



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES

## DEFINITION OF POVERTY AND DISABILITY PREVENTION

*The measure of relative poverty in the U.S. is more than twice the poverty in Europe.*

A forum was held by the Brookings Institution on “Poverty and Income”: A Look at the Census Data and What the Numbers Mean”. Members of the Brookings Institution, poverty research personnel, House Ways and Means staff, and a non-profit anti poverty advocate made presentations, at the forum.

### **Summary**

There was considerable focus at the forum on the definition of poverty, which has consequences for distribution of benefits in 82 government programs. Two measures of poverty were described at the forum. One was relative poverty, which is 60% of median income used by most European countries and is 23.5% of the U.S. population and Absolute Poverty, which is 8.7% of the U.S. population. The definition of poverty may have limited utility in addressing the human conditions of vulnerable people who are impoverished. Indirect benefits that are not calculated in the poverty figures were a concern in poverty definitions. However, the macro poverty calculations can mask the unmet human needs of people who are vulnerable.

Public support for programs to meet human needs do not necessarily reach all of the people they are intended to serve. For instance, 40% of persons eligible to participate in food stamps fail to do so. Eligible non-participants in the school lunch program are 30% and there are 5 million eligible non-participating children in Medicaid and SCHIP. In addition, policy barriers have been developed to obstruct access to critical health services. For instance, West Virginia’s Mountain Health Choice program, under the guise of providing access to new preventive services, has created procedural barriers where 92% of recipients have lost critical health services.

### **Disability Prevention Issues,**

There are many federal programs that use the poverty measure to distribute human resources. The poverty level, in many cases, determines who will get needed human services. People with disabilities; disproportionately depend on human resources for needed timely health care, adequate nutrition, housing and other human services related to well-being and their health. A low threshold of poverty may limit these vital human resources that result in diminished health that could contribute to disability.

**Intervention,**

A letter was written an anti-poverty advocate, who presented at the forum, concerning adverse implications of the definition of poverty on diminished health of vulnerable population.

**Recommendation**

The U.S. definition of poverty should approximate that of the European Union.