

December 2009

## **PERSONAL HYGIENE AND CLEANING SUPPLIES: OPTIONS TO INCREASE ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON STATE**

The 2009 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to:

*examine the need for and methods to increase the availability of nonfood items, such as personal hygiene supplies, soaps, paper products, and other items, to needy persons in the state. The study shall examine existing private and public programs that provide such products, and develop recommendations for the most cost-effective incentives for private and public agencies to increase local distribution outlets and local and regional networks of supplies.<sup>1</sup>*

This report explores options for increasing access and availability of non-food items, principally in the category of personal hygiene and cleaning products, for low-income Washington State residents.

The discussion is organized around the following questions:

- 1) What federal and state programs assist low-income people with food purchases? What can we learn from these programs about the need of this population for personal hygiene and cleaning products?
- 2) What are the options for expanding access and availability?
- 3) For each option, what are the principal advantages and disadvantages?

### **Summary**

This paper examines existing public and private programs that provide personal hygiene and cleaning supplies to low-income populations.

Based on interviews with knowledgeable people, three principal options are identified if the legislature chooses to increase access and availability. A hybrid approach is possible, as the options are not mutually exclusive.

- ✓ Establish a benefit card or voucher program for personal hygiene and cleaning supplies;
- ✓ Allocate additional support services' funds to cover personal hygiene and cleaning products for recipients of TANF; and
- ✓ Use existing governmental purchasing contracts to allow more community organizations to purchase products at lower negotiated prices.

<sup>1</sup> ESHB 1244, Sec. 610 (11), Chapter 564, Laws of 2009

In 2009, legislation related to this topic was heard by the Senate and House. SB 6053 directed the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to conduct a pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of providing personal hygiene and cleaning products to people in need, using volunteer-based organizations. Later in the session, a study proviso in the operating budget relating to this topic was assigned to the Institute.

**Question 1: What federal and state programs assist low-income people with food purchases? What can we learn from these programs about the need of this population for personal hygiene and cleaning products?**

When considering how many citizens in Washington State have difficulty affording personal hygiene and cleaning items, the most useful means of approximating this population is examining the number receiving assistance with food purchases. This section also describes other forms of public assistance through which individuals can currently access personal hygiene and cleaning products.

## Food Assistance

Individuals without adequate access to food because of their limited income are eligible for various assistance programs. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is a federal program that enables low-income families to purchase eligible food at authorized retail stores primarily through the use of electronic benefit cards. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the program at the federal level and state agencies at the state and local levels. In Washington, the program is called the Basic Food Program and includes an additional state-funded component.

Eligibility for the Basic Food Program is based on income and other factors. A household may qualify regardless of eligibility for other state assistance. Data from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) indicate that more than 430,000 households (over 826,000 individuals) received food stamps in Washington during October 2009; the average assistance per household was

\$246.55.<sup>2</sup> Food stamps can only be spent on food and cannot be used for:

- alcoholic beverages
- tobacco
- vitamins and/or medicines
- hot food products that are prepared to be eaten immediately
- non-food items (i.e. pet food, paper products, soaps, household supplies)

In recent years, advocates for low-income people have proposed allowing certain prepared foods (e.g., rotisserie chicken) to be purchased with food stamps. These efforts have not been successful to date.

Experts consulted for this paper indicated that program expansion to allow purchase of hygiene and cleaning supplies is extremely unlikely. The food stamp program is included in the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) budget, thus, hygiene and cleaning products are outside the scope of this agency's mission.

## Other Public Assistance Programs

Low-income individuals have some access to personal hygiene and cleaning products through various forms of public assistance besides SNAP, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid and Health and Recovery Assistance Administration, and the emergency food assistance programs.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).** Individuals who receive cash grants, such as TANF or General Assistance, can spend these funds on their hygiene/cleaning needs. The original cost of living standard of need for low-income families in the state, conducted by DSHS in 1980, took personal care, household supplies, and laundry into account.<sup>3</sup> The average TANF grant in state fiscal year 2008 was \$434 per month per case.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://emis.dshs.wa.gov>

<sup>3</sup> Russell Lidman & Tom Sykes (1981). *Cost of living in 1980 for low-income families in Washington State*. Olympia: Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Research Development, pp.47, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Economic Services Administration (2008). *ESA briefing book for state fiscal year 2008*. Olympia: Department of Social and Health Services.

Families with a TANF grant are eligible for transitional support services that help them work, look for work, or prepare for work. The services are limited to \$3,000 per year. Items that can be purchased with these funds include diapers (\$50 per month per child for up to three months), haircuts/styling (\$40 per request), and personal hygiene supplies to maintain appearance and grooming related to employment (\$50 per client per program year).

