Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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New 2013 ACS 5–Year Estimates Released for Pennsylvania:
Data for Census Block Groups Accessible in American FactFinder for First Time

PENN STATE HARRISBURG – The U.S. Census Bureau today released its annual installment of new demographic and socio-economic data for every community in the United States. The 2009-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates provide data for all counties, municipalities, and other geographic areas down to the census block-group level. Notable for this year's release is the addition of Census block group (summary level 150) data in the Bureau's premier online data tool – American FactFinder. Previously, this geography level was only available through the ACS Summary File.[1]
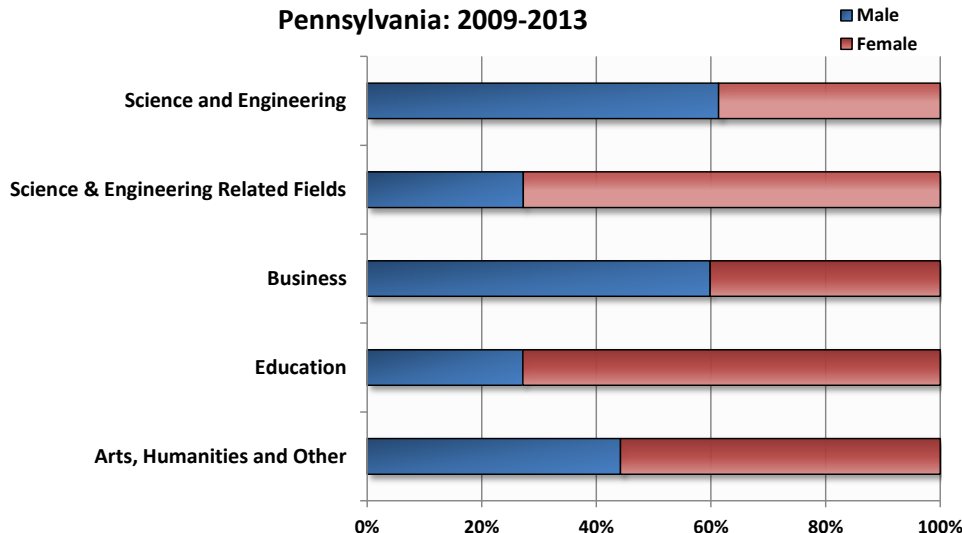
In Pennsylvania, new detailed socio-economic data was released for all 67 counties, 2,561 municipalities, 500 school districts and several other statistical areas (see Geography Notes section below).

Bachelor's degree by Field of Degree
Five years of data collection has been reached since the ACS commenced asking questions about field of degree for those holding a bachelor's degree in 2009. This allows the ACS to offer the first socioeconomic data on this topic for all 67 counties. There are thirteen new tables available on this topic.

Information from this new data reveals the gender distribution within a particular field of degree. Although the distribution among all bachelor's degree holders was even for males (48.6 percent) and females (51.4 percent) in Pennsylvania during the period 2009-2013, men and women held majorities in specific fields (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Sex Distribution Within Field of Bachelor's Degree, Pennsylvania: 2009-2013

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[1] As of now, the U.S. Census Bureau does not plan to include block group data in American FactFinder for previous editions of the ACS 5-Year Estimates.

Science and engineering was the most male-dominated field group, with 61.4 percent male graduates. Business degree followed closely as the second most male-dominated with 59.9 percent. Conversely, females dominated in other degree fields, relative to their proportion of bachelor's degree holders. This is particularly true in education and the science and engineering related degree fields, where just more than 1-in-4 degree holders were male. Women also held a greater percent of the bachelor's degrees in the arts, humanities and other fields (55.8 percent).

Of all Pennsylvania counties, Philadelphia County had the largest percentage of women in the science and engineering field with 47.5 percent in 2009-2013. In the female-dominated field of education, men had the highest percent of education related bachelor's degrees in Juniata (41.7 percent) and Union (41.5 percent) counties.

Type of Health Insurance Coverage for Those Aged 18 to 34 Years
The 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates also offer the first detailed data relating to the type of health insurance coverage by age. This data will provide those tasked with planning and implementing health policy and programs a full picture of the type of lack of insurance at the state, county and municipal level for a specific age cohort.

According to the new data, more than three-quarters (76.1 percent) of Pennsylvanians aged 18 to 34 years had one type of health insurance in 2009-2013. Five percent of 18 to 34 year olds had two or more types of insurance, while the remaining 18.9 percent lacked health insurance coverage. Among persons aged 18 to 34 years with one type of insurance, counties in the Central and Southeastern part of the state had the highest rates of employer-based health insurance. Counties with 80.0 percent or more of 18 to 34 year olds with employer-sponsored health insurance only included: Cumberland, Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, Snyder Union, Adams, Columbia and Perry. A total of fifteen counties had rates of employer-based health insurance only below 70.0 percent for this age group. Most of these counties were located in Western Pennsylvania, except Philadelphia, Pike and Wayne counties

Of 18 to 34 year olds with one type of insurance, the rate of those having Medicaid/means-tested public coverage as their sole health insurance ranged from a low of 5.2 percent in Centre County to a high of 27.4 percent in Mifflin and Forest counties.

