Poverty and Hunger in Washington State

A Snapshot of Information









August 2008



DSHS

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Information About This Publication

Title Poverty and Hunger in Washington State

Abstract This paper provides the context within which the programs provided by DSHS/ESA operate. By providing the context to the broader issues of poverty and hunger, it allows us to include partners within the community as well as our partners within the department and other state agencies.

It is a contemporary look at the extent of the problems within our state. This paper is meant to generate discussion and understanding of the problems, which is essential to coming together on shared solutions.

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Project Sponsor Economic Services Administration

Troy Hutson, Assistant Secretary

DSHS...Improving the quality of life for individuals and families in need in Washington State

ESA...Helping people build better lives

OSD...Providing the right support at the right time with the right attitude

E-MAPS...Providing accurate, timely accountability and performance statistics

Poverty and Hunger in Washington State

This paper was developed at the request of Troy Hutson, Assistant Secretary of Economic Services Administration, Department of Social and Health Services. His vision is to broaden the discussion to explicitly include the issues of poverty and hunger, which underlie the programs the Economic Services Administration provides to clients throughout the state. Because these issues are so pervasive, he also seeks to include partners throughout the communities in Washington where people seek help. By linking the nodes within the existing service networks, it is possible to spark ideas and build coalitions of support to strengthen service delivery and potentially leverage resources.

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Produced by E-MAPS

Economic Services Administration Management Accountability and Performance Statistics

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Introduction

This report spotlights attention on poverty and hunger that threaten the well-being of people in communities across this state. It is meant to generate discussion and understanding of the problems, which is essential to coming together on possible

solutions.

The purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the problems of poverty and hunger in Washington State that the many programs within the Department of Social and Health Services are designed to address. The goal is to provide the context within which these programs operate. By providing this context to the broader issues of poverty and hunger, it allows us to include partners within the community as well as our partners within the department and other governmental agencies.

Drawn from recent information, this report gives a high level overview of the extent of these problems in our state, without being an exhaustive reference. We hope that this paper will help us reach out to partners in a more holistic manner, widening not only the discussion but also the network of partners who serve those in poverty and those who struggle to meet basic food needs.

We hope this paper is but a jumping off point to bring people together around a common purpose – to help those who are poor and hungry within our state, within our regions, within our communities. By coming together with our partners, we are better informed about the types of services available and who is eligible for these services. This information is not only useful for referrals, but may also stimulate ideas on how to serve our clients better and how to potentially leverage resources among us.

The current economic situation underscores the need for a collaborative approach beyond the governmental divisions that define program services and service delivery. The worsening economy may drive more people to seek help. The recent experience at food banks across the country and the state illustrates how more people are seeking help and how the supply of food is not keeping pace.

From case files, we stitched together facts to describe how three individuals use cash, medical and food assistance. From these sketchy case notes, we see how the state provides a safety net for those who need help. We see these individuals get jobs and leave assistance only to see them come back again when they lose jobs or their living situations change. These people are clients of DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services), and possibly, of various community services who help low-income people. But they are also part of the bigger picture of poverty and hunger in this state and this nation.

This paper is a catalyst to call for a renewed dialogue on poverty and hunger. It is intended to spark interest in reducing poverty and hunger one community at a time.

Overview

This paper is a snapshot of information on poverty and hunger in Washington State. First, we provide three case studies of DSHS clients. Then, we move into recent events around hunger. Finally, we present recent statistics and geographical maps on poverty, hunger and economic hardship.

Case Studies

To better tell the story of some of those in the DSHS caseload, we scanned through many case files. We were looking for cases that had sufficient information in the case files to detail some of the situations that clients find themselves in and what happens to them over time.

We were able to develop three case studies, using facts described in the case file notes by case workers. These case studies provide a glimpse into the lives of the clients we serve. What comes through in each case is the struggle these clients face. They move on and off assistance as they lose jobs and find jobs.

The common beginning for the three case studies is that these clients all seek services when they are pregnant. The other characteristic they have in common is that they are unmarried at the time they apply for public assistance services.

The public assistance services they seek are for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a federal cash assistance program for families with children, and food assistance.

