

American Housing Survey 50th Anniversary

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

September 25, 2024

- Hello, everyone!
- I'm so pleased to be here to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the American Housing Survey (AHS).
- Think about that . . . a half century partnership that's enabled the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to inform the American people . . .
- To inform them about the ways we live in housing, what housing and occupancy look like, and our struggles and our successes in finding and retaining housing.
- In a sense, the AHS also reveals people's progress in achieving the American Dream—that of owning a home.
- Plus, the AHS is used in all kinds of critical policymaking at the federal, state, and local levels.
- All this is why we're honored and why we're privileged to conduct this survey.
- The Census Bureau serves HUD by providing the data it needs to achieve its mission.
- After all, housing is a fundamental human need.
- So, forgive us for being really proud to support HUD . . . and for playing a role in generating this essential benchmark data.
- Now, allow me to brag a little.
- The Census Bureau has a long history of measuring housing in America.
- We've done so regularly since 1850 in our population and housing censuses.
- That means once each decade, we learned how many homes there were in the country and how long occupants lived in them.
- And, of course, those limited data once a decade weren't quite enough for the breadth of policymaking that was needed in our country.
- In fact, before the AHS, we didn't know how much of our housing needed rehabilitation—whether the kitchen or heating equipment worked or the extent to which home improvements were affecting the housing stock.
- We didn't know how the supply of rural housing compared with that of central cities.
- We didn't know how much families' housing costs changed from 1 year to the next.
- We had no idea what neighborhood services influenced residents to stay or to move.
- And we didn't know how much those who did move managed to improve their living conditions . . . or just the opposite.
- That's where the AHS comes to the rescue.
- This survey represents a major federal effort to find out these things and more.
- Since 1973, it's been our nation's most comprehensive, go-to housing survey.
- The AHS provides foundational data on the size, composition, quality, and cost of our nation's housing—and how it's changed over time.
- It tells us about the physical condition of homes and neighborhoods, about the costs of financing and maintaining homes, and about the characteristics of people who live in them.

- This information is so important for communities, planners, and policymakers, all of whom use the results of the AHS to assess local and national housing needs.
- Its data are used to make evidence-based decisions about programs that affect people of all income levels, of all ages, and of all racial and ethnic groups.
- OK, I've gushed enough about the AHS . . . although honestly, I could do lots more.
- But y'know, the AHS wouldn't be the treasure that it is without the people who make it happen.
- So, please indulge me while I give a few shout outs.
- Yes, let's thank the staff who've supported, and continue to support, the AHS over the past several decades—some of whom are here today.
- From HUD, they include:
 - My friend and former Urban Institute colleague, Solomon Greene, who is principal deputy assistant secretary for Policy Development and Research.
 - And there's Kurt Usowski (*U-sow-ski*), deputy assistant secretary for the Office of Economic Affairs.
 - George Carter, director of the Housing and Demographic Analysis Division.
 - Shawn Bucholtz (*Buck-holtz*), former director of the Housing and Demographic Analysis Division.
 - We'd also like to acknowledge the contributions of Dav Vandenbroucke (*Van-den-brock*), who was unable to join us today. Dav was a senior economist on the AHS who was a tireless advocate for the survey, ushering it through many seasons of change, including the major redesigns of 1977 and 2015.
- And now let's turn to some of our Census Bureau staff, many of whom are here today. We have:
 - Tamara (*TAM-er-a*) Cole, AHS survey director and her team, who coordinate survey operations.
 - We also have here many of our housing subject matter experts, mathematical statisticians, and programmers.
 - We're also pleased to have a number of field supervisors and field representatives join us, and well as some of our regional office staff.
- We also have some guests who've retired from the Census Bureau after long careers in service to the American Housing Survey.
- These folks include:
 - Dan Weinberg, former chief of the Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division.
 - Barbara Williams and Sue Lord, who had long careers as subject matter experts on the survey.
 - Medell Ford, who oversaw field operations for many, many years.
- We thank all of you for your years—and in some cases, decades—of service on this survey.
- Your dedication is why the AHS is the powerful data tool that it is.
- I also want to acknowledge and thank the Census Bureau field representatives who work on the AHS.
- Y'know, their work is some of the hardest at our agency.
- Their success requires true interpersonal skills,
- Seriously, they face incredible challenges every time they step out into the field.
- In a real way, they are THE face of the Census Bureau to the public.
- They stand toe-to-toe, day after day, on the doorsteps of a statistically representative slice of America
- And, yes, they ask people to trust them.
- The fruits of their interactions are the AHS data.

- These data are what everyone sees, uses, and benefits from.
- So, thank you, again, to our field staff and our regional office staff for all you do.
- Now, we're just so proud of this decades-long partnership with HUD that has resulted in a lot of amazing data on America's housing.
- We're also proud to be involved in improving this survey for the next 50 years.
- Hey, it's within our grasp to build a better, stronger AHS.
- Starting next May, the AHS plans to move from a survey conducted every 2 years to a continuous operation with data collected every month throughout the year.
- How smart is that, right?
- This will enable policymakers to focus on pressing issues such as housing insecurity, the impacts of climate change, accessibility, and the intersection of health and housing.
- And on that wonderful note, I—and we—thank everyone involved again for all your hard work on this survey.
- Happy anniversary to the American Housing Survey!