

# Guest Editor's Introduction

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The American Housing Survey (AHS) is the largest regular national housing sample survey in the United States. The AHS began in 1973 and has used the same longitudinal sample of housing units since 1985. The AHS instrument asks numerous questions concerning housing-related topics, including housing unit size and condition, household characteristics, neighborhood amenities, housing costs, rents and mortgages, and reasons for moving. Information from the AHS is important for monitoring the overall housing market, the housing stock, and the performance of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing programs. Most AHS users create single-survey, cross-section estimates. A smaller number of users make use of the longitudinal structure of the AHS.

HUD hosted an AHS User Conference on March 8, 2011, to highlight the many uses of the AHS in research and to present results from newly released 2009 AHS data sets, which included new disability-related questions and a supplemental survey of post-Hurricane Katrina recovery in New Orleans. Of the 15 papers presented, we selected 8 for the symposium in this issue of *Cityscape*. The symposium features an article on housing for the disabled, two articles on housing subsidy recipients' housing and neighborhood satisfaction, two articles on the physical adequacy of housing, one article on energy use, and one article on housing units with negative equity. Two articles make use of the longitudinal data and six use the 2009 AHS as a cross-section. Two Australian authors familiar with housing data provide an international perspective.

For the 2009 AHS, HUD adopted a standardized set of six disability questions that a Census Bureau advisory committee recommended for all federal surveys, and one symposium article uses these new questions to better understand the disabled population's housing conditions. In the article, "The House Next Door: A Comparison of Residences by Disability Status Using New Measures in the American Housing Survey," Denise W. Hoffman and Gina A. Livermore explore how disability status is associated with a range of housing and neighborhood quality characteristics. Using the 2009 AHS and multivariate cross-sectional analysis to control for income and other characteristics, they conclude that individuals with disabilities report living in lower quality housing and lower quality neighborhoods than households with no people with disabilities. Their findings are consistent with previous research that cited higher health and other living costs and reduced household efficiency as reasons why people with disabilities experience lower quality housing and neighborhoods. Hoffman and Livermore also conclude that housing programs help alleviate some hardships for the disabled, but additional assistance may be needed.

Two articles focus on self-reported housing and neighborhood satisfaction for housing program participants. In the first article, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want: The Role of Public Housing and Vouchers in Achieving Residential Satisfaction,” Lauren M. Ross, Anne B. Shlay, and Mario G. Picon explore housing and neighborhood satisfaction levels among Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and public housing participants and among unassisted renters. Using an ordered logit regression analysis to control for individual, household, and neighborhood characteristics, the authors find that HUD program participants report higher levels of housing satisfaction (on a scale of 1 to 10) than unassisted renters. HUD program participants, especially HCVP participants, however, reported lower levels of neighborhood satisfaction.

In the second article to explore HUD program participants’ self-reported housing and neighborhood satisfaction, “Comparing Public Housing and Housing Voucher Tenants With Bayesian Propensity Scores,” Brent D. Mast notes that HUD currently has no administrative data to compare the quality of public housing units with HCVP units and that the AHS could serve this purpose. Building on previous work with additional analysis, Mast concludes that AHS identification of HUD program participants is problematic because the AHS overrepresents public housing participants and underrepresents HCVP participants. As a result, apparent differences in housing or neighborhood satisfaction between the two housing programs based on AHS data may be biased. Mast introduces a Bayesian model that uses income and rent variables common to HUD administrative data and 2009 AHS data to improve the reliability of quality comparisons. Mast finds little statistical difference in household and neighborhood satisfaction ratings between public housing participants and HCVP participants.

A housing unit’s physical adequacy is an important component of housing quality and an important determinant for overall housing assistance needs. HUD researchers currently create housing inadequacy indicators for the AHS. Two articles in this symposium focus on housing’s physical adequacy, as defined in the AHS. In the first article, “Exploring Housing Challenges of Low-Income Minority Populations in the Southern United States,” Sung-jin Lee, Kathleen R. Parrott, and Mira Ahn examine housing conditions of low-income minority householders in the South using data from the 2009 AHS. They conduct a bivariate analysis to determine which factors influence housing adequacy. They find that income, housing structure and type, geography, neighborhood quality, and housing assistance receipt all influence the housing adequacy measure.

In the second article on housing adequacy, “Housing Value, Costs, and Measures of Physical Adequacy,” Paul Emrath and Heather Taylor reexamine the AHS housing adequacy indicators and find that, in contrast to what economic theory would predict, they had little correlation with housing values and rents. Motivated by this finding, they propose a new methodology for determining physical inadequacy by indentifying adequacy-related variables that they show to have strong correlation with housing values and rents. The new methodology identifies more units as physically inadequate, relative to the existing indicators. Emrath and Taylor reach the important conclusion that the inventory of existing homes on the market may be overstated, because some of the units are not physically adequate to serve as housing.

In “Household Energy Bills and Subsidized Housing,” Samuel Dastrup, Simon McDonnell, and Vincent Reina investigate energy use for housing program participants, including differences in billing arrangements between housing program participants and unassisted renters, and energy use

for tenants paying utilities separately from rent. They build on a previous theoretical model of tenants' energy use when landlords pay utilities by extending the model to show utility-maximizing decisionmaking for housing program participants. To complement their theoretical analysis, Dastrup, McDonnell, and Reina use data from the 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 AHS to show that tenants receiving housing assistance, especially public housing tenants, are more likely to live in units where the landlord pays the utilities. Their analysis reveals no statistically significant differences in energy use between unassisted low-income renters who pay their utilities separately from rent and housing program participants who pay their utilities separately from rent.

The rapid decline of housing values since 2007 has caused many homeowners to have mortgage balances that are now larger than the value of their housing unit. These homeowners are said to have negative equity and to have mortgages that are "under water." In "Housing Units With Negative Equity, 1997 to 2009," George R. Carter III uses AHS longitudinal data from 1997 through 2009 to calculate trends in negative equity nationally and for individual housing units, including the persistence of negative equity over time and the extent to which home sales could be considered distressed. Carter's negative equity estimates, derived from the AHS, are substantially lower (11.6 percent) than estimates produced by other data sources (First American CoreLogic's 23 percent). Carter also finds that negative equity persistence increased between 2007 and 2009, as did the number of distressed sales.

In "The American Housing Survey From a Cross-National Perspective," Andrew Beer and Debbie Faulkner provide an Australian perspective on housing issues and housing data. Australia faces housing supply and housing adequacy issues, and Beer and Faulkner note that the AHS's emphasis on housing quality is an important and desirable feature of housing surveys. Much like the United States, Australia is grappling with how best to provide adequate housing for the disabled. The authors note that Australia does not have a survey of similar quality and scope as the AHS to help understand how housing programs for the disabled will affect the housing market. Finally, the authors mention that budget issues and privacy concerns are two of Australia's major limitations to conducting a survey similar to the AHS.

The articles chosen for this symposium represent cross-sections of housing policy topics and AHS data uses, reflecting their origins in the 2011 AHS User Conference. Researchers from housing-related disciplines will benefit from reading these articles from both policy and technical perspectives. Beginner and intermediate AHS data users may learn new ways that they can use the AHS to answer important questions, including questions requiring longitudinal analysis. Advanced users may find indepth discussions of AHS's limits useful for their analyses.

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