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In the case studies, clients withdrew their applications until their third

trimesters because of the work requirement. Case workers typically refer eligible pregnant women to the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, which provides checks for nutrient-rich foods, and to First Steps, which was passed by the legislature to meet the goals of the Maternity Care Access Act. The goals of the Maternity Care Access Act have been met in terms of improving prenatal care, decreasing low birth weight and decreasing infant mortality. After First Steps increased eligibility for pregnant women up to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, the number of births funded by Medicaid increased from 17,984 before First Steps (Fiscal Year 1988) to 34,257 (Fiscal Year 2001) after First Steps increased eligibility. The State of Washington is committed to improving outcomes for pregnant women and their children, as demonstrated from the information above.

We now turn to the three case studies. These case studies give us a glimpse into the lives of our clients.

Case Study 1 – Kim

Kim is pregnant and unmarried. Her baby is due on December 19, 2006.

Work History and Living Circumstances

Kim has worked at her parents' company for about 6 years. The father of the unborn child, John, lives with Kim in her parents' house. John is working. Both Kim and John will have to move out of her parent's house soon. John stops working in October 2006

Public Assistance History

Kim applies for TANF and food stamps in June 2006. After the case worker tells her about the work requirements, Kim withdraws her application. She reapplies on September 19. 2006 when her pregnancy is in the third trimester.

The case worker opens a case for Kim. Kim's TANF grant amount is \$349 per month. She receives food stamps for a household size of 1. Kim gives birth to a girl, Riana, on December 17, 2006. Her TANF grant amount increases to \$546 per month.

On January 1, 2007, Kim begins working again for her parents' company and moves out of their house. Shortly after, Kim stops working to take care of the child. Both Kim and John start working again in March 2007, leaving TANF.

They continue to receive food assistance in the form of Transitional Food Assistance (TFA). They do not want TANF, but they need food assistance. They are both in and out of employment, but are trying not to return to TANF.

Kim does not want TANF, but does want food assistance. Kim and John are on and off jobs, but try not to come back on TANF.

Case Study 2 – Sally

Sally is pregnant and unmarried. Her baby is due August 2003.

Work History and Living Circumstances

Sally gets pregnant while attending high school. She gives birth to a son, Thomas, in August 2003. She makes arrangements for childcare so she can complete high school. Sally completes high school in March 2005.

Sally had limited work history while in high school and had worked before her third trimester when pregnant with Thomas. She begins working again in March 2005, after completing school.

Sally gives birth to a daughter, Brenda, in September 2006. Sally lives with Ralph, the father of Brenda. Ralph is employed, and Sally works after Brenda is born.

Public Assistance History

Sally applies for childcare in August 2003 for her newborn son, Thomas, so she can complete school. Sally applies for and receives TANF effective April 2004 for a household size of 1. The next month, Sally reports a new job. She is off TANF because her income is now over the eligibility limit.

Later, after Sally loses her job, she reapplies for TANF and remains on TANF until February 2007. Sally applies for Ralph's TANF benefits because he is not working.

Both Sally and Ralph then find jobs. She wants to terminate assistance because they are working again.

In April 2007, Ralph dies, leaving Sally as the sole support of two children under the age of 4. Sally applies for TANF and food stamps in October 2007. One of the children is receiving Social Security Assistance (SSA) survivor benefits. Sally's application is denied because that income puts her over the income eligibility limits for TANF, but her food stamps are reinstated.

By February 2008, Sally is employed again. Her food stamps are then terminated.

Case Study 3 - Donna

Donna is pregnant and unmarried. Her baby is due February 2007.

Work History and Living Circumstances

Donna has 12 years of education and is 24 years old. Donna is living with her fiancé, Raymond, the father of the unborn child.

Raymond does not work. He is active on a General Assistance - Unemployable (GAU) grant. The GAU program is designed for those individuals who are temporarily unemployable. In October 2006, GAU is terminated for Raymond.

Donna is on medical leave from her employer. She received her last pay check on September 6, 2006.

On February 9, 2007, Donna gives birth to a son, Billy. Soon after, Donna and Raymond are no longer living together and Donna is living with her parents.

Two months later, Donna is employed. She started working on April 18, 2007 part time for 9 hours per week at minimum wage. She is no longer living with her parents.

In July 2007, Donna reports that she is working 30 hours per week. By September, she is working full time with a different employer.

