

Protecting Programs for Low-Income People in Deficit Reduction Plans Is Vital to Women and Their Families

As President Obama and leaders in Congress work to reach agreement on a plan to address the federal deficit, they must respect one key principle: **any deficit reduction plan must protect programs for low-income families and individuals and ensure that the measures employed to reduce the deficit do not increase poverty.**

This principle has been honored consistently in the major bipartisan deficit reduction packages of recent decades. It is particularly important to women, who are more likely than men to be poor at all stages of their lives because of ongoing employment discrimination and greater responsibilities for unpaid caregiving. As a result, women and their families disproportionately rely on federal programs to protect their health, obtain quality child care and higher education, and help them meet their basic needs during difficult times and as they age.

Women and their families should not bear the brunt of deficit reduction. Any agreement on deficit reduction must neither cut low-income assistance programs directly nor subject these programs to future cuts under automatic enforcement mechanisms. Increased revenues from those with the greatest ability to pay must be a major part of any deficit reduction plan. Maintaining and strengthening programs like those listed below protects the most vulnerable today and expands opportunity for a stronger shared future.

Women who head families and elderly women are especially reliant on programs for low-income people.

Many low-income assistance programs are designed to improve the lives of poor children – and the majority of poor families with children (57 percent) are headed by single mothers. Nearly four in ten (38 percent) single-mother families were poor in 2009 and poverty rates were above 40 percent for Black (44 percent) and Latina (46 percent) single-mother families. More than three in four (77 percent) single-parent families were headed by women. Among poor single-parent families, more than four in five (85 percent) were headed by women.

Women are two-thirds of the elderly poor and the poverty rate for women 65 and older was 11 percent in 2009, compared to 7 percent for men 65 and older. Elderly women who live alone are particularly vulnerable: in 2009 their poverty rate was 17 percent compared to 12 percent for men 65 and older living alone.

Source: [NWLC calculations based on 2010 Current Population Survey.](#)

Protecting Women's Health

Medicaid

Medicaid provides health care coverage to low-income individuals who are elderly and live with disabilities, as well as low-income children, parents, and pregnant women. It covers a comprehensive array of services including prenatal care, well-child visits, preventive services like mammograms and pap smears, and long-term care services including nursing home coverage. In 2007 nearly seven in ten elderly individuals who relied on Medicaid for assistance were women, and nearly eight in ten non-elderly adults – mostly pregnant women and low-income parents – were women. About 30 million children received healthcare coverage through Medicaid in 2009.

Sources: [NWLC calculations from The Medicaid Statistical Information System State Summary Datamart](#). “[Health Coverage of Children: The Role of Medicaid and CHIP](#)” (2011) Kaiser Family Foundation.

Title X Family Planning Program

The Title X family planning program provides comprehensive family planning and related preventive health services to low-income women. In 2008, the program served over five million people, 93 percent of whom were women.

Source: [RTI International Family Planning Annual Report: 2009 National Summary](#) (2010).

Maternal and Child Health Block Grant

The Maternal and Child Health block grant provided prenatal care for 2.5 million women and primary and preventive care services for more than 31 million children, including many with special needs, in 2009. The Maternal and Child Health block grant provides funds for health issues ranging from women's health to newborn screenings to immunizations so children can attend school.

Source: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau data](#).

Providing Supports for Children

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) program helps low-income working families afford child care and supports activities that improve the quality of care for all families. The CCDBG served a monthly average of more than 953,000 families with 1.63 million children in 2009. Children of color were the majority of the children served, and 86 percent of the families served by CCDBG were single-parent households.

Sources: [U.S. Department of and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Program Data and Statistics](#). “[Child Care and Development Block Grant Participation in 2009](#),” (2011) by Hannah Matthews and Teresa Lim, Center for Law and Social Policy.

Head Start and Early Head Start

The Head Start program provides grants to public and private agencies to provide child development services to low-income children and families. The program helps preschool-age children build their reading and arithmetic skills to prepare them for school. The Head Start preschool program served 929,300 young children in 2009, most of whom were children of color. Nearly six in ten families served by the program were headed by a single parent.

The Early Head Start program is a federally funded program that provides child and family development services to low-income pregnant women and families with children under age three. The Early Head Start program served 83,700 children under age three and 9,600 pregnant women nationwide in 2009. Children of color made up a majority of children served by the program. Four in ten families served by the program were headed by a single parent.

Sources: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009"](#) (2010) by Elizabeth Hoffman, Center for Law and Social Policy. ["Early Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009"](#) (2010) by Elizabeth Hoffman, Center for Law and Social Policy.

Child Support Enforcement

The Child Support Enforcement program helps families obtain financial and medical support from a parent living outside the home. It served 17.5 million children in 2009, nearly one in four. Child support is an important anti-poverty program, although eligibility for services does not depend on income. It lifted nearly a million people from poverty in 2009. For poor custodial families who receive child support it provides, on average, 40 percent of their total income. In 2007, 7.4 million custodial parents had child support awards, 87 percent of whom were women. Of the custodial parents living below the federal poverty level, 93 percent were women.

Sources: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement data, U.S. Census Bureau, the 2011 Statistical Abstract, Social Insurance and Human Services, "Child Support Plays an Increasingly Important Role for Poor Custodial Families"](#) (2010) by Elaine Sorensen, Urban Institute. NWLC calculations based on [2010 Current Population Survey](#).

Improving Nutrition

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps feeds nearly 45 million people each month, helping millions of families put food on the table. SNAP served 44.6 million people in 21 million households in March 2011. In 2009, women were 64 percent of nonelderly adult recipients and 67 percent of elderly adults receiving benefits. Additionally, more than half (58 percent) of all SNAP households with children were headed by a single adult, 93 percent of whom were women.

