

Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households: 2010 and 2011

American Community Survey Briefs

By Shelley K. Irving
Issued November 2012
ACSB/11-13

INTRODUCTION

Public assistance income provides cash payments to poor families or individuals and includes Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA). TANF replaced Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1997 through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, often referred to as “welfare reform.” Unlike AFDC benefits, TANF benefits are time-limited, require most adult recipients to work, and give states increased flexibility in program design. GA, also known as General Relief in some areas, usually refers to programs that provide income support to adults without dependents. Public assistance income does not include Supplemental Security Income, noncash benefits from programs such as the Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or separate payments received for hospital or other medical care.¹ To qualify for public assistance benefits, the income and assets of an individual or family must fall below specified thresholds.

This report presents data on public assistance receipt at the national and state levels based on the 2010 and the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS questions on participation in public assistance identify households in which one or more current members received public assistance during the past 12 months. Data are for households, not individuals. If any person living at the sample address at the time of the interview received public assistance in

the past 12 months, then the household is included in the estimate of public assistance participation.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECEIPT

For the first time in several years, there was no significant increase in 2011 in the number or percentage of American households receiving public assistance benefits from the previous year. In both the 2010 ACS and the 2011 ACS, 3.3 million households, or 2.9 percent of all households, received public assistance at some point in the previous 12 months.² In 2011, Alaska, Maine, Hawaii, Washington, and Vermont were among the states with the highest public assistance participation. Louisiana, Wyoming, South Carolina, Alabama, and North Dakota were among the states with the lowest public assistance participation rates (Table 1).

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia had a higher participation rate than the national average of 2.9 percent in the 2011 ACS. These states were concentrated in the West (Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, California, Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada) and the Northeast (Maine, Vermont, Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut). The remaining states were Michigan, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Ohio, and Tennessee (Figure 1).

Twenty-four states had lower participation rates compared with the national average of 2.9 percent in the 2011 ACS. Eleven of them were located in the South (Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Mississippi, West Virginia, and Kentucky). Nine were located in the

² For public assistance participation estimates in previous years, see Irving, Shelley K., *Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households: 2009 and 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2011. Also see Irving, Shelley K., *Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households: 2008 and 2009*, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2010.

¹ The Food Stamp Program was renamed SNAP in 2008.

Table 1.

Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households by State and Puerto Rico: 2010 and 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www)