Public Assistance History

Donna applies for TANF on September 29, 2006. TANF starts in October 2006 for a household size of 1. Her TANF amount is \$349 per month. Her TANF grant is increased to \$546 after she has Billy in February 2007.

In September 2007, TANF is closed due to Donna's income, which puts her over the income eligibility limit. Donna would like to continue to receive food stamps.

Stories of Hunger or Food Insecurity

April 11, 2008, PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) published a story entitled, *Hunger in America*, from Bill Moyers Journal. Part of the story is cited below:

The news at the grocery store is grim for many. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food prices rose by 4% last year, the largest increase in 17 years. And, the USDA predicts they will rise another 4% this year. Eggs are up 40% in the past year; milk up 26% a gallon; a loaf of standard bread, 20%. All across the nation families, government agencies and food banks are feeling the pinch. So many people are in precarious straits our government figures 28 million Americans will be using food stamps this year, the highest level since the program began in the 1960s.

Global food shortages and a faltering U.S. economy are hurting food banks. That was the headline on April 21, 2008 for Hunger News, and was a topic that day on *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio.

May 9, 2008, *The Olympian*, Thurston County newspaper, ran a front-page story on the marked increase of individuals seeking help from the food bank. The food bank lamented shortages of day-old bread from bakeries and having to limit one bag of rice per person. Gas and food prices have driven up the demand for free food at the Thurston County Food Bank – an increase of 27% in individuals and an increase of 28% in households seeking food the first quarter of 2008 compared to the same period of 2007. Individuals can shop the Food Bank up to 2 times a year or more frequently with a social service referral. Three persons were interviewed:

Matt Begley was getting food for the third time in the past month. He is unemployed and can't afford food or gas and doesn't know what he would do without the food bank. "Even TV dinners are more expensive." Grace Dufoe tries to stretch her Social Security checks by going to the food bank. "Without the food bank, I basically don't eat." Patricia Kunkle, a single mother of three, has been going to the food bank for six months. She travels a lot as a caregiver, but her employer reimburses her for fuel only once a month. She gets food that lasts her family about two weeks. "The other two weeks are a struggle."

In a May 20, 2008 media release, Governor Gregoire urged generous donations to food banks to help those in need. The release stated that "many of Washington's 320 food banks are experiencing short-term shortages due to increased demand."

As illustrated by these contemporary examples, the current situation of hunger is exacerbated because of the skyrocketing prices of food and other commodities, such as gas. We use the terms hunger and food insecurity interchangeably. Food insecurity is defined as conditions and behaviors that characterize households having difficulty meeting basic food needs.

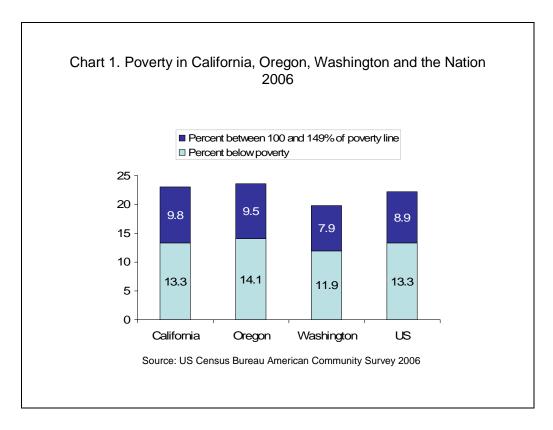
Following are some current facts and figures drawn from sources that document poverty, hunger and other indicators of economic hardship. This information provides a quick look at Washington in relation to Oregon and California and to the nation.

We then excerpt some information from a recently published article on the role that regular child support has in reducing a family's use of public assistance. Following that article is a series of county maps that show numbers and percentages of persons in poverty; numbers and geographic density of clients receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), food stamps and medical assistance; and percentages of custodial parents and noncustodial parents.

