

Latest Maryland Snapshot from the 2015 American Community Survey

Typically, from year to year there are not many significant changes in the economic, social and housing data for Maryland, and that was mostly true with the data found in the release of the 2015 American Community Survey which showed generally stagnant income, unemployment and total poverty rates compared to 2014. However, there were a few significant changes of note over the 2014 to 2015 period, namely:

- the large increase in the foreign born population
- the reduction of the poverty rate for the youngest children
- the continued decline in the labor force participation rate
- the continued rise in educational attainment, and
- the continued rise in the percent of Maryland residents with health insurance.

The annual American Community Survey (ACS) – the U.S. Census Bureau’s nationwide monthly survey of 295,000 addresses covering demographic, social, economic and housing data, is a good instrument to measure not only changes from the previous year, but also to look at longer-term trends, such as telling us how far we have come since the advent of the Great Recession and the generally lackluster recovery which followed for years afterward.¹

Below are some highlights for Maryland from the 2014 American Community Survey, with comparisons back to 2008.

ECONOMIC:

- Maryland’s **unemployment rate** continued to fall, but the difference between 2015’s 5.5 percent rate and 2014’s 7.2 percent rate was statistically significant. (See [Table 1.](#)) The 2015 unemployment rate of 5.5 percent was well below the seven percent plus rates from 2011 to 2014, and it is lower than that it was in 2008 before the great recession.
- The **labor force participation rate**, or the percent of the population ages 16 and over in the labor force (either employed or unemployed) continues to fall, with a statistically significant drop of 0.8 percent to 67.3 percent in 2015. In 2011 Maryland’s labor force participation rate was 68.9%. A decline in the labor force participation rate can come from both an aging population as more people retire, or from a generally inhospitable job market which causes people to give up looking for work.
- There was no statistically significant change between 2014 and 2015 in the share of Maryland commuters who **commute to work** by any means. The share of those that carpooled was 8.9 percent in 2015, not a statistically significant difference from the 9.3 percent in 2014, but a

¹ The official time period of the Great Recession according the National Bureau of Economic Research was December 2007 to June 2009.

statistically significant reduction from the 10.1 percent in 2011. Likewise, the 73.8 percent that drove alone in 2015 has been nearly the same in the last few years. While the share of commuters who use public transportation between 2014 and 2015 has remained the same at 9 percent. The share of workers working from home also had a statistically significant increase between 2014 (4.1%) and 2015 (4.4%).

- **Average travel time** stood at 32.6 minutes in 2015, a statistically significant increase from average times in 2012. Maryland's 2014 travel time is the second longest in the U.S., trailing only New York's 33.1 minutes.
- **Median household income** continues to remain stagnant, having been stopped by the Great Recession. The most recent increase of \$1,777 dollars in the last year is statistically significant, and the 2014 median and increase of 2.4 percent. Maryland's 2015 median household income is the highest in the U.S.
- Even with the growth in overall median household income the share of the percent of households who have **earnings income** (essentially income from work) has been stagnant. In 2015, 81.3 percent of households had earnings income, a decrease (but not a statistically significant one) from 81.7 percent in 2014.
- Along with the overall decline in the share of households with earnings over the last several years, there has been an increase in the share of households receiving **social security** benefits. In 2015, 27.5 percent of all Maryland households received social security benefits, up from 25.5 percent in 2011. All of the annual changes between 2011 and 2015 have shown an increase and these changes are statistically significant. An aging population, as well as a less than robust job market in many of these years, has contributed to this increase.
- More directly related to the less than robust job market and stagnant incomes is the increase in households receiving **food stamp/SNAP benefits** over the last five years. In 2015, 11.2 percent of all Maryland households received these benefits, a statistically significant increase from the 9.9 percent in 2011.
- There was a slight decrease in the overall **poverty rate** for Maryland residents from 2014 (10.1%) to 2015 (9.9%), this change is statistically significant. However, the 2015 poverty rate of 9.7 percent is well above the 8.0 percent rate that was before the great recession. In 2015 poverty rates were higher for children under age 18 (12.8%), and children under five years (14.9%), however, they were lower for ages 5 to 17 (12.0%) compared to 2014.
- The 2015 poverty rate for the elderly, ages 65 and over, was the lowest of any age group at 7.3 percent. This age group was the only one to have a statistically significant *drop* from the 2011 rate (7.5%).

