Oregon DHS: Economy means increases in need for food stamps, cash and medical assistance

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The global recession will continue to drive even more Oregonians to seek state benefits to help them through the economic downturn, according to the biannual caseload forecast released by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) Thursday.

Sen. Margaret Carter addresses media at Thursdayâ€™s news conference, as (l-r) Erinn Kelley-Siel (assistant DHS administrator for Children, Adults and Families Division), Bruce Goldberg and Rep. Peter Buckley listen. The most dramatic increases in the 2009-2011 biennium will continue to be services that are most sensitive to economic downturns, such as food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Oregon Health Plan.

Here are the most significant increases DHS is planning for:

A 30.2 percent increase in the number of people needing food stamps up to a high of more than 671,000 Oregonians.

The number of families who will qualify for temporary cash assistance is predicted to increase by 24 percent up to nearly 26,000 families

The number of Oregonians eligible for health care through the Oregon Health Plan is expected to increase 23 percent to a high of 565,500

â€œItâ€™s important to remember that behind these statistics are Oregon families who will be facing job loss and financial difficulty in the months and years ahead,â€• said Bruce Goldberg, M.D., director of DHS. â€œWe will continue doing everything we can to ensure that people receive the assistance they need to help them get through these tough times.â€•

The forecast comes after demand for food stamps and cash assistance already hit record levels as Oregonâ€™s economy fell prey to the national downturn.

Representative Peter Buckley and Senator Margaret Carter, co-chairs of the Legislatureâ€™s Joint Ways and Means Committee joined Dr. Goldberg at a news conference releasing the 2009-2011 forecast. The lawmakers said the DHS forecast highlights one of their key challenges â€“ protecting Oregonâ€™s most vulnerable at a time when funding for the programs on which they depend is shrinking.

â€œThings are difficult for Oregonians in all parts of the state,â€• said Sen. Carter (D-Portland). â€œThe lucky ones are working two jobs to make ends meet. The others have lost their job and have nowhere else to turn for help. We cannot turn our backs on the people who count on us the most, when they need us the most.â€•

"Our challenge as we work our way through this budget is to find a balanced approach that helps those Oregonians who need it most and asks those who are able to share in the responsibility of getting Oregonâ€™s economy moving again,â€• said Rep. Buckley (D-Ashland).

The information is available on the DHS Web site in both short and long versions.