

Key Information about the American Community Survey

The Census Bureau has developed and is implementing a different approach to collecting the information which had been collected by the decennial "long form" or 10% sample survey. This new approach takes the form of a continuous, large-scale, nationwide sample survey known as the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS essentially collects the same information (with minor modifications) which was previously collected by the long form. The Census Bureau has been phasing in the ACS since 2001. In 2005, the ACS went full scale for the household population and in 2006 the ACS finally achieved full coverage, including the "group quarters" population (which includes the institutionalized).

Several features about the ACS are worth mentioning:

Given its sample design, a single year of ACS data includes valid data for jurisdictions (counties and cities) with populations of 65,000 and over. However, data for geographical units with fewer persons may be obtained by combining sample data for two or more years. The number of years required depends on the size of the geographical unit (e.g., smaller town and cities may require that 2-3 years of data be combined). For Census Tracts, the smallest unit for which this is possible, the sample sizes require that 5 years of data be combined.

In order to preserve the ability of users to combine data from consecutive years, the Census Bureau is trying to make as few changes as possible from year-to-year. Nonetheless, there will be some revisions and hopefully improvements. An example of this is in the 2008 ACS where some revisions were made to the disabilities questions. This may have improved the clarity and usefulness of these questions, yet will delay the release of information at finer geographic levels until they accumulate five years of data.

Information about the ACS may be found on the Census Bureau web site at:

<http://www.census.gov/acs>

State level ACS data tables are available on the AGing Integrated Database (AGID) at www.data.aoa.gov. These tables were constructed from the ACS Public Use 5% Microdata Sample (PUMS) and include a full range of person and household characteristics.

County level population estimates by age are available on the AGing Integrated Database (AGID) at www.data.aoa.gov and are also posted on the AoA web site at: http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/index.aspx