In July 2009, Washington State received a TANF Emergency Fund grant from the federal government for \$48,295,454.<sup>5</sup> This money was not earmarked for personal hygiene or cleaning supplies; however, to the extent that the state invests these funds in cash grants or WorkFirst support services, it could potentially be used for these purposes.<sup>6</sup>

**Medicaid and Health and Recovery Assistance (HRSA).** For residents in nursing homes or who receive medical-only assistance, the daily Medicaid nursing home rate includes costs for over-the-counter non-prescription items; personal hygiene items that fit this description are included in the daily rate.

HRSA covers prescription items, so prescribed personal hygiene items may be covered in this way. Cleaning supplies or housekeeping is a covered cost in the support services component of the daily Medicaid nursing home rate.<sup>7</sup>

**Federal: The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).** In terms of emergency food assistance programs, both the federal and state governments provide similar forms of assistance. TEFAP is a federal program that helps supplement food for low-income people by making commodity foods available to state distributing agencies. Under this program, clients must meet household income standards by providing an annual self-declaration. A client's household income may not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).** This program provides nutritious food packages designated specifically for the nutritional needs of low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to

one year postpartum, infants, children up to age six (not on WIC), and elderly people at least 60 years of age. Over 90 percent of clients are elderly; their income may not exceed 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Mother and qualifying children may not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

In Washington, the state distribution agency for the federal emergency food assistance funds is the Department of General Administration (GA), using food banks for distribution to local agencies that directly service the public. GA leverages its current delivery system to distribute USDA food for both TEFAP and CSFP. Annually, both programs provide \$10 to \$20 million in USDA food that serves over 90,000 households each month.

**State Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).** The Department of Commerce administers a state-funded Emergency Food Assistance Program. In 2009 the EFAP budget of approximately \$10 million leveraged about \$206.7 million (with tribal food voucher match and \$206.5 without tribal voucher match) in matching in-kind and cash contributions. EFAP provided funding for 340 food banks and distribution centers (funding staff, operational expenses, equipment, and food) and 32 tribal food voucher programs. In 2009, about 1.4 million clients were served through the programs and over 113.5 million pounds of food were distributed.<sup>8</sup>

EFAP policies allow food banks and distribution centers to use up to 10 percent of the funds to provide essential nonfood items such as personal hygiene or cleaning products. To be eligible for EFAP assistance, a client must be unable to purchase enough food for subsistence.

A 2008 survey of EFAP providers indicated that a majority (188 out of 222, or 85 percent) of the state's food banks carry non-food items.<sup>9</sup> When asked about "categories of items that their clients need more of," 157 out of 216 (73 percent) indicated non-food items.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/apprTANFemerfund.html>

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Sandy Jsames, WorkFirst Program, DSHS.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Kenneth Callaghan, DSHS.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Susan Eichrodt, Program Manager, Emergency Food Assistance Program.

<sup>9</sup> Conducted by Laura Pierce Consulting for the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (now Department of Commerce)

<sup>10</sup> Institute analysis of 2008 survey by Laura Pierce Consulting, *Emergency food assistance program customer survey report*, Olympia: Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

## Community-Based Sources of Assistance

In response to low-income people’s need for personal hygiene and cleaning products, some communities in Washington have created organizations that focus entirely on these products and function similar to food banks.

For example, in Olympia, the YWCA operates the “Other Bank” that distributes these products. In 2008, they reported helping 17,000 people with supplies, including the following: toilet paper, sanitary napkins and tampons, laundry detergent, dish soap, deodorant, shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrushes, shaving cream, and razors. This bank is open once a week.<sup>11</sup> The Ballard Food Bank offers a “hygiene bar” with these items three days a week for four hours.<sup>12</sup>

In Whatcom County, Hope House Multi-Service Center has established an “Above and Beyond Shop” that distributes personal hygiene products, diapers, school supplies, light bulbs, soaps, and other related supplies that cannot be purchased with food stamps.<sup>13</sup>

During a June meeting of the Emergency Food Assistance Program Advisory Group and Washington Food Coalition Board, the group discussed the legislative direction for this study. This organization includes representatives from all aspects of the emergency food distribution system (food banks, meal programs, and food distributors, large and small, rural and urban). Several representatives noted that when people are in need of food and come to a food bank, they always need personal hygiene and cleaning items, as well.

