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Health in the Community

## Many California Seniors Cannot Afford Basic Necessities, Including Food, Health Care; Minorities Disproportionately Affected

Forty-seven percent of California's older residents cannot afford to pay for basic necessities, including health care, food and housing, according to a report released on Tuesday, the *San Jose Mercury News* reports (de Sa, *San Jose Mercury News*, 2/24). The official federal poverty index, which is used to determine how government aid is allocated, does not account for regional differences in the cost of living and relies on an outdated methodology that does not reflect true costs, Susan Smith, director of the [Insight Center for Community Economic Development's](#) California for Economic Security project, said (O'Brien, *Contra Costa Times*, 2/23).

Researchers from the University of California-Los Angeles [Center for Health Policy Research](#) and ICCED developed the Elder Economic Security Standard to assess the true financial need to cover cost of living in California (Hendricks, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/24). The index accounts for the costs of housing, food, health care and transportation based on geography and other factors.

The index indicated that elderly women living alone, minorities and recent immigrants are the hardest hit (*Contra Costa Times*, 2/23). Seven out of 10 blacks and Hispanics, as well as six out of 10 Asians, live below the economic security standard, according to the report. Researchers in part attribute the disparity to "historical injustices that kept minorities from union jobs that offered pensions or steered them to low-paying manual work," according to the *Mercury News*. The report urges the state to use the new economic security standard to determine eligibility for means-tested state programs (*San Jose Mercury News*, 2/24).

 The report is available [online](#).