- The percent of Marylanders with **health insurance** increased to 93.4 percent in 2015, a statistically significant increase from the 92.1 percent in 2014 and every year back to 2011 when it stood at 89.6 percent. These gains over the last year is the result of the increasing share of residents with **public health insurance** (Medicaid and Medicare), and of residents with **private health insurance**. Residents with private health insurance in 2015 (74.1%) is slightly higher than it was in 2014 (73.6%). The share of residents with public coverage had increases in each of the last five years, and now stands at 31.5 percent, nearly five percentage points higher than in 2011. As a result of these changes, the percent of residents **without any insurance** has dropped to 6.6 percent in 2015, 3.8 percentage points below what it was in 2011.

SOCIAL:

- As has been noted in the past, the weak job market post Great Recession had led to increased **educational attainment**, as more people stay in school gaining the skills and training which will make them more marketable. In 2015 the share of Maryland residents ages 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher was 38.8 percent, a statistically significant increase from 2014's 38.2 percent, as well as the 36.9 percent share in 2011. Also, the percent of the adult population with a graduate or professional degree in 2015 (17.7%) is a statistically significant increase from 2011 (16.5%).
- There was an increase of nearly 21,150 in Maryland's **foreign born population** between 2014 and 2015 this increase is not statistically significant, pushing the 2014 foreign born share to 15.2 percent, up from 13.9 percent in 2011.
- In 2015, 6.9 percent of Maryland residents spoke English less than very well, not a statistically significant difference from the previous four years.

HOUSING:

- The **average household size** in Maryland decreased slightly to 2.69 in 2015 from 2.70 in 2014, not a statistically significant decrease.
- The **average family size** decreased from 3.29 in 2014 to 3.28 in 2015. There was no statistically significant change between 2014 and 2015.
- The **overall vacancy rate** showed a statistically significant decrease between 2014 (10.6%) and 2015 (10.5%). **Homeowner vacancy rates** are relatively low in 2015 (1.9%), a statistically significant increase from 2014 (1.6%).
- **Rental vacancy rates** have declined over the last several years after peaking in 2011 at 7.1 percent. The 2015 rate of 5.6 percent represents a statistically significant drop from the 2011 peak as a recovering housing market has meant more demand for rental units.

- The **median value of owner-occupied homes** had statistically significant increase in 2015, the 2015 self-reported median value of \$299,800 was \$11,300 above the \$288,500 value of 2014. The median values of owner-occupied homes are starting to increase, this is the fourth consecutive annual increase
- **Median monthly owner costs** for units with a mortgage stood at \$1,909 in 2015 an insignificant change from 2014, this was a slight increase from \$1,905 in 2014.
- Unlike owner costs, **median rental costs** have generally been up. The 2015 median rental cost of \$1,278 is (a statistically significant) increase from 2014 (\$1,243) and up by \$74 (6.1%) since 2011.
- **The percent of “cost burdened” owners with a mortgage** continues to fall. The percent of homeowners with a mortgage paying 35 percent or more of their income for housing was 21.8 percent in 2015, a statistically significant drop from 27.7 percent in 2011.
- In contrast to homeowners, **the share of renters paying 35 percent of their incomes for rental costs** has fluctuated over the last five years but remains at a much higher level than for homeowners. The 2015 share of 41.3 percent is not statistically different from 2014 (41.8%), but the reduction from the peak of 43.9 percent in 2011 is statistically significant.

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