Statistics on Poverty in California, Oregon, Washington and the Nation

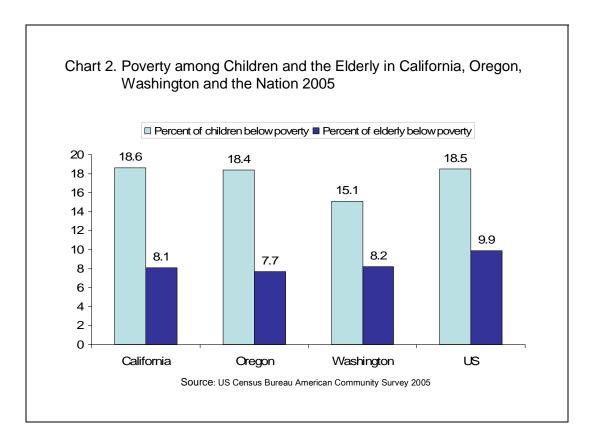
The West Coast Poverty Center at the University of Washington compiled information on poverty, which we cite below. In the U.S., 13% of the population was living below the federal poverty line in 2005. In California, Oregon, and Washington, 5.9 million people were living in poverty, including 2.1 million children. Chart 1 shows poverty estimates that indicate 13% of the population in California (4.7 million people), 14% of the population in Oregon (just under half a million

people) and 12% of the population in Washington (over 700,000 people) were living in poverty. When the poor are combined with those who are living close to poverty (between 100% and 149% of the poverty line), nearly one out of four people in California (23.1%) and Oregon (23.6%) and about one in five people in Washington (19.8%) are either poor or very close to it.



Poverty among Children and the Elderly

Children were generally more likely to live in poverty than working age or elderly adults (65 years of age and older) in 2005. Nearly one in five children in California (18.6%) and Oregon (18.4%) were living below the poverty line. Children in Washington were significantly less likely (15.1%) to live in poverty than children in Oregon, California or the nation. Washington had a slightly greater percentage of poor elderly at 8.2% than California (8.1%) or Oregon (7.7%), but less than the national percentage at 9.9% (see Chart 2).



Poverty among Minorities

Ethnic and racial minorities in the West Coast states and in the nation were more likely to be living below poverty than non-Hispanic whites in 2005. Between one in five and one in four Blacks and Hispanics live in poverty, depending upon the state. Nearly one-third (30.3%) of the Native Americans in Washington State live below the poverty line.

Poverty and Hunger Information

Even though Washington has fewer of its population in poverty than the nation or in Oregon or California, the number of poor is large, totaling 736,963 individuals in 2006. Where possible, characteristics of individuals living below poverty in Washington are used in the following statistics; otherwise information from national surveys is used.

 The young and the old are disproportionately poor as are Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics and females in Washington state.

• Incarceration and Poverty

- Nationally, parents who have been incarcerated experience negative outcomes on their employment and earnings, adding to the barriers of getting out of poverty.¹
- Not only are there negative effects of incarceration on the subsequent employment and earnings of these parents, but there are also negative collateral impacts on the family incomes of these parents' children.
- These negative effects have focused attention nationally and in Washington state² on re-entry strategies to improve the earnings and employment outcomes for prior offenders.
- Also, because of the increasing child support debt that accrues while parents are incarcerated, there has been interest in adjusting or even forgiving arrearages.³
- In the United States, for related children under 18 living in families with a female householder with no husband present, 42.1% were in poverty compared with 8.1% for married-couple families.⁴

Washington's numbers on hunger have improved since 2001, but too many Washingtonians live with hunger or the threat of hunger. Food

¹ Charles E. Lewis, "The Negative Effects of Incarceration on Fathers in Fragile Families," *Institute for Research on Poverty*, Visiting Scholars Program, 2001-2002.

² Elizabeth Drake, "Offender Reentry Initiative: Recommended Criteria for the Community Transition Coordinator Networks," *Washington State Institute for Public Policy*, August 2007.

³ Harry J. Holzer, "Collateral Costs: The Effects of Incarceration on Employment and Earnings among Young Men," *Institute for Research on Poverty*, Discussion Paper No. 1331-07, October 2007.

⁴ "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2006," *Current Population Reports*

stamps, food banks and the Women, Infant Children (WIC) program help alleviate this problem.

The first two county maps in this paper show where Washington's poverty populations are distributed. The ranking of the top six counties by numbers of individuals at the 100% poverty level (page 28) follows:

- 1. King
- 2. Pierce
- 3. Spokane
- 4. Snohomish
- 5. Yakima
- 6. Clark

The ranking by percentage of the counties' populations (page 29) who are poor, however, is:

- 1. Whitman 22%
- 2. Okanogan 21%
- 3. Yakima 21%
- 4. Ferry 20%
- 5. Kittitas 20%

These five counties had fewer than 100 persons per square mile in 2007, indicating they are rural. Two of these counties house state universities. Whitman is home to Washington State University, and Kittitas is home to Central Washington University, which in part explains their greater percentages of individuals below poverty.

