

Understanding 2025 American Community Survey Content Changes

October 15th, 2026

Transcript

Mary Ana McKay: Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for joining me today. My name is Mary Ana McKay, and I am in the American Community Survey Office here at the U.S. Census Bureau. I want to talk to you today about the 2025 American Community survey content changes. We will cover the new and modified questions on the 2025 questionnaire.

Mary Ana McKay: To prepare you for the upcoming release. Next week we will host the 2025 ACS 1-year prerelease webinar on Thursday October 22nd. That is our typical prerelease webinar that will detail how to access data and resources from the ACS and provide tips for comparing geographies and statistics over time.

Mary Ana McKay: If you have a question related to what I am sharing today, submit it using the chat feature throughout the webinar. You can find this under the direct tab at the top of the window. Click “chat with panelists” to start. We will have a brief Q and A period at the end of my presentation.

Mary Ana McKay: Let's dive right in. To start, we will walk through the ACS content change process. Then I will highlight the changes for the 2025 ACS and finally, I will leave you all with resources to learn more.

Mary Ana McKay: Every question on the ACS must have a federal use justified by federal law, so adding a question or making a change to the ACS involves extensive testing, review, and evaluation. Roughly every five years the ACS program solicits federal agencies for proposed changes to the survey and conducts what is known as a content test. We conduct content tests in order to determine the best wording, format, and placement of proposed new questions or revisions to existing questions.

Mary Ana McKay: The testing and evaluation phases from the most recent contest tests occurred from 2020 to 2024. We will be discussing the changes from that test that were implemented in the 2025 ACS. The ACS has evolved over the years with changes to content that were made in order to fulfill the needs of the federal agencies relying on the data. Based on the results from the last content test, four topics were modified in 2025. Those questions cover the household roster, educational attainment, health insurance coverage, and labor force. There are three new questions on the 2025 ACS for sewer, electric vehicles, and solar panels. I'll briefly walk through the new and modified questions, but if you'd like to view them, you can do that by accessing the sample questionnaires on the ACS website, which are available through the URL at the bottom of this slide. Transitioning to our modified questions.

Mary Ana McKay: The change to the household roster question was proposed by the Census Bureau to improve coverage of young children and tenuously attached residents. Complex households, those that contain extended family, multiple generations, blended families or non-relatives are more prone to rostering error and undercoverage. The household roster question was modified with a different visual layout of who to include and not include when answering the ACS. The question used to repeat the word "include" multiple times but now has distinct headers for "include" and "do not include" with examples below them. This modification is expected to improve within household coverage, but there are no changes to the data products. Within the educational attainment question, the categories for no schooling completed, nursery school, and kindergarten were replaced with a single category for less than grade 1. This change was proposed by the Census Bureau to reduce the errors in reporting of no schooling completed. Ongoing research at the Census Bureau had shown that a relatively high percentage of people were selecting the response category no schooling completed in the self-response modes of the ACS.

Mary Ana McKay: Among adults over the age of 25, 1.9 % were classified in the ACS as having no schooling completed. Other surveys suggest this should be less than .5%. Tables that previously displayed no schooling completed, nursery school and kindergarten will be modified to use the updated category of less than grade 1. A list of these modified tables is shown here.

Mary Ana McKay: Several changes were made to the labor force questions to clarify the information being asked. This was made by the Census Bureau to improve directions for respondents. For clarity, the words “for pay” were added to the question, “when did this person last work even for a few days?”

Mary Ana McKay: The words “for at least one day” were added to the question about how many weeks were worked. That's question 40B. This makes the question clearer to align it with the intended universe of responders as well as other labor force questions.

Mary Ana McKay: The examples in the weeks worked questions, so that's questions 40A and B, are no longer in bold and include additional wording to clarify what should be included. For example, the instructions indicate that respondents should include all jobs for pay when considering their response. This was always the intent but was not explicitly stated in the instruction.

Mary Ana McKay: And finally, the words “include all jobs for pay and military service” were added to the instructions for the hours worked question—that's question 41. This was added for clarity and consistency with other questions. The changes to the labor force questions were made to provide clarity to respondents but did not substantively change the questions. Therefore, there are NO changes to the data products in the 2025 for the labor Force topic. Moving on, there were a few changes made to the health insurance coverage question. These were proposed by the census Bureau with input from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security Administration, Health and Human Services or HHS, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, as well as the National Center for Health Statistics. The primary objectives of revising the health insurance coverage question were to improve measurement of public coverage and accuracy of direct purchase coverage, reduce overcount of single service non comprehensive insurance plans, so that's vision or dental plans, and reduce erroneous reports of multiple coverage. In addition to the question change, we also modified how we process the data by no longer coding write-ins if another valid health insurance response was selected. Write-ins are only coded if no other health insurance option is selected.

Mary Ana McKay: The questions used to have “yes” and “no” check boxes next to each insurance type. The modified questions includes a header for “yes insured” with check boxes for each insurance type below it and a header for “no uninsured” at the bottom with a checkbox that says no health insurance or health coverage plan. So there was a change from “yes/no” to mark all that apply with the option to affirmatively state no health insurance. Instructions were modified to instruct respondents not to include non-comprehensive single forms of health insurance such as dental, drug, or vision plans. This updates the previous questionnaires that did not include this clarification.

Mary Ana McKay: Prior research found two things. First, Medicaid and other similar programs are under reported in the ACS, and second, direct purchase and multiple forms of coverage are over reported. Going down the list of options, Children's health insurance program (CHIP) was added to Medicaid.

