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## Guaranteed annual income greatly diminishes food insecurity issues for Canada's poorest seniors

A new study has found that food insecurity for the country's poorest seniors is cut nearly in half once they achieve the age of 65 and are eligible for the guaranteed annual income provided through the Old Age Security (OAS) program. It subsequently poses the question of why 65 has been established as the golden age for access to the program and whether an age-based demogrant is appropriate, given the substantial impact a guaranteed annual income can achieve.



The University of Lethbridge's Dr. Daniel Dutton co-authored the study along with Drs. Lynn McIntyre, Cynthia Kwok and Herb Emery of the University of Calgary. The age of 65 was established as the benchmark for eligibility to receive OAS in 1968 and only recently was under threat to be moved to 67 by the Harper government. With food security issues so interconnected with OAS, Dutton questions the age-based approach.

"Currently, age 65 is the magic number for some reason. The question we ask ourselves, why age 65, why not at 63? What is it about 65 that makes these people more deserving of Old Age Security?" he asks. "Obviously, the program itself isn't designed to target food insecurity but it does, so now we have to have the discussion."

The study utilized seven years of national-level data from the Canadian Community Health Survey to examine food insecurity prevalence among those aged 55 to 74. Focusing on low-income, single-person households (those making less than \$20,000 per year), the study found that as these seniors became eligible for OAS, the prevalence for food insecurity was cut nearly in half.

"Remember, the amount of money they receive is not a lot by any standard, it certainly isn't making them rich by any means, but what it is doing is giving them a measure of

stability,” says Dutton. “These people are now no longer unsure of what their future holds in terms of supplemented income from the government and that’s very important.”

Dutton is a post-doctoral fellow at the U of L’s Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy. His training is in population health and economics and he has a special interest in how policy can change population-level health outcomes.

As food insecurity leads to higher health-care costs and utilization, policy that reduces the prevalence of food insecurity has an important impact on low-income seniors and similarly, on the costs borne by the rest of society.

“This study demonstrates that even small amounts of guaranteed annual income can have a potentially important impact on poverty,” he says. “Now, we have to ask ourselves if an age-based demogrant is the way to go or is there a better way to distribute Old Age Security that will provide the stability of a guaranteed annual income to our poorest seniors and in turn, reduce food insecurity on a broader scale.”

Reduction of Food Insecurity among Low-Income Seniors as a Likely Impact of a Guaranteed Annual Income is available online: <http://bit.ly/PPP423d>.

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/study-finds-food-insecurity-issues-halved-guaranteed-annual-income>

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