Ferry, Okanogan and Yakima were designated distressed counties, based on their three-year average unemployment rates for 2004-06 that

exceeded 6.7%. Yakima is the only county on both lists. Forty-one percent of its population is Hispanic, a group that experiences a higher incidence of poverty than non-Hispanic whites.

The next series of county maps (pages 30 - 37) show where public assistance clients live in terms of numbers, density and specific programs used. The table below shows that the same six counties that have the greatest numbers of poor persons also have the greatest numbers of TANF, Food Stamp and Medical Assistance clients. County rankings by poverty and program numbers follow:

Table 1: Ranking of Counties by Poverty and Assistance Programs

Counties	Ranked by # of Persons in Poverty	Ranked by # of TANF Clients	Ranked by # of Food Stamp Clients	Ranked by # of Medical Assistance* Clients
King	1	1	1	1
Pierce	2	2	2	2
Spokane	3	4	3	3
Snohomish	4	5	5	4
Yakima	5	3	4	5
Clark	6	6	6	6

^{*} Note: Medical Assistance reflects all medical coverage group codes.

2006 Facts on Poverty⁵ and Hunger in Washington State

Characteristics of the Poor in Washington⁶

- 11.8% (736,963 individuals) of the population of all ages is poor
 - National Rank = 32
- 22.3% (392,653 individuals 25 years and older) have less than a high school education, including GED
- 26.5% (55,431individuals 16 years and older) are unemployed
- 1.9% (35,664) worked full-time, year-round in the past 12 months
- 29.0% (25,710) of American Indians and Alaskan Natives are poor
- 25.2% (52,277) of Black or African Americans are poor
- 12.8% (405,166) of females are poor
- 8.8% of individuals 65 years and over are poor
 - National Rank = 31
- 15.4% (231,026) of children under 18 are poor
 - National Rank = 32
 - It would be possible to fill SAFECO Field more than five times with Washington's 231,026 children living in poverty.

⁵ Below the federal poverty level

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⁶ Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006, unless otherwise noted.

Other Facts Indicating Hardship in Washington State⁷

- 3.2% of households have cash public assistance income
 - National Rank = 7 (tied with California and Michigan)
- 40.6% of Washington's grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren compared to 40.5% nationally
 - National Rank = 32
- 7.6% of individuals 5 years and older speak English less than "very well"
 - National Rank = 15
- 44.9% of renter-occupied units spend 30% or more of household income on rent and utilities
 - National Rank = 19 (tied with Ohio and Rhode Island)
- 10.2% of households are headed by female householders with no husband present
- Subsidized child care⁸
 - More eligible parents are choosing not to use child care subsidies since policy changes were implemented in 2002 and 2003.
 - The changes involved repeated background checks and no retroactive payments for in-home/relative care prior to a criminal background check.
 - By early 2004, the percentage of TANF families using Working Connections Child Care was at its lowest level in five years due to their heavy reliance on in-home/relative care.

⁷ US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006, unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Marna Miller and Jim Mayfield, "Declining Use of Subsidized Child Care: The Role of Criminal Background Checks," *Washington Institute for Public Policy*, June 2005

Hunger, Supplemental Nutrition and Food Bank Statistics

Washington State⁹

- 10.3% of Washington's households had food insecurity in the period 2004-06 compared with the national average of 11.3%.
- Washington's average three-year food insecurity percent for the period 2004-06 improved significantly from the period 1996-98 when it was 13.2%.
- An estimated 251,000 Washington households live with food insecurity.¹⁰
- The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) serves over 265,000 Washington mothers and babies per year.
 - Nearly half of all babies born in Washington benefit from the WIC program.¹¹

Nation

- In 2006, 1.2 million people went to food banks for help.
 - Of those people seeking help at food banks, 40% of them were children.¹²

US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2006, unless otherwise noted

¹⁰ United States Department of Agriculture 2007

¹¹ Washington State Department of Health 2006

¹² Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development 2007

Regular Child Support Helps Lower Cost of Public Assistance¹³

In Washington state, records show that since 1993, when full child support payments are regularly received by custodial families, the families are much less likely to use expensive public services. A dependable child support payment, even if it is small, provides stability for a custodial family.