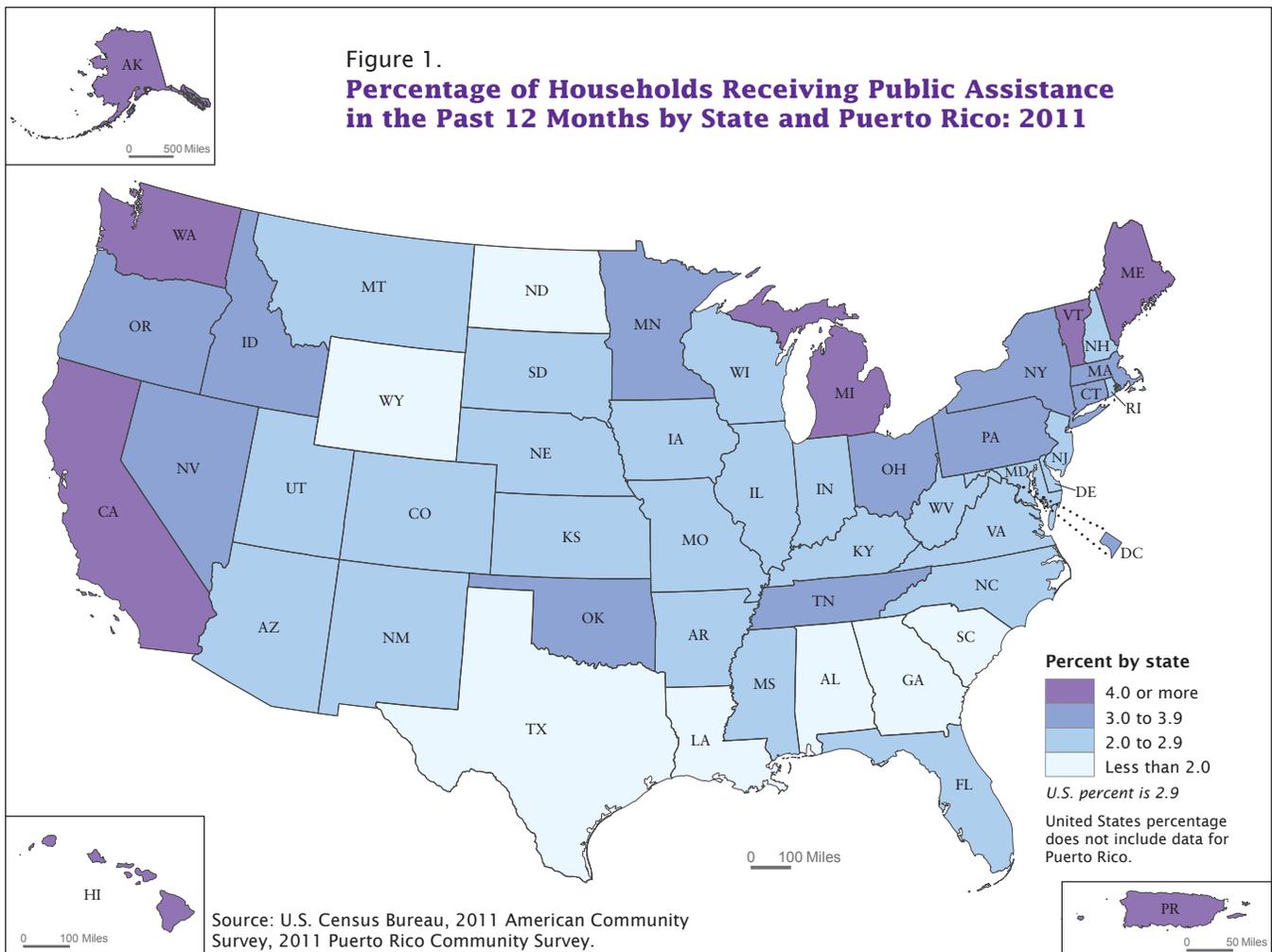
Area	Public assistance receipt in 2010				Public assistance receipt in 2011				Change in public assistance receipt (2011 less 2010)			
	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)
United States . . .	3,276,261	34,703	2.9	0.1	3,309,517	29,887	2.9	0.1	33,256	45,798	-	-
Alabama	29,713	2,476	1.6	0.1	33,492	2,607	1.8	0.1	*3,779	3,596	0.2	0.2
Alaska	16,963	1,764	6.7	0.7	15,757	1,942	6.1	0.7	-1,206	2,623	-0.5	1.0
Arizona	64,339	3,611	2.8	0.2	64,349	4,366	2.7	0.2	10	5,666	-	0.2
Arkansas	20,082	2,190	1.8	0.2	31,304	2,788	2.8	0.2	*11,222	3,545	*1.0	0.3
California	500,432	13,142	4.0	0.1	514,924	12,248	4.1	0.1	14,492	17,965	0.1	0.1
Colorado	42,931	3,243	2.2	0.2	43,971	3,313	2.2	0.2	1,040	4,636	-	0.2
Connecticut	42,376	3,157	3.1	0.2	43,495	3,651	3.2	0.3	1,119	4,827	0.1	0.4
Delaware	8,431	1,193	2.6	0.4	8,762	1,390	2.6	0.4	331	1,831	0.1	0.6
District of Columbia	11,758	1,839	4.7	0.7	10,065	1,404	3.7	0.5	-1,693	2,313	*-0.9	0.9
Florida	140,643	5,704	2.0	0.1	139,856	6,921	2.0	0.1	-787	8,969	-	0.1
Georgia	66,956	3,985	1.9	0.1	65,233	4,670	1.9	0.1	-1,723	6,139	-0.1	0.2
Hawaii	14,784	1,752	3.3	0.4	19,471	2,503	4.3	0.5	*4,687	3,055	*1.0	0.7
Idaho	15,459	1,774	2.7	0.3	20,465	2,353	3.5	0.4	*5,006	2,947	*0.8	0.5
Illinois	119,391	5,403	2.5	0.1	115,492	4,594	2.4	0.1	-3,899	7,092	-0.1	0.1