Age by Poverty Status
Another new data table (B17020) available from the 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates accounts for various age categories by poverty status. The new breakdowns include: Under 6 Years, 6 to 11 Years, 12 to 17 Years, 18 to 59 Years, 60 to 74 Years, 75 to 84 Years, and 85 Years and Over.

Figure 2. Poverty Status by Age, Select PA Cities: 2009-2013

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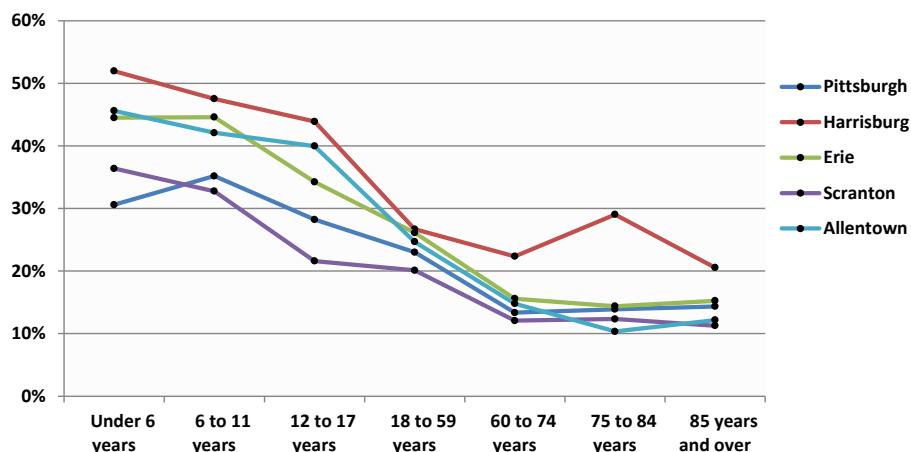Harrisburg   Institute of State and Regional Affairs

Figure 2 shows the poverty rate for select cities throughout the commonwealth. In general, the poverty rate for Pennsylvanians declined as they moved through the age spectrum. The poverty rate was highest for either the under 6 years or 6 to 11 years age cohorts for all the selected cities, while the lowest rates were found in one of the cohorts after age 60 years.

Geography Notes
The 2013 ACS estimates are the first to include tabulations for the new Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (Core Based Statistical Areas - CBSAs). These geographic areas use the February 2013 CBSA definitions, based on 2010 Census results.

School districts still reflect 2011-12 boundaries as these boundaries are only updated every two years as part of the School District Review Program. Congressional Districts reflect the 113th Congress, while all other areas reflect boundaries as of January 2013. Due to the delay in getting the state legislative districts approved in Pennsylvania, the boundaries for state house and senate districts continue to use those from 2001.

Starting with today's release, the ACS will no longer produce estimates for summary level 080: State-County-County Subdivision-Place/Remainder-Census Tract. Summary level 080 estimates are for portions of tracts that are the intersecting areas of county subdivisions and places, or portions of county subdivisions and places that are the intersecting areas with tracts. The Census Bureau made this decision in part because 70 percent of estimates for this summary level were zero. Summary level 140: State-County-Census Tract will continue to be produced.

More about the 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates
The ACS 5-Year Estimates use a series of monthly samples to produce annually updated data for the same geographic areas formerly surveyed via the decennial census long-form sample. ACS 5-Year estimates are derived from 60 months of data collection to provide a large enough sample size to ensure the most reliable estimates for smaller geographic areas.

The 2009-2013 ACS Estimates aggregate the sample responses from Pennsylvania households collected from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2013 and represent the average estimate of a population characteristic over the entire time period. For the years 2009 and 2010, the 2009-2013 ACS estimates were based on an annual, nationwide household sample of about 250,000 addresses per month (2.5 percent of the population per year). Because of sample size enhancements in June of 2011, the data collected in 2011 and 2012 were based on roughly 300,000 addresses per month, or 3 percent of the population per year. Beginning in January 2013, the ACS added an internet self-administered data collection instrument as a new mode. This option was only available to mailing addresses in the United States. The ACS discontinued sending questionnaires in the initial mailing and instead sent households an invitation to fill out the survey on-line. Non-respondents received a questionnaire in the second mailing. Finally, because of the Federal Government shutdown in October 2013, the ACS did not collect data for the October panel. As result, the 2013 sample was smaller than the 2012 sample.

Estimates from the 2009-2013 ACS 5-Year product are available for all geographic areas in Pennsylvania, including the geographies that were included in three-year and one-year releases. The 2013 ACS 5-Year Estimates are different from, and should not be directly compared to the 2013 ACS 1-Year Estimates or the ACS 3-Year Estimates, released previously, which relate to specific time periods only. As is the case with all surveys, statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. Margins of error have been omitted in this Research Brief for clarity, but are available for all ACS estimates from factfinder2.census.gov.

Five-year estimates are released annually for all geographies, continuing with next year's release of the 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year Estimates, which will produce - for the first time – non-overlapping ACS 5-Year Estimates (data users will be able to compare this data product to the 2005-2009 ACS 5-Year product). Non-overlapping ACS 5-Year period estimates allow smaller communities (those with fewer than 20,000 in population) to compare changes over time in their social, economic and housing characteristics.

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth's expert in demographics and Census datasets. To request custom American Community Survey data tables or maps, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center at 717.772.2710.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
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The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth's official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau's National State Data Center Program.

Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center's State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg's Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.

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