Source: [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service](#).

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five. WIC provided nutritious food to more than 8.9 million low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children in March 2011. The program served more than 901,000 pregnant women; 571,000 breastfeeding women; 621,000 postpartum women; and 2.1 million infants and 4.7 million children in March 2011.

Source: [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service](#).

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) provides nutritious food to low-income elderly adults, breastfeeding mothers, and infants. It served an average of nearly a half million low-income elderly people each month in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. CSFP also provided food and formula to an average of more than 20,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children each month.

Source: [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service](#).

National School Meals Programs

The national school meals programs are federally assisted meal programs that exist in more than 101,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care facilities. The National School Lunch Program provided nutritious lunches to more than 31.9 million children each school day in March 2011, 66 percent of which were served as free or reduced price meals. The National School Breakfast Program served more than 12.2 million children each school day in March 2011, 84 percent of which were served as free or reduced price meals. More than six in ten (63 percent) single-mother families, or nearly 6.3 million single-mother families, were eligible to receive free or reduced price meals in 2009.

Sources: [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service](#), [School Lunch](#), [School Breakfast](#). NWLC calculations based on [2010 Current Population Survey](#).

Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program provided nutritious meals and snacks to 3.2 million children in day care, Head Start or outside-school-hours care centers as well as 112,000 adults in adult day care facilities in 2009. In March 2011, the program served more than 1.9 billion meals, more than 1.8 billion of which were served in day care homes and child care centers. Free and reduced price meals accounted for 82 percent of all meals served.

Sources: [Food Research and Action Center](#), [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service](#).

Maintaining Income and Work Supports

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is a block grant to states to fund cash assistance, work supports, and other services for low-income children and parents. In FY 2010, approximately 1.85 million families and 3.3 million children received TANF assistance. In FY 2008, nearly nine in ten (87 percent) adults served by TANF were women.

Source: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families](#).

Unemployment Insurance (UI)

Unemployment insurance (UI) benefits provide temporary income support to jobless workers who have lost a job through no fault of their own and meet other state requirements. During periods of high unemployment, the federal government funds additional weeks of emergency unemployment benefits to supplement state UI benefits. Nationwide, federal and state UI benefits kept 3.3 million people out of poverty in 2009, including nearly one million children and more than one million women.

Source: NWLC calculations based on [2010 Current Population Survey](#).

Social Security

Social Security is a social insurance program that protects workers and their families when income is lost due to retirement, disability, or death. Social Security is especially important to women's economic security: for nearly three in ten female beneficiaries 65 and older (29 percent), Social Security is virtually the only source of income. The average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is modest – about \$12,000 per year – but without Social Security, half of women 65 and older would have been poor in 2009.

Sources: [U.S. Social Security Administration, *Income of the Population 55 and Older, 2008* \(2010\)](#). [U.S. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2010* \(2011\)](#). NWLC calculations based on [2010 Current Population Survey](#).

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provides income support for low-income individuals who are elderly, blind and living with disabilities. In 2009 SSI served 7.7 million people, including 1.2 million children. The majority of adults in the program in 2009 were women – nearly six in ten – and two-thirds of elderly SSI beneficiaries were women.

Source: [U.S. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2010* \(2011\)](#).

Expanding Educational Opportunities

Pell Grants

The Federal Pell Grant Program provides need-based grants to help low-income students pursue post-secondary education. In 2001, when women represented 56 percent of college students, approximately

60 percent of Pell grant recipients who graduated were women. Data on the gender of Pell grant recipients is not available for 2009, but women represented 57 percent of college students. The program served 8 million students in the 2009-2010 academic year and the maximum Pell Grant for the 2010-2011 award year (July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011) was \$5,550.

Sources: [U.S. Department of Education](#). “[A Profile of Successful Pell Grant Recipients](#)” (2009) by Christina Chang Wei, Laura Horn and Thomas Weko, U.S. Department of Education. “[Digest of Education Statistics 2010](#)” (2011) by Thomas D. Snyder and Sally A. Dillow, U.S. Department of Education.

Perkins Career and Technical Education Grants

The Perkins Act provides funds to states to support career and technical education programs at both the secondary and post-secondary level. Programs funded by Perkins focus on preparing students for high-wage, high-skill careers in current and emerging employment sectors. At the secondary level, nearly half (47 percent) of enrollees were women in the 2009-2010 academic year. At the post-secondary level, 55 percent were women in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Source: NWLC calculations based on unpublished U.S. Department of Education data.

Making Housing More Affordable

Rental Assistance

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided rental assistance to more than 5.4 million families in FY 2010 through various programs. The Section 8 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA, also known as the Housing Choice Voucher program) provided core rental assistance to more than two million vulnerable families in 2009. In 2008, 80 percent of households served by Section 8 TBRA were headed by women and nearly half (48 percent) were headed by women with children. Low-income elderly people and people with disabilities also receive housing assistance from dedicated HUD programs.

Sources: [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development TBRA data](#). “[The Housing Choice Voucher Program](#)” (2009) Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low-income households meet their energy needs. In FY 2008 an estimated 33.5 million households were eligible for LIHEAP under the federal statutory guidelines. Survey data indicate that in FY 2009, nearly all (92 percent) of households who received LIHEAP had at least one vulnerable household member (someone who was elderly, a child or a person with disabilities).

Sources: [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as reported by the Congressional Research Service](#), [Administration for Children and Families and National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, 2009 National Energy Assistance Survey](#) (2010).