Indiana	65,548	3,904	2.7	0.2	58,961	3,903	2.4	0.2	*-6,587	5,521	*-0.3	0.2
Iowa	33,537	2,858	2.7	0.2	28,124	2,110	2.3	0.2	*-5,413	3,553	*-0.4	0.3
Kansas	27,337	2,911	2.5	0.3	25,655	2,396	2.3	0.2	-1,682	3,770	-0.2	0.3
Kentucky	41,160	3,461	2.4	0.2	44,323	3,377	2.7	0.2	3,163	4,836	0.2	0.3
Louisiana	24,390	2,241	1.4	0.1	24,432	2,279	1.4	0.1	42	3,196	-	0.2
Maine	28,213	2,176	5.2	0.4	26,750	2,599	4.8	0.5	-1,463	3,390	-0.3	0.6
Maryland	52,814	3,822	2.5	0.2	59,217	4,568	2.8	0.2	*6,403	5,956	*0.3	0.3
Massachusetts	76,037	4,683	3.0	0.2	76,711	4,926	3.0	0.2	674	6,796	-	0.3
Michigan	155,354	4,862	4.1	0.1	150,742	5,086	4.0	0.1	-4,612	7,036	-0.1	0.2
Minnesota	71,147	3,947	3.4	0.2	75,037	3,835	3.6	0.2	3,890	5,504	0.2	0.3
Mississippi	26,205	2,590	2.4	0.2	25,462	2,531	2.4	0.2	-743	3,621	-0.1	0.3
Missouri	55,617	3,211	2.4	0.1	57,152	3,599	2.4	0.2	1,535	4,823	0.1	0.2
Montana	9,851	1,302	2.4	0.3	10,647	1,577	2.6	0.4	796	2,045	0.2	0.5
Nebraska	16,109	1,664	2.2	0.2	15,031	1,851	2.1	0.3	-1,078	2,490	-0.2	0.3
Nevada	29,976	3,088	3.0	0.3	32,611	3,023	3.3	0.3	2,635	4,321	0.3	0.4
New Hampshire	16,416	1,992	3.2	0.4	12,738	1,713	2.5	0.3	*-3,678	2,628	*-0.7	0.5
New Jersey	84,598	4,931	2.7	0.2	87,824	3,870	2.8	0.1	3,226	6,268	0.1	0.2
New Mexico	21,680	2,299	2.8	0.3	22,248	2,279	2.9	0.3	568	3,238	0.1	0.4
New York	243,430	7,549	3.4	0.1	242,414	7,247	3.4	0.1	-1,016	10,465	-	0.1
