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Central Coast seniors struggling just to get by

Study finds almost half don't have income to meet their basic needs

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SACRAMENTO - Nearly half the seniors living alone in Monterey and San Benito counties can't afford to cover basic costs such as for food, housing, transportation and health care, according to a new study released Tuesday by the University of California, Los Angeles.

The study said 47.6 percent of seniors ages 65 and older who live by themselves in these counties don't have enough income to cover minimum needs based on the cost-of-living in California.

More than a quarter, 27.3 percent, living in two-person households in Monterey and San Benito counties run short of money to live securely.

There were 6,000 economically insecure seniors living alone in the two counties and 5,000 living in couples, according to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the primary agency that did the study.

The study found seniors were vulnerable in both rural and urban counties. The two counties with the highest elder financial insecurity were San Francisco at 61.3 percent for seniors living alone, and Imperial at 67.1 percent. They also led counties for senior couples.

"We saw there really isn't any sort of safe zone," said Erin Fogg, spokeswoman for the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, a nonprofit advocacy group that also worked on the study.

Statewide more than a million seniors living alone and with family members couldn't meet basic expenses, the study found.

The policy brief was based on 2007 data, the latest available, and the economic condition of these seniors likely is worse today given the current recession.

"As the economy wipes out retirement savings and destroys equity, our parents and grandparents will find paying for a roof over their heads and affording basic necessities even more of a struggle," Steven Wallace of the UCLA health center and lead author of the study, said in a prepared statement.