During the discussion, several individuals described efforts by their organizations to provide personal hygiene products to low-income populations. Exhibit 1 summarizes the comments from this meeting and offers examples of efforts in the state. Some program representatives did not have an opportunity at the meeting to comment, and some food banks were not represented; readers should be aware that this is not a comprehensive description of efforts in the state.

**Exhibit 1\***  
**Sample Emergency Food Assistance Practices:  
Personal Hygiene and Cleaning Products**

<b>Blue Mountain Action Council</b>	Focusing on residents in nursing homes who have very small incomes, this agency has distributed personal hygiene items to this population, along with shoes and clothing.
<b>Central Kitsap Food Bank</b>	For the last 12 years, this food bank has provided each recipient with one roll of toilet paper at each visit.
<b>Coastal Community Action Program</b>	For the last ten years, this organization has put together personal hygiene packs. They serve 800 individuals a year; their representative noted that they never have enough to give to everyone who is in need.
<b>Grays Harbor Food Bank</b>	Working with the local Dollar Store, the food bank has arranged for store clerks to collect money from customers at the counter to pay for particular hygiene products; the money is used to purchase the product from the store and distribute it to low-income people.
<b>Maple Valley Food Bank and Emergency Services</b>	This organization offers personal hygiene items once a month to its clients.
<b>Pantry Shelf of Walla Walla</b>	They put together packets for the homeless. Whenever possible, they provide items for families as well.
<b>Snohomish Community Food Bank</b>	This food bank has held several community drives for hygiene products.
<b>Tenino Food Bank</b>	For the last ten years, they have given toilet paper and soap with every sack of groceries. Working through the schools, they help supply feminine hygiene products to female students.
<b>Yakima Food Bank</b>	Bags with personal hygiene products have been put together for clients and distributed to emergency shelters as well as passed out to food bank clients. In cooperation with the dental hygiene program at the local community college, they set up educational videos for children visiting the food bank with their parents, and distributed toothbrushes.

\* In researching this paper, we contacted Clean the World’s CEO, and requested information on how their recycling and distribution efforts in Washington could be expanded. Their proposal is included as an appendix.

<sup>11</sup> YWCA of Olympia (2008). *2008 annual report*. Olympia, WA: YWCA.

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.ballardfoodbank.org/content/view/3/14>

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.ccsww.org>

## Other Efforts

For the last two years, the American Automobile Association of Washington and Northern Idaho has had donation campaigns in the fall to collect toiletry items (soap, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, toothpaste, and deodorant) and distribute them to persons in need through local shelters, food banks, and other charitable organizations. Donations for the “Soap for Hope” campaign can be dropped off at all AAA offices in these two locations. The campaign especially encourages travelers to bring their unused sample-sized shampoos, conditioners, lotions, and soaps to their local AAA office for distribution to those in need of such items. Each local office decides which charity will receive the donations. Last year’s campaign in early December recorded 30,000 items were collected; the 2009 figures for the same period were 82,000.<sup>14</sup>

Two hotels in Washington State currently collect their facilities’ used personal care products and mail them to a non-profit in Florida, Clean the World. The products are recycled, sterilized, and distributed to low-income populations. Bret Wirta, the CEO of Wirta Hospitality Worldwide in Bellevue, learned about Clean the World’s efforts and made arrangements to send products from their Quality Inn in Sequim, Washington. A second property owned by Wirta’s organization and located in Sequim, Holiday Inn Express and Conference Center, will begin sending products in February.

Mr. Wirta said this arrangement is an excellent way for a hospitality organization to help reduce the number of items thrown away and, thus, contribute to a better environment while also helping people in need. He noted that many midscale hospitality businesses are not certain how they can contribute to environmental causes, and this method is relatively easy to arrange and can have a significant impact.

Clean the World has submitted a proposal that would expand their efforts in this region (see Appendix).

## Question 2: What are the options for expanding access and availability?

Numerous experts were consulted to identify options to increase access and availability of personal hygiene and cleaning products to low-income populations. The identified options were explored to assess their relative feasibility. These choices are as follows:

- Establish a benefit card or voucher program for personal hygiene and cleaning supplies;
- Allocate additional support services’ funds to cover personal hygiene and cleaning products for recipients of TANF; and
- Use existing governmental purchasing contracts to allow more community organizations to purchase products at lower negotiated prices.