With one element of stability, it is easier for others to develop. The evidence on custodial parent work and earnings supports this idea. When custodial parents are on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), regular full child support payments do not make a difference to the number of families on welfare or to the rates for finding or losing work. When not on TANF, custodial parents with regular full payments find jobs faster and keep jobs longer. Compared with working custodial parents with irregular payments, working custodial parents with regular full payments work more hours and have higher earnings. This dependable stream of child support income can improve a custodial parent's employability and family life.

In addition, the child support system can order private medical coverage for custodial children, reducing dependency on Medicaid. These child support services led to an estimated \$106 million in the state's cost savings for TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid in State Fiscal Year 2006.

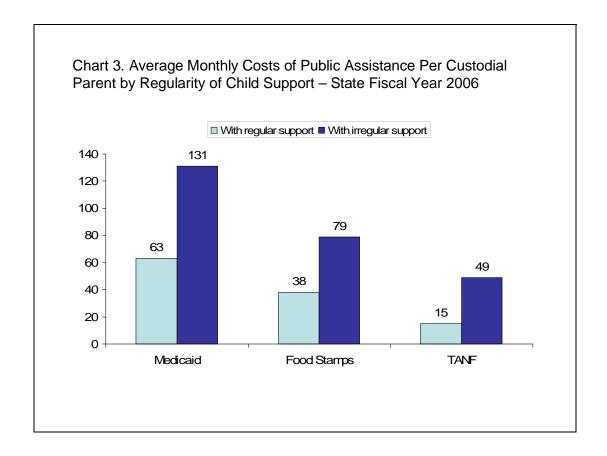
Custodial parents' cost savings are realized when they do not use services. Average costs for custodial parents with regular full payments

24 Department of Social and Health Services - Economic Services Administration - Operations Support Division

¹³ Excerpted from the article, "Regular Child Support Helps State Lower Cost of Welfare Assistance," by Carl Formoso, Qinghua Liu and Carol Welch in *Policy and Practice*, March 2008

are much lower because at all earning levels, fewer individuals will use TANF, food stamps or Medicaid.

The following chart compares State Fiscal Year 2006 average monthly costs for custodial parents with regular child support payments to costs for those with irregular payments. Custodial parents with regular full payments show less than half the cost of food stamps and Medicaid, and less than a third of the cost of TANF than those custodial parents receiving irregular support payments.



There are two maps (pages 36 - 37) that show the distribution of custodial and noncustodial parents by county. Overall, there is little difference in the county distributions between the custodial and noncustodial parents.

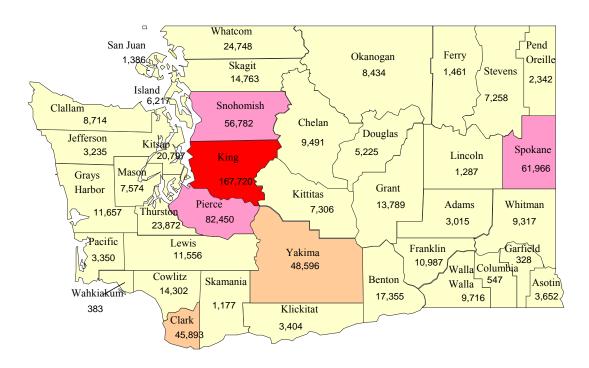
POVERTY AND HUNGER IN WASHINGTON STATE

Where both custodial and noncustodial parents reside mirrors the proportions of persons of poverty in this state and the proportions of clients receiving TANF, food stamps and Medical Assistance. These distributions are not surprising because more than two-thirds (67.7% in State Fiscal Year 2008) of the child support cases are either currently on TANF or have received TANF in the past.

