United States Census Bureau

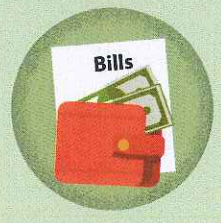
MEASURING AMERICA

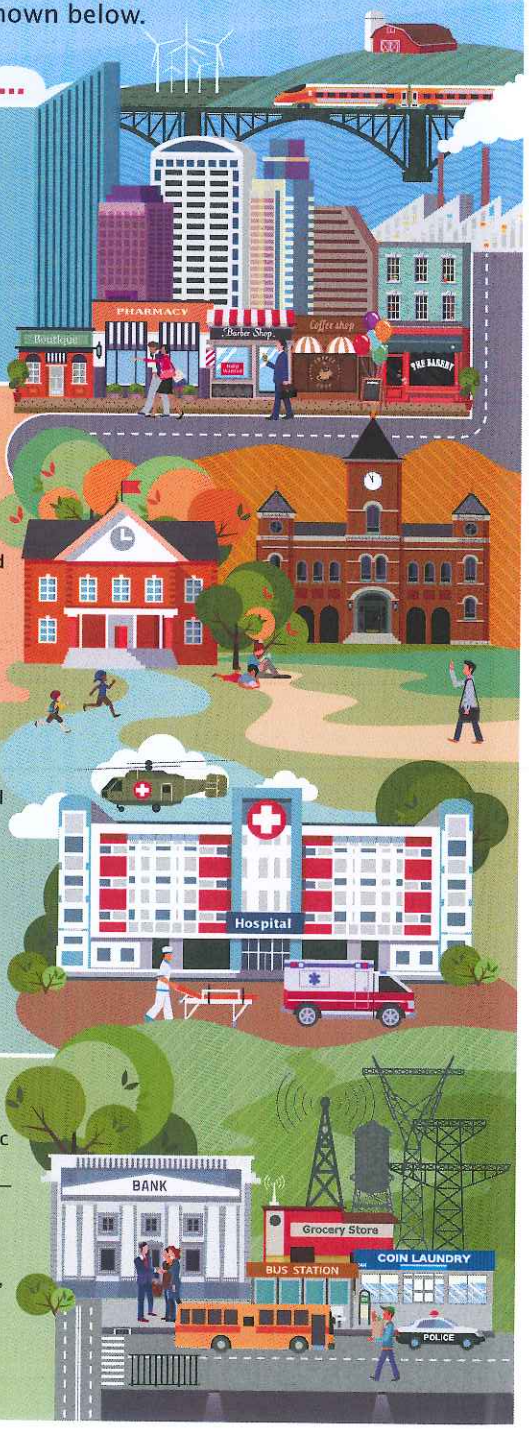
May 21, 2015

Your Answers, Your Future

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides vital information on a yearly basis about our nation and its people. Through the ACS, we know more about jobs and occupations, educational attainment, veterans, whether people own or rent their home, and other topics. Public officials, planners, and entrepreneurs use this information to assess the past and plan the future. When you respond to the ACS, you are doing your part to help your community plan hospitals and schools, support school lunch programs, improve emergency services, build bridges, and inform businesses looking to add jobs and expand to new markets, and more. The ACS consists of 72 questions pertaining to the topics shown below.

What we ask about...	How your responses help...
Employment The ACS asks whether respondents are employed, unemployed, and out of the labor force. It also asks about weeks and hours worked and about industry and occupation.	This information helps government at all levels better understand unemployment and the availability of workers, plan unemployment programs and services, and develop programs to boost employment. Communities learn which occupations and industries are growing in their areas and businesses can find locations with the workforce they need.
Education The ACS asks about school enrollment, gathering information on America's students from nursery school to graduate school and on whether they are in a private or public school. It also asks about educational attainment—did the respondent earn a high school diploma or the equivalent, a bachelor's degree, or higher?	These statistics help communities to measure how well educational resources are serving their populations, measure changes in education over time, evaluate the educational attainment of the workforce, and identify the educational and training needs of adults. This information also helps communities to bridge gaps between the educational attainment of potential workers and the educational requirements of potential employers.
Veterans The ACS asks about a person's military service, where veterans are moving throughout the country, their ages, and their VA service-connected disability rating status to understand veterans' needs at the community level. Though the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains veterans' records, the ACS provides additional statistics about all veterans, regardless of whether they utilize VA services.	These statistics about veterans help communities plan for future health care and nursing homes, plan and fund job training, and improve the home loan guarantee program. They also benefit businesses looking to hire or serve veterans.
Income and Housing Costs The ACS asks several questions about the money you receive from various sources and your regular living expenses such as rents, mortgages, taxes, and utilities.	The statistics that result from these questions help gauge the need for economic and housing assistance. How many people live in poverty, what are their characteristics—the ACS is the only source of these data at the community level. Income and poverty estimates factor into funding requests that address need. When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs.