**Option 1: Establish a benefit card or voucher program for personal hygiene and cleaning supplies.** Under this option, individuals identified through an existing government assistance program would receive a state-funded electronic benefit card or voucher that would allow purchase of personal hygiene and cleaning products in selected grocery and/or drug stores for a certain dollar amount in a specific time period. Alternatively, the TANF grant amount could be increased to take advantage of the existing card system used for that program. There is, however, no guarantee that those additional funds would be used to purchase personal hygiene and cleaning products.<sup>15</sup>

**Option 2: Allocate additional support services’ funds to cover personal hygiene and cleaning products for recipients of TANF.** Transitional work-related support services are available to persons on the TANF program. This support is limited to \$3,000 per year with \$50 allowed per program year per client for personal hygiene products. Under this option, the limit could be increased.

**Option 3: Use existing governmental purchasing contracts to allow more community organizations to purchase products at lower negotiated prices.** The state’s General Administration agency has a co-op where members can purchase goods at negotiated prices. Many non-profits are eligible to receive a co-op membership allowing them access to negotiated prices from certain vendors. The two relevant vendors for this project are Correctional Industries and Office Depot.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Jennifer Cook, AAA Washington.

<sup>15</sup> Per RCW 74.08A.340(2)(c) legislative action would be required to increase the grant amount.

**Correctional Industries:** Eligible non-profits can enroll in the co-op; they receive a co-op number to set up an account to access government pricing. Once signed up and issued a user ID and password they can order on-line.<sup>16</sup> The relevant items for purchasing would include a personal hygiene kit, which contains individually sized deodorant, shampoo, comb, toothbrushes, toothpaste, bar soap, shaving cream, razor, tampon or pad (from \$2.69 to \$3.89), and shampoo (\$.76 for a 4 oz. bottle to \$54.43 for a case of 72).

**Office Depot:** Co-op members use their number to set up an Office Depot account; they are issued a login name and password. Delivery fees are waived for orders over \$50. Relevant items for purchasing are large packs of individually wrapped toilet paper (case of 80 for \$49.99) and tampons (box of 500 for \$89.99).

**Question 3: For each option, what are the principal advantages and disadvantages?**

The advantages and disadvantages of these options are displayed in Exhibit 2.

**Conclusion**

The goals of increasing access and availability of personal hygiene and cleaning products for the state’s low-income population can be met through three identified options. These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

**Exhibit 2  
Advantages/Disadvantages of Options to Increase the  
Availability of Personal Hygiene and Cleaning Products to Low-income People**

	Advantages				Disadvantages				
	Low income status for recipients already established	Access to a wider variety of products and prices	Increases supply at existing in-kind distribution sites	Uses existing commercial outlets	Requires state general funds	Counted as income for purposes of food stamps	State managers need to establish rules/accountability	Items need to be purchased, collected, and stored	Limited number of sites
<b>Option 1: Establish a benefit card or voucher program for personal hygiene and cleaning supplies</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Option 2: Allocate additional support services’ funds to cover personal hygiene and cleaning products for recipients of TANF</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Option 3: Use existing governmental purchasing contracts to allow more community organizations to purchase products at lower negotiated prices</b>	✓*		✓					✓	✓

\* Rules to establish low-income status are less rigorous than with other options.

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<sup>16</sup> See: <http://washingtonci.com>

## **Appendix: Proposal From Clean the World Foundation, Inc.**

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### **Executive Summary**

Through the collection, recycling and distribution of soap and shampoo products discarded by hotels every day, Clean the World Foundation, Inc. (CTW) has created a charitable soap recycling operation and is dedicated to the below:

- Creating Jobs – by providing meaningful employment in collection and recycling operations to men and women in recovery homes and shelters;
- Supporting the Needy – through distribution of recycled hotel soap, shampoo, conditioner, and other amenities to local charitable support organizations;
- Save the Planet – by reducing the tons of daily hotel waste dumped into landfills nationally;
- Save Lives – through basic hygiene and hand-washing efforts preventing millions of children's deaths in poor countries caused by diarrheal disease and acute respiratory infection.

With over 100 hotels participating with monthly program fees and more quickly joining, CTW has already eliminated over 200 tons of waste reusing and diverting these products from landfills in a few short months, including placing large soap deliveries to Haiti and Africa. CTW was founded in February 2009 as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation.

### **Process Overview:**

CTW implements its mission through: (i) collecting, sorting and processing discarded soap, shampoo and lotion product donations from participating hospitality partners; (ii) recycling these product donations at its current facilities in Florida; and (iii) delivering these recycled product donations to domestic homeless shelters and impoverished countries suffering from high death rates due to diarrheal disease and acute respiratory infection.

We intend to open at least nine Recycling Operations Centers in key national markets, including the State of Washington. These locations will serve as the region's central recycling facility, with the equipment and staff necessary to collect and recycle the soaps and amenities collected from hotels and other organizations. The primary equipment consists of steamers, sanitizers, trays, drying racks, shipping containers, and collection bins.

