



# Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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## 2011 ACS Data Shows Poverty Continues to the Rise in the Keystone State

**PENN STATE HARRISBURG** – More Pennsylvania adults are living below the poverty level, according to the 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates released today by the U.S. Census Bureau. The percentage of Pennsylvania adults below the poverty level increased from 11.8 percent in 2010 to 12.1 percent in 2011. This continues a pattern of steady increases since 2007 when the rate was 10.2 percent. The poverty rate for those ages 18 to 64 increased from 12.7 percent in 2010 to 13.1 percent in 2011. An even larger increase was seen in the poverty rate for related children under age five, from 21.7 percent in 2010 to 23.1 percent in 2011.

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides updated information about the nation's changing and diverse population every year. Data relating to income, poverty, educational attainment, commuting statistics, disability, language spoken at home and many other socio-economic characteristics are included in the survey.

In Pennsylvania, data was released for all congressional districts; 40 counties; the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, Erie, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, and Scranton; 22 unified school districts; metropolitan statistical areas; and several other geographies with populations of 65,000 or more. Norristown Area School Districts was added to the one-year ACS estimates this year, having attained the 65,000 population threshold.

### Income and Education

The median household income in Pennsylvania was \$50,228 in 2011, just below the national figure of \$50,502 and second lowest in the Northeast region, above only Maine with \$46,033.

Among Pennsylvanians aged 25 and older, 88.6 percent completed high school or more, compared to 85.9 percent in the nation. Additionally, 27.0 percent of the 25-and-older population in the state had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 28.5 percent nationally and 32.8 percent in the Northeast region.

### Housing Costs

In 2011, the median value for an owner-occupied home in Pennsylvania was \$164,800, just below the value for the nation (\$173,600) but far below the value for the Northeast region (\$250,100). The median gross rent (rent plus utilities) in the state was \$786, compared to \$871 for the nation and \$985 for the Northeast region.



## **Survey Improvements**

As a replacement to the former once-a-decade decennial long form sample data (i.e. Census 2000 SF3), the reliability of the ACS estimates is critical to data users. In June 2011, the ACS annual sample size was increased from 2.9 million to 3.54 million addresses, resulting in an improvement in the reliability of the estimates by roughly 22 percent. In Pennsylvania, this improvement means that an additional 22,000 households will receive an ACS form annually. To increase reliability of ACS estimates further, data users should consider using a higher level geographic area when analyzing more detailed characteristics. For instance, in most cases, when evaluating a detailed data table like median earnings for men and women at different education levels, data users will get a more reliable estimate at the county-level as opposed to the municipal-level. Also, collapsed tables, indicated by the leading "C" in the ACS Table ID, help to increase reliability of estimates by creating a larger sample size for a given population or housing characteristic.

Other 2011 ACS improvements include the modification of the sample design to increase the reliability of estimates for smaller census tracts. This change, which began in January 2011, calls for higher sampling rates for smaller census tracts, while slightly reducing the sampling rate of larger tracts. The goal of this sample reallocation is to minimize the differences in reliability among census tracts. Census tract data from the ACS will be available in the 2007-2011 ACS 5-Year file, which will be released in December.

## **New Tables**

The new detailed table Worker Population for Workplace Geography (B08604), one of several new tables available in the 2011 ACS, provides an estimate of the number of workers in a geographic area during standard working hours. Other new tables include a simplified employment status table (B23025) and nine new, more detailed tables for racial groups.

Possible new ACS topics in the future include computer ownership/internet access and parental place of birth. These proposed table additions would not be implemented until 2013 or later.

## **More about the ACS**

The 2011 ACS estimates are based on an annual, nationwide household sample of about 295,000 addresses per month, or nearly 3 percent of the population per year. The estimates aggregate the sample responses from Pennsylvania households collected from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011. Geographic areas for which data are available are based on total populations of 65,000 or more. They are different from, and should not be directly compared to the previously released ACS multi-year estimates. As is the case with all surveys, statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error.

Upcoming releases from the ACS included the 2009-2011 ACS three-year estimates in October and the 2007-2011 ACS five-year estimates in December. Three-year estimates will be available for all geographies that have a population of 20,000 or above, while the five-year estimates will produce data for all Pennsylvania counties, municipalities, and other census geographies down to the block group level.

The American Community Survey is conducted every year to provide up-to-date information about the social and economic needs of a community. Annual releases from the ACS mean that communities will no longer have to rely on a single snapshot of socio-economic data that becomes increasingly dated throughout the decade. The ACS helps federal officials determine where to distribute more than \$400 billion each year. Responses to the survey are strictly confidential and protected by law.

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.

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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.**