North Carolina	78,705	4,099	2.1	0.1	74,299	5,097	2.0	0.1	-4,406	6,541	-0.1	0.2
North Dakota	5,880	1,065	2.1	0.4	5,235	938	1.8	0.3	-645	1,419	-0.2	0.5
Ohio	161,210	6,099	3.6	0.1	157,297	5,292	3.5	0.1	-3,913	8,075	-0.1	0.2
Oklahoma	46,968	3,180	3.3	0.2	52,471	2,672	3.6	0.2	*5,503	4,154	*0.4	0.3
Oregon	54,915	3,084	3.6	0.2	52,334	3,987	3.4	0.3	-2,581	5,041	-0.2	0.3
Pennsylvania	180,404	7,731	3.7	0.2	184,989	5,613	3.7	0.1	4,585	9,553	0.1	0.2
Rhode Island	11,464	1,712	2.8	0.4	10,590	1,367	2.6	0.3	-874	2,191	-0.3	0.5
South Carolina	32,255	2,648	1.8	0.1	31,425	3,288	1.8	0.2	-830	4,222	-0.1	0.2
South Dakota	9,158	1,502	2.9	0.5	7,622	1,265	2.4	0.4	-1,536	1,963	-0.5	0.6
Tennessee	71,984	4,061	2.9	0.2	81,538	5,224	3.3	0.2	*9,554	6,616	*0.4	0.3
Texas	167,089	6,873	1.9	0.1	167,272	6,103	1.9	0.1	183	9,192	-	0.1
Utah	21,472	1,873	2.4	0.2	18,606	1,832	2.1	0.2	*-2,866	2,620	*-0.3	0.3
Vermont	12,609	1,527	4.9	0.6	11,097	1,253	4.3	0.5	-1,512	1,975	-0.6	0.8
Virginia	58,333	3,920	1.9	0.1	64,798	3,753	2.2	0.1	*6,465	5,427	*0.2	0.2
Washington	118,766	4,800	4.6	0.2	114,258	6,419	4.3	0.2	-4,508	8,015	-0.2	0.3
West Virginia	16,912	2,147	2.3	0.3	17,905	2,038	2.4	0.3	993	2,960	0.2	0.4
Wisconsin	50,608	3,303	2.2	0.1	51,150	2,977	2.2	0.1	542	4,447	-	0.2
Wyoming	3,852	902	1.7	0.4	3,916	983	1.8	0.4	64	1,334	-	0.6
Puerto Rico	72,684	3,473	5.5	0.3	70,703	3,477	5.6	0.3	-1,981	4,914	0.1	0.4