### **Project Goal – Creating Jobs:**

Clean the World has partnered with Central Care Mission ([www.CentralCareMission.org](http://www.CentralCareMission.org)) (CCM) a 20+ year old charitable organization in Florida to run our 3,000 square foot Recycling Operation Center with offices and loading dock in a light industrial commerce park. CCM is a long-term residential program with a positive environment for men run by William Lowry, Executive Director. As part of their Vocational program CCM runs a soap sterilization plant where workers process soap, shampoo, conditioner and bath gel.

In partnership with a strong qualified mission or shelter in each of the key national markets, CTW can expand quickly providing jobs as plant managers, drivers, collection and recycling staff. A single interested key local partner with centrally located facilities based in Washington State will be selected as a recycling partner, providing meaningful employment for the men and women in their recovery shelter or mission. Many men's and women's shelters often need paying jobs in order to fully recover and contribute positively in society. CTW has already created 10 new full-time jobs in Florida with ability to expand in each market.

### **Project Goal – Supporting the Needy:**

CTW will further select Local Mission Partnerships as qualified non-profits and shelters who are in need of recycled amenities for their programs. On average, 100 pounds of amenities per month (soap, shampoo, lotion, and conditioners) are donated to a local shelter, providing a broad reach to provide positive support for basic hygiene needs.

### **Project Goal - Environment:**

CTW has conducted extensive work since its beginnings as a charitable organization founded in February 2009. Our Founders set upon the goal to create the nation's first large scale soap recycling operation - to recycle gently used soap, save lives, create socially responsible jobs, and protect the environment. Based on our work to date, there are now over 100 hospitality partners using CTW's recycling program, including Marriott, Intercontinental, Hilton and Hyatt, representing approximately 18,000 total hotel rooms. Since its inception, Clean the World has been steadily increasing its services and operations to accommodate rapidly expanding community needs, awareness and donations, and has accepted in-kind donations of more than \$475,000. In the process, Clean the World has put over 3 million soap bars and 100,000 pounds of shampoo and conditioner back into human use, simultaneously eliminating over 200 tons of waste.

**Project Goal - Health:**

According to the World Health Organization, diarrheal disease and acute respiratory illness are the number three and number one causes of death, respectively, in lower income countries, resulting in approximately 4.5 million combined deaths annually. Most of these deaths occur among children under the age of five. Among these lower income countries, Africa and Southeast Asia are most afflicted with diarrheal disease and acute respiratory illness. CTW is focused on the elimination of these two illnesses.

In the longer term we intend to leverage and build upon models that have already been stated by these studies and previous soap interventions. CTW intends on collaborating with international health groups, such as the WHO, that are currently conducting studies in order to quantify and isolate any incremental effect of the CTW soap interventions in subject regions.

**State of Washington Summary:**

With almost 200,000 hotel rooms in its four-state proximity, the economic opportunity exists to create a Seattle based CTW Recycling Operation Center (ROC). Seattle is one of nine key markets selected by CTW to create an entire facility and support infrastructure dedicated to the collection, recycling, and distribution of discarded hotel amenities.

<b>CTW - State of Washington</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>
<b><u>Hotel Room Summary</u></b>			
Hotel Rooms	127,965	145,810	145,810
Hotel Room Nights	9,685,500	31,932,300	31,932,300
<b><u>Amenities Summary</u></b>			
Recycled Amenities (Tons)	64.1	166.3	166.3
In-Kind Amenities Value	\$ 968,600	\$ 3,193,200	\$ 3,193,200
<b><u>Local Support Summary</u></b>			
Jobs Created	11	12	12
Local Shelters Supported	100	300	300
<b>Total One-Time Start-Up Needs</b>	<b>\$ 382,000</b>		

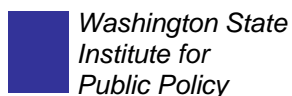
The one-time startup costs of \$382,000 will be utilized to create a Washington State based recycling location serving cities and towns across the region, and our results will affect a positive outcome reducing landfill waste, jobs created in domestic shelters and missions, all while helping to save lives.

Based on our successful experience and rapid adoption of our model for the Florida hotel and lodging industry, we expect to serve almost 150,000 hotel rooms, representing almost 32 million room nights annually, in order to support 300 local shelters, recycling over 165 tons of hotel soap and amenities which would ordinarily be discarded.

*Clean the World, Shawn Seipler, www.cleantheworld.org*

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