

Frequently Asked Questions – Affordable Housing Fact Book

History – For more than 30 years, a partnership between the Chicago Rehab Network and the Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, a research unit within the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has produced neutral, scholarly demographic research on conditions in communities in Chicago and across Illinois on the occasion of the Decennial Census. These data have been provided in a free and open manner in order to raise public awareness of housing and encourage public policies grounded in fact that prevent displacement, promote preservation and encourage the production of new affordable housing throughout the city and state.

What is the value-added in this Fact Book? In addition to adding to a growing wealth of historical and time series data, the Fact Book analyses conducted by the urban planning researchers Voorhees Center use geospatial analysis to aggregate information available through the U.S. Census Bureau to custom geographies that have meaning to communities in Chicago: Community Areas and Wards. This information is not available from the government tabulated at these levels. Nonetheless, providing information at these levels is what allows advocates, legislators, leaders and indeed anyone interested in the future of communities to make sound policy recommendations and decisions grounded in fact. CRN is also available to facilitate discussions on a hyperlocal level on how Fact Book information relates to the development context and neighborhood planning.

How do the facts reported on these fact sheets relate to communities and public policy? By taking a close look at who lives in a community and how things have changed over time, it is possible to engage in data-informed decision making based on an accurate picture of current conditions. This information empowers individuals and organizations to help shape the neighborhood development environment and target policy initiatives and interventions to support populations at risk on the ground. For instance, the federal government provides dollars for a number of programs based on population counts at the municipal level. Knowing how populations have changed at a micro level within submarkets helps bring about an equitable distribution of resources that can move neighborhoods from existing needs to solutions.

What if your facts don't match mine? A number of methodological decisions are involved in producing this research that can impact comparison to other sources. Often differences stem from issues with data sources within the Census and the aggregation schemes applied to those data. Please also note that 2000 data dealing with dollar values have been adjusted for inflation to 2010 constant dollars.

What if I have a question? Contact us! CRN is available to answer Fact Book-related questions by calling 312.663.3936 or emailing Rachel@chicagorehab.org.

Can CRN customize data for my organization? CRN provides technical assistance to members and is available to consult on a wide variety of demographic and economic research topics. Contact Rachel@chicagorehab.org for more information.

What is the difference here between family and non-family households? For purposes of the Census Bureau, a family household is one where two or more people living in the same place are related by

blood, marriage or adoption. Non-family households include single people living alone, roommates and unmarried couples without children.

How is poverty status determined? The Census Bureau compares individual or family income before taxes to 48 nationally determined poverty thresholds depending on the person's age and how many other people they live with (if any). Income for these purposes includes earnings, investment income, and cash benefits and transfers. It does not include noncash benefit such as Medicaid, food stamps and housing subsidies. If the income of the person for whom poverty is measured is below the applicable national threshold, they are considered to be "in poverty." In 2013, a family of four with two children was considered in poverty if their income was less than \$23,624.ⁱ

Why are race and ethnicity reported separately? Based on government standards, the Census Bureau gathers information such that race and Hispanic origin are considered separately. Under this scheme, people are counted one or more races *and* either Hispanic or Not Hispanic. For this reason, adding up races and "Latino (of any race)" will result in a number greater than the reported population.

What is median household income? Median household income is the middle income in a geography: statistically, half of households make more, while half make less. Median income is a better measure of household income than average income because it is less affected by outliers, such as a small number of very wealthy households in a community. Income includes monies obtained a variety of ways, not only through wages, salaries or business profits, but also through other sources such as dividends, net property income, estates and trusts, Social Security, public assistance or welfare payments and pensions. The median household income in Chicago in 2010 was \$46,877. This income level is significantly lower than the regional median incomes published annually by HUD, \$75,100 in 2010 for a family of four, which the City opts to use to establish income maximums for its affordable housing programming.

What do monthly housing costs for owners include? Monthly owner costs include: payments to mortgage or home equity debt, real estate taxes, homeowners insurance, condo fees (if applicable), mobile home cost (if applicable) and utilities (electricity, gas, water and sewer, and any other utilities such as local recycling costs).

What do monthly housing costs for renters include? Monthly gross rent costs include contract (lease) rent and utilities (electricity, gas, water and sewer, and any other utilities such as local recycling costs). In Chicago, the landlord is responsible for water, sewage and (in some cases) recycling costs.

What is cost burden? A household is considered cost burdened when it pays 30% or more of monthly income toward monthly housing costs, either as renters or owners. This standard for consumer financial health with respect to housing costs has been used by the federal government for a variety of programs since the early part of the last century.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ US Census Bureau (2013) "How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty" available online at <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/measure.html>

ⁱⁱ Schwartz and Wilson (2007) "Who Can Afford To Live in a Home?: A look at data from the 2006 American Community Survey", available online at <http://www.census.gov/housing/census/publications/who-can-afford.pdf>
Other data come from Voorhees Center (2014) "Affordable Housing Fact Book Data Definitions and Sources."