



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

DEFINITION OF POVERTY RELATES TO NEEDED RESOURCES TO PREVENT DIMINISHED HEALTH AND DISABILITY

Poverty standards should be developed that are commensurate with those of Europe

A congressional briefing was held on “Economic Cost of Child Poverty”. Presenters at the forum were an expert on tax and budget policies, an economist and an advocate to address policy issues of poverty

Summary

There are 37.3 million Americans in poverty. One in eight Americans and one in five children do not have the resources to meet their most basic needs. There are over 80 federal programs that distribute needed human resources to vulnerable populations based on levels of poverty. Thus, the definition of poverty is extremely important for adequate distribution of human resources for people in need. Poverty was described at the forum in absolute and relative terms. The relative measure, percent of median income, provides comparisons of social values that countries place on poverty.

A proposed new definition of poverty, in the U.S. would raise the current absolute level of poverty about 20% to 30% of median income. However, the European standard of 60% of median income doubles the proposed new U.S. standard. At the same time, there appear to be political forces that would significantly lower existing relative levels of poverty. Thus, it appears the current debate for a revised standard for poverty is at an inadequate level of subsistence to meet the human needs of vulnerable populations in the U.S. compared to European standards.

Disability Prevention Issues

The impact of poverty on human health was raised at the forum. Many anti-poverty programs are related to social determinants of health and life quality in later life

Social determinates associated with poverty may adversely impact on children and family psychological processes that contribute to disability. There may be intergenerational transmission of social determinants of health associated with diminished health and early mortality and morbidity associated with poverty. Thus, the poverty measure should be adequate to meet sufficient family and individual human needs that prevent diminished health and disability.

Intervention

A letter was written to Senate and House staff members associated with legislation on definition of poverty to comment on the human cost of poverty on vulnerable people from a population based public health perspective.

Recommendation

Poverty standards should be developed that are commensurate with those of Europe