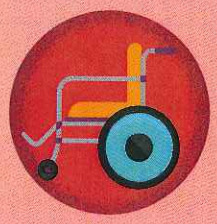




Commuting

The ACS asks about your daily commute—where you go, how you get there, what time you leave for work, and how long it takes—to understand where people are traveling during a normal day.

Precise information about your commuting patterns is crucial to planning improvements to roads and highways, developing transportation and services, and creating emergency response strategies.



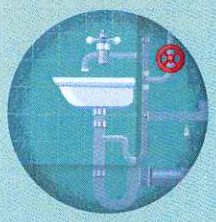
Disability and Health Insurance

The ACS asks about a person's difficulty with specific daily living tasks: Do you have difficulty seeing or hearing? Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs or in dressing or bathing?

The ACS also asks whether people have health insurance, including type of health insurance for those who have health coverage plans.

Communities use these statistics to plan services such as transportation, employment programs, and public service accessibility for people with disabilities. Businesses that serve this population may also seek areas that have a high demand for their services.

From these statistics, we learn which groups are at risk of experiencing limited health care access, poor health, and poor health outcomes.



Housing Characteristics

The ACS asks questions about plumbing, kitchen facilities, and other housing features to help identify areas with substandard housing.

Questions about the size and age of housing also flag local problems like overcrowding, health hazards, and congestion.

Through your ACS responses, we learn about communities eligible for housing assistance, rehabilitation loans, and other programs that help people afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing.

Your responses help communities plan solutions. In places where disaster strikes, these data are vital in planning recovery.

Owners and Renters

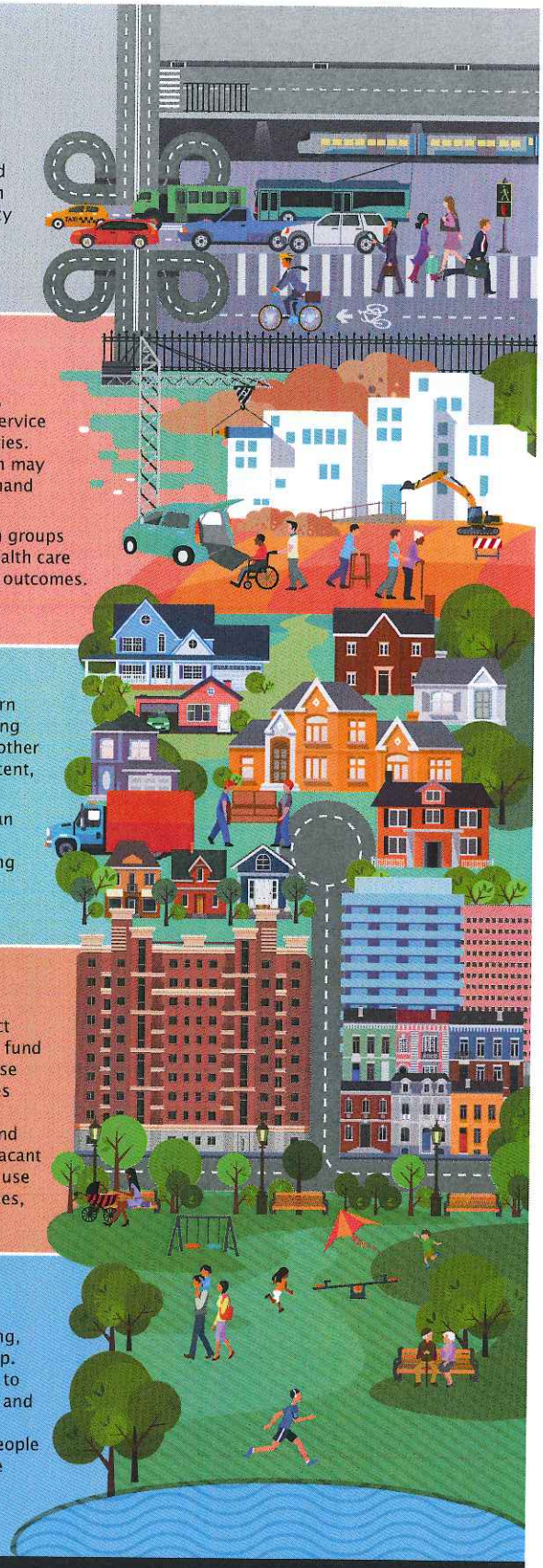
The ACS asks about whether you own or rent your home, and the amount of monthly rent or how much the home and property are worth.

These statistics are used to analyze whether housing is affordable, protect owners and renters, and allocate and fund assistance programs. Governments use these statistics to understand changes in local housing markets, monitor affordability, qualify for assistance, and reduce the tax revenue losses from vacant or abandoned properties. Businesses use these data to design and market homes, and home goods.

People and Relationships

The ACS asks respondents about their age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and their relationship to others in the household.

This information, along with other statistics, is used to monitor well-being, discrimination, and economic hardship. Federal agencies use this information to administer programs providing funds and services for groups such as single parents, low-income families, older people living alone, etc. Businesses use these estimates to evaluate local market demand for products and services.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Questions and Why We Ask <www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/questions_and_why_we_ask/>.

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