



Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

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2008 American Community Survey Released: Demographic Snapshot Now Includes Health Insurance Data

PENN STATE HARRISBURG – The Census Bureau today released new demographic data for all 50 states, and the nation's largest counties and cities, including for the first time this year data on health insurance coverage. The 2008 American Community Survey is a dataset that replaces the long form of the decennial census, data that includes income, poverty, educational attainment, commuting statistics, disability and employment.

In Pennsylvania, data was released for all congressional districts, 39 counties, the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, Erie, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, and Scranton, 19 unified school districts, metropolitan statistical areas, and several other geographies.

According to the new data, 9.4 percent of Pennsylvanians lacked health insurance coverage, more than 1.15 million people in total. That is a smaller proportion of uninsured, however, than the Northeast Region (10.2 percent) and the United States as a whole (15.1 percent). This is the first time that the Census Bureau has included health insurance coverage in the American Community Survey.

Since the American Community Survey is updated every year, data users can make detailed comparisons over time for a variety of socioeconomic characteristics. For example, educational attainment in Pennsylvania is on the rise: from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, the percent of Pennsylvanians with a Bachelor's degree or higher has increased (from 25.4 percent in 2006 to 26.3 percent in 2008), as has the percent of Pennsylvanians with a high school diploma or higher (from 86.2 percent in 2006 to 87.5 percent in 2008).

American Community Survey data also allows the states to be quickly compared on a variety of measures. For example, Pennsylvania ranks 4th in the nation in the percent of its households that include at least one member who is 65 or older (26.8 percent). Pennsylvania is also ranked 4th in the percent of its U.S. citizen population that was born in Pennsylvania (79.0 percent).

Other Selected Data

- The proportion of housing units that were owner-occupied has decreased from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 (from 71.7 percent in 2006 to 70.8 percent in 2008). During the same time, the value of owner-occupied housing increased (from \$155,000 in 2006 to \$164,700 in 2008).
- In 2008, 3.8 percent of the state's population (458,605 people in total) had serious difficulty hearing, while 2.2 percent (269,318 people in total) had serious difficulty seeing. This is the first time the American Community Survey has included hearing and vision disability data separately.
- The median gross rent paid by Pennsylvania renters has increased from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 (from \$706 in 2006 to \$726 in 2008).

More about the ACS

The American Community Survey replaces the decennial census long form. The 2010 Census will be short-form only. As part of the Census Bureau's reengineered 2010 Census, the data collected by the ACS helps federal officials determine where to distribute more than \$300 billion each year, and responses to the survey are strictly confidential and protected by law.

In October, the Census Bureau will release ACS three-year estimates, which produce data for dozens more counties, cities, school districts, and other municipalities. Three-year estimates for 2006-2008 will be available for all geographies that have a population of 20,000 or above. In 2010, five-year estimates will be released for all counties, municipalities, and other geographies.

The 2008 ACS estimates are based on an annual, nationwide household sample of about 250,000 addresses per month, or 2.5 percent of the population a year. Geographic areas for which data are available are based on total populations of 65,000 or more. As is the case with all surveys, statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error.

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, 2008 American Community Survey
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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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