward products that qualify for the flag, and phase out advertising in these media for products that do not. This means that, over the course of 2005, a number of well-known Kraft products (including regular *Kool-Aid* beverages, *Oreo* and *Chips Ahoy!* cookies, several *Post* children's cereals, and many varieties of *Lunchables* lunch combinations) will no longer be advertised in these media. Kraft will continue its existing policy of not advertising in media with a principal audience under age six.

"We're working on ways to encourage both adults and children to eat wisely by selecting more nutritionally balanced diets," said Lance Friedmann, Kraft's Senior Vice President, Global Health & Wellness. "We believe that these initiatives are a step in the right direction."

Sensible Solution Program

The *Sensible Solution* flag, which will help consumers more easily identify Kraft's "better-for-you" choices within a food or beverage category, will begin to appear on qualifying products in the United States in April 2005. In many cases, the flag will contain specific information about a product's key nutritional benefits.

"We want to provide a range of options that help people make more informed decisions about the foods and beverages they buy for themselves and their families," said Friedmann. "With one quick glance at the *Sensible Solution* flag, it will be easier to identify Kraft products that offer better nutritional choices in their respective product categories."

Among the products in the U.S. that will carry the flag are: *Kraft 2% Milk Shredded Reduced Fat* cheese, *Post Shredded Wheat* cereal, *Minute Rice Instant* whole grain brown rice, *Triscuit Original* baked whole grain wheat crackers and *Crystal Light* beverages. Plans are under development for similar programs in other countries, based on regulatory requirements and other local considerations.

A product can qualify in one of two ways for the *Sensible Solution* flag:

- By providing beneficial nutrients such as protein, calcium, fiber or whole grain at nutritionally meaningful levels, or by delivering a functional benefit such as heart health or hydration, while staying within specific limits on calories, fat (including saturated and trans fat), sodium and sugar; or
- By meeting specifications for "reduced," "low" or "free" in calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar or sodium.

The detailed criteria for this program were developed by Kraft's nutrition experts, include input from the company's external council of advisors from key health and wellness disciplines, and incorporate guidelines from acknowledged

public health authorities.

Product Advertising in Media Seen Primarily by Children Ages 6-11

Kraft will continue its existing policy of not advertising in television, radio and print media with a primary audience under age six. In addition, the company now will begin to change the mix of products it advertises in television, radio and print media seen principally by children ages 6-11.

Over the course of 2005, Kraft will increasingly advertise in these media products that meet the *Sensible Solution* criteria, with a particular emphasis on foods and beverages offering beneficial nutrients or a functional benefit. In 2006, as existing commitments expire, advertisements of all products not meeting the criteria will be phased out completely around the world. Kraft will continue to advertise its full portfolio of products in television, radio and print media seen principally by parents and all-family audiences. The company will also, in accordance with policies that it regularly evaluates and revises, market its products through means such as packaging, websites and in-store promotion.

“Despite broad agreement that there is no simple way to effectively encourage better nutrition and more physical activity, we recognize that parents are concerned about the mix of food products being advertised to younger children,” said Mark Berlind, Kraft’s Executive Vice President, Global Corporate Affairs. “The initiatives we’re announcing today are part of our ongoing efforts to help address that concern.”

Examples of existing products that the company will continue to advertise in media aimed specifically at the 6-11 age group include: *Sugar-Free Kool-Aid* beverages, *Lunchables Fun Pack Chicken Dunks* and *Half the Sugar Fruity Pebbles* cereal. As part of this initiative, Kraft’s research and development team

is creating more new products for children that will meet the more rigorous set of *Sensible Solution* criteria.

“A recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on preventing childhood obesity calls for strengthened self-regulation of food and entertainment advertising to children,” added Berlind. “We believe that the IOM’s proposal is constructive, and hope that all stakeholders will join together to make real progress on this issue.”

Further information on Kraft’s marketing practices, its broad-based health and wellness initiatives and the Sensible Solution program can be found on Kraft’s corporate website (www.kraft.com/responsibility/home.aspx) and on its consumer website (www.kraftfoods.com/kf/HealthyLiving/sensiblesolutions).

2005 GOVERNOR'S VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Recognizing Outstanding Volunteer Service in the State of Texas, the OneStar Foundation announces the 2005 Governor’s Volunteer Awards invitation for nomination. Now in its 22nd year, the Governor’s Volunteer Awards acknowledge volunteers whose commitment to community and to service is exemplary. Administered by the OneStar Foundation and the Office of the Governor, the awards honor outstanding Texas volunteers and further the foundation’s mission to promote, develop, and support local efforts that use service and volunteerism to meet community needs. Award recipients will be recognized at a ceremony in Austin, Texas in June 2005.

OneStar is accepting nominations through March 1, 2005. If you are interested in submitting a nomination, download an application form at www.onestarfoundation.org/onestar/awards/index.html.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBESITY AND PARTICIPATION IN NUTRITION PROGRAMS EXAMINED

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a report examining whether participation in nutrition assistance programs contributes to the growing problem of obesity. An expert panel was convened by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to determine if there is a scientific relationship between participation in one of the nation's 15 nutrition safety net programs and excess weight.

The panel reviewed existing scientific literature through March 2004. A critical review of these studies and the panel's experience formed the basis for the following conclusions:

Poverty, as measured by household income, is associated with obesity in some population groups. One review of 144 published studies shows a strong inverse association between socioeconomic status and obesity in women, and an inconsistent relationship in men and children.

The panel concluded that it is necessary to separate the effects of poverty and socioeconomic status from the potential effects of food assistance to determine the relationship between obesity and program participation. The research challenge, however, is that poverty is highly correlated with program participation, making it hard to separate their independent effects.

Existing research provides inconsistent evidence of an association between the four major nutrition assistance programs and obesity, and no evidence that program participation causes obesity. The published scientific literature, although relatively sparse, provides some information on components of the relationship between program participation and obesity. No study, however, has fully addressed important issues related to research design and

measurement necessary to establish a causal relationship. There is no published research that considers the relationship between participation in WIC and maternal obesity. There is no published research that provides evidence of a consistent relationship between participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs and obesity. The published research indicates there is some association between Food Stamp Program participation and obesity, but there is no evidence of causality. Only one study considered the combined effects of participation in multiple programs, and it found no evidence that participating in more than one program increased or reduced the risk of being overweight.

New research would be needed to determine the relationship between nutrition assistance program participation and obesity. The panel emphasized the need for future research to consider the simultaneous effects of program participation, poverty, and obesity.

In addition, future research would have to address key limitations of past studies, including:

- selection bias that leads to systematic differences between program participants and non-participants and complicates the interpretation of observed differences in outcomes like obesity;
- incomplete measures of program participation that do not include information on the duration and amount of benefits;
- inaccurate measures of eligibility that hinder identification of appropriate comparison groups; and
- high costs of collecting accurate information on dietary intake, height, and weight.

The panel recommended that a mix of research approaches taking various factors into consideration be utilized in future research.

A copy of the full report is available online at www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/NutritionEducation/NutEd.htm.



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