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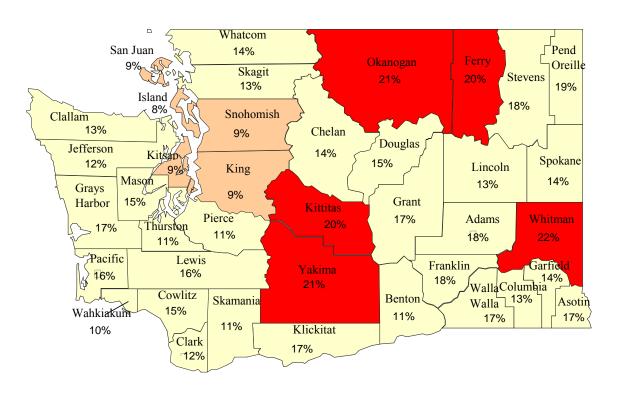
County Maps of Washington State

Number of Persons of All Ages at the 100% Poverty Level by County in Washington State: 2005



Source: Estimated 2005 Poverty Population (100% Poverty Level) per U.S. Census Bureau at http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/saipe/saipe.cgi.

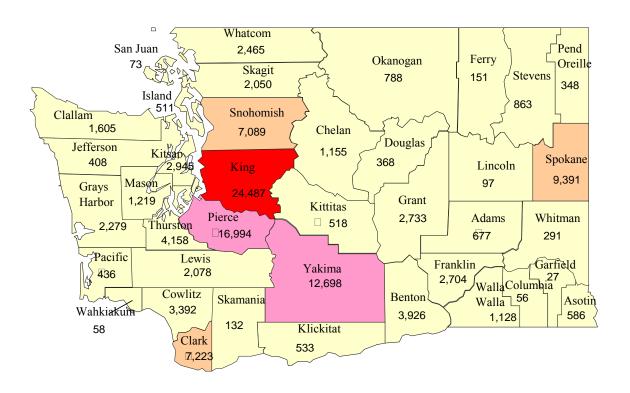
Percentage of Persons of All Ages at the 100% Poverty Level by County in Washington State: 2005



Note: State Percentage in Poverty = 12%

Source: Estimated 2005 Poverty Population (100% Poverty Level) per U.S. Census Bureau at http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/saipe/saipe.cgi. Estimated 2005 population per WA OFM at http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/aprill/intercensalto07.xls.

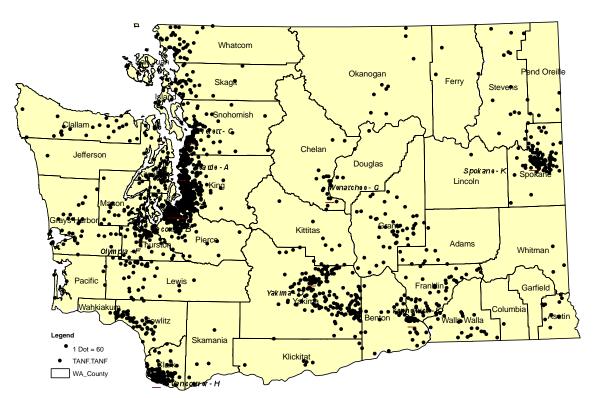
Number of TANF Clients by Residential County in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

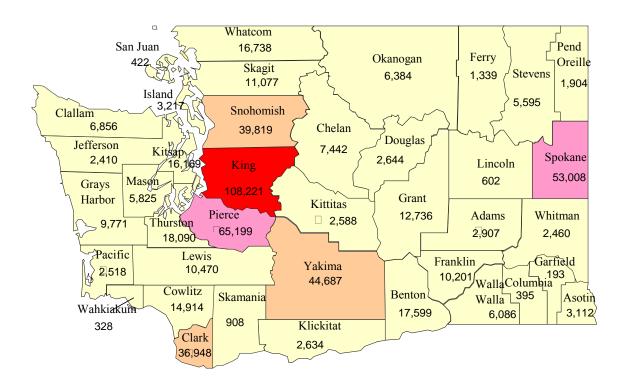
Number of TANF Clients by Density of Residential Zip Code in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

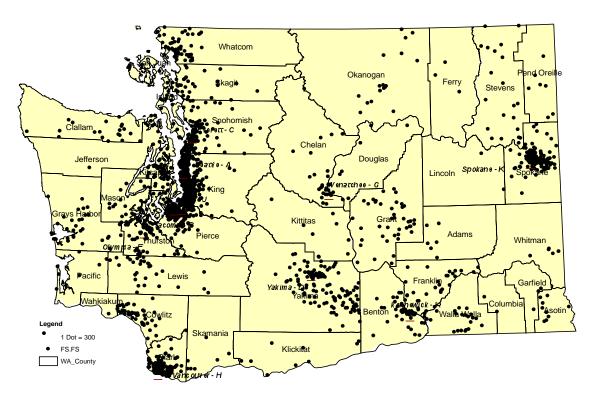
Number of Food Stamp Clients by Residential County in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