* Statistically different from zero at the 90 percent confidence level.

- Represents or rounds to zero.

¹ Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2011 American Community Surveys, 2010 and 2011 Puerto Rico Community Surveys.



Midwest (North Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, South Dakota, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri). The remaining states were Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and New Hampshire (Figure 1).

Seven states (Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Virginia) had increases in the number and percentage of households receiving public assistance from the 2010 ACS to the 2011 ACS (Figure 2). In comparison, from the 2009 ACS to the 2010 ACS, 14 states had increases in the number and percentage of households receiving

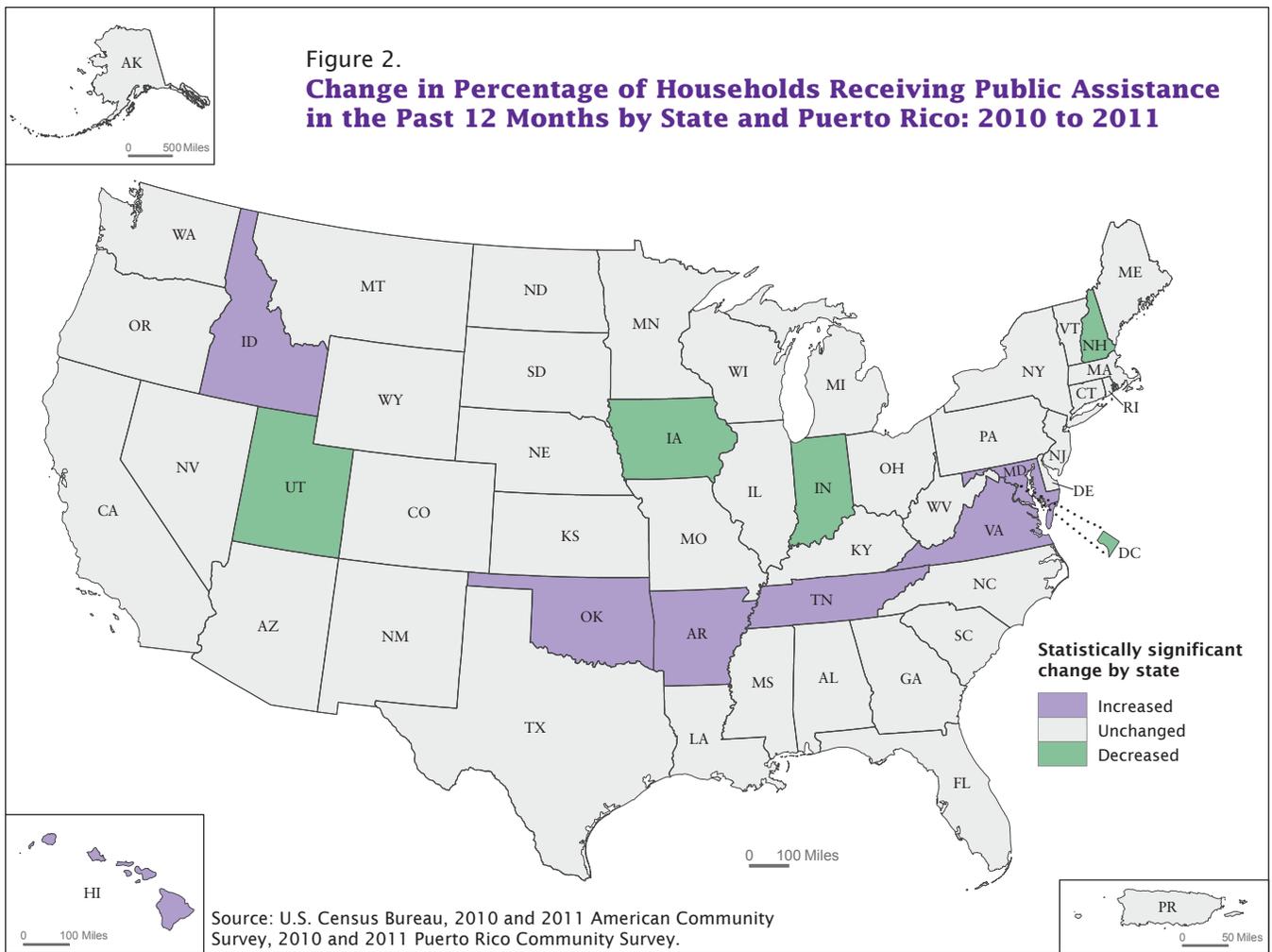
public assistance.³ In Alabama, the number of households receiving public assistance grew, but the 2010 and 2011 rates were not statistically different from each other. No states experienced a statistically significant decrease in the number or percentage of households receiving public assistance from the 2009 ACS to the 2010 ACS.⁴ However, from the 2010 ACS to the 2011 ACS, four states (Indiana, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Utah) had decreases in the number

³ See Irving, Shelley K., *Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households: 2009 and 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2010.

⁴ See Irving, Shelley K., *Public Assistance Receipt in the Past 12 Months for Households: 2009 and 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2010.

and percentage of households receiving public assistance. In the District of Columbia, the percentage of households receiving public assistance fell, but there was no significant change in the number of households receiving public assistance from the 2010 ACS to the 2011 ACS (Figure 2). In all the remaining states, the rates and the number of households receiving public assistance in the 2011 ACS were not statistically different from the 2010 ACS estimates.

In the 2011 ACS, Puerto Rico had a higher public assistance participation rate (5.6 percent) than the national average (2.9 percent). From the 2010 ACS



to the 2011 ACS, there was no change in the number or percentage of Puerto Rican households that received public assistance in the past 12 months.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS sample interviewed in 2011. The estimates based on this sample approximate the actual values and represent the entire household and group quarters population. Sampling error is the difference between an estimate based in a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of the sampling errors are provided in the form of

What Is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.3 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit <www.census.gov/acs/www>.

margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing,

and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent level unless otherwise noted. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling error may be

introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on

sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the 2011 ACS Accuracy of the Data document located at

<www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf>.