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The poverty rate hit **11.4 percent** in 1977, its lowest point. In the '80s and '90s, the poverty rate rose and fell, but never grew above **15.2 percent**. Since 1999, the poverty rate consistently has been on the rise, landing at **15 percent** in 2011.

FEDERAL POVERTY THRESHOLDS

In 2012, the federal poverty threshold for a single person under age 65 with no children was \$11,945. For a single parent with one child, that number increased to \$15,825. For two adults and two children living in the same household, the poverty threshold was \$23,283.

RELATED CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

SIZE OF FAMILY UNIT	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+
ONE PERSON (unrelated individual) Under 65 years 65 years and over	11,945 11,011								
TWO PEOPLE Householder < 65 years Householder 65+ years	15,374 13,878	15,825 15,765							
THREE PEOPLE	17,959	18,480	18,498						
FOUR PEOPLE	23,681	24,069	23,283	23,364					
FIVE PEOPLE	28,558	28,974	28,087	27,400	26,981				
SIX PEOPLE	32,847	32,978	32,298	31,647	30,678	30,104			
SEVEN PEOPLE	37,795	38,031	37,217	36,651	35,594	34,362	33,009		
EIGHT PEOPLE	42,271	42,644	41,876	41,204	40,249	39,038	37,777	37,457	
NINE PEOPLE OR MORE	50,849	51,095	50,416	49,845	48,908	47,620	46,454	46,165	44,387

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Wisconsin Way

Wisconsin is one state trying to change that.

Tim Smeeding, director of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was a member of then-Gov. Jim Doyle's poverty commission in 2008 and convinced him to not follow the lead of a number of governors setting a goal to cut poverty levels in half within 10 years.

"None of them have achieved it," he said.

Smeeding suggested the Great Recession would force poverty numbers higher or, at the very least, it would be hard to keep the numbers down. So he told the governor, "what you could do is more accurately measure poverty and you could do a better job measuring the effects of the programs we use to fight poverty, which aren't included in the overall poverty rate."

Smeeding was head of the economic status subcommittee and recognized the two big federal programs—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, and the earned income tax