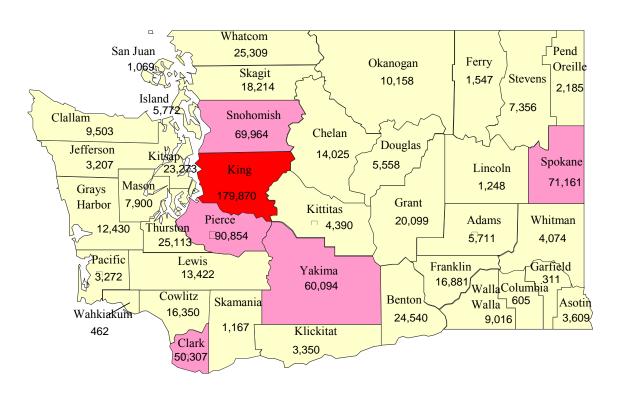
Number of Food Stamp Clients by Density of Residential Zip Code in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

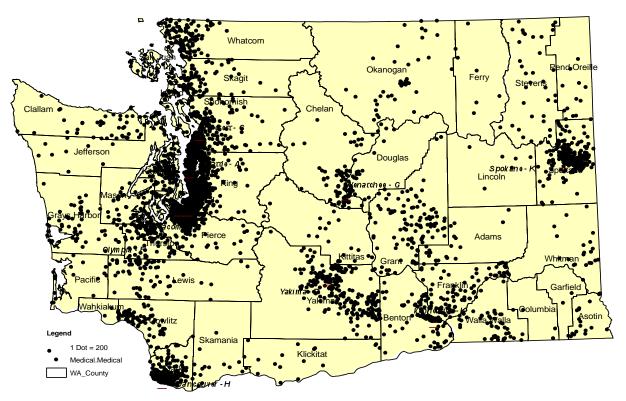
Number of Medical Clients by Residential County in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: Medical reflects all coverage group codes. If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

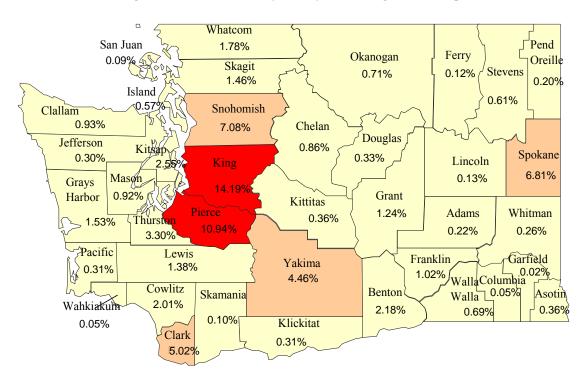
Number of Medical Clients by Density of Residential Zip Code in Washington State: January 2008



Source: ACES Data as of Februay 2008

Note: Medical reflects all coverage group codes. If a client is found to be in more than one county during the month (due to transition), then the client would be counted in each county they are found in.

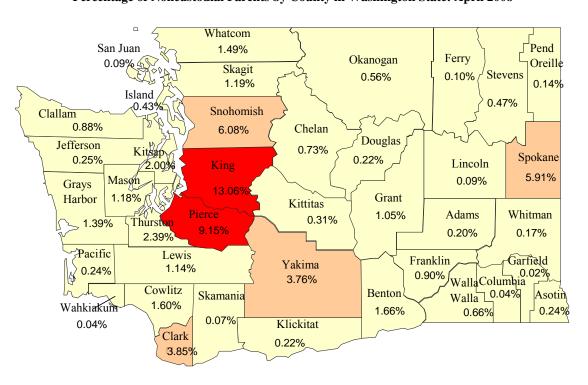
Percentage of Custodial Parents by County in Washington State: April 2008



Note: 24.54% of CPs are out of state or do not have valid Fipscode.

Provided by DSHS/ESA/OS/E-MAPS - May 14, 2008

Percentage of Noncustodial Parents by County in Washington State: April 2008



Note: 36% of NCPs are out of state or do not have valid Fipscode.

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