Mary Ana McKay: Marketplace, Broker, and Healthcare.gov were added to direct purchase. Medicare was moved up, direct purchase was moved down. Veteran's healthcare (VA) coverage moved before TRICARE. The Census Bureau recommends that data users compare the 2025 ACS 1-year health insurance estimates to previous years with caution. Data users should also be aware the estimates for health insurance coverage in the comparison profiles, which compare 2025 health insurance estimates to the previous year's estimates will not appear on data.census.gov. Comparison guidance and user notes will be released alongside the 1-year data.

Mary Ana McKay: The health insurance variable will be excluded from all 5-year products until the research to bridge the estimates can be completed. We expect to publish 5- year health insurance estimates with the 2022 to 2026 ACS five-year data release. However, three demonstration tables will be released, which will provide unofficial insured and uninsured rates overall and by age and sex for the levels of geography covered by the standard ACS 5-year tables. These tables will not bridge the change in methodology, but rather assume that high level reports of insured and versus uninsured are consistent across the 5-year period. The Census Bureau will be providing resources to help data users understand the changes to the health insurance question and data.

Mary Ana McKay: We plan to release a Random Samplings blog today which will highlight how we expect the 2025 ACS 1-year health insurance estimates to differ from prior year's data. This will help prepare data users who rely on the ACS 1-year health insurance estimates.

Mary Ana McKay: On the 1-year release day, we also plan to release a Research Matters blog, which will detail the changes to the 2025 ACS one year health insurance data. The blog will examine rates of direct purchase coverage, Medicaid coverage, and multiple coverage from 2021 through 2025. It will also compare these types of health insurance coverage rates with rates from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economics Supplement. Looking ahead to the 5-year data, we plan to release a working paper which will detail the proposed methodology to bridge the health insurance estimates to support the production of 2022 to 2026 ACS 5-year estimates. Moving to our new questions.

Mary Ana McKay: The sewer question was requested by the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Agriculture. This question formerly appeared on the census in 1970, 1980, and 1990. The question is, "Is this House apartment or mobile home connected to a public sewer?"

Mary Ana McKay: Prior to this change, the question was being collected by the American Housing Survey, but that survey does not provide data at lower geographic levels like the ACS. The data are critical for understanding the wastewater infrastructure in rural and smaller communities.

Mary Ana McKay: The data also allow for monitoring of water quality and potential environmental impacts such as seepage into surrounding soil. Four new tables will be released to access sewer data. These will be Tenure by Sewer, Sewer by Units in Structure and Allocation of Sewer.

Mary Ana McKay: Just to clarify, allocation refers to filling in missing or inconsistent data from other households or people in the sample who are similar. Additionally, the fourth table will be for the Supplemental Estimates and will include table K202512 Sewer Status.

And a little bit of reference here, the ACS 1-year supplemental estimates are a subset of detailed tables that are available for geographic areas with populations of 20,000 or more.

Mary Ana McKay: The electric vehicle question was requested by the Energy Information Administration, which is tasked with determining the current national energy supply and whether it meets the needs of the country. The question added is, “do you or any member of this household own or lease an electric vehicle?”

Mary Ana McKay: Determining the prevalence of electric vehicle ownership at the housing unit level will help multiple agencies understand the energy supply, demand, and current technology of energy resources when making projections for future energy needs. Understanding energy consumption at lower levels of geography will also help federal agencies make the technological and capital changes necessary within the energy infrastructure. Data for electric vehicles will be displayed in four new tables. These tables include Vehicles Available by Electric Vehicles, Tenure by Vehicles Available by Electric Vehicles, and Allocation of Electric Vehicles. The Supplemental Estimates will include Table K202514 Vehicles Available by Electric Vehicles.

Mary Ana McKay: The solar panel question was requested by the Energy Information Administration. The question has never been asked under Decennial Census. The question is, “does this house apartment or mobile home use solar panels that generate electricity?”

Mary Ana McKay: A similar question is asked on the American Housing Survey, as well as the Residential Energy Consumption Survey, but they only produce estimates at the national level and for select metropolitan areas. The data from this question can be used to forecast housing energy for local communities.

Mary Ana McKay: The new tables added for solar panel are shown here. These include Presence of Solar Panels by Units in Structure, Tenure by Presence of Solar Panels by Units in Structure, and Allocation of Solar Panels. And for the Supplemental Estimates, K202513 Presence of Solar Panels will be available.

Mary Ana McKay: Data for the new content on the 2025 ACS will be available in the 2025 ACS 1-year data products and the 1-year supplemental estimates which will both be released on October 29th. 5-year data for the new topics are expected in the 2025 to 2029 data release scheduled for release in 2030.

Mary Ana McKay: For the modified topics, health insurance will not be available in the 2021 to 2025 5-year release as discussed earlier. However, the other modified topics will remain available. For educational attainment, responses of no schooling completed, nursery school, and kindergarten that appeared on the question for 2024 and prior will be mapped into the “less than grade one” category. No additional processing is needed for the roster or labor force questions when creating the 5-year file, given the up, the updates are only to the instructions rather than to the actual response categories available.

Mary Ana McKay: You can check out the table shells for new tables starting next Thursday, October 22nd. Sign up for GovDelivery updates to stay informed about the release and more. There are several resources available on the ACS content changes webpage that help data users understand content changes and the ACS. If you want a deeper dive into the topics and the content changes I highlighted today, I highly recommend you read through our content test evaluation reports. These reports detailed the methodology of the content test, the details of what was tested for each topic along with the results and recommendations. We produce these documents at the end of the content test and they provide great detail into the process and conclusions. The content changes webpage also contains links to the ACS content change policy, a visualization, and a webinar which provide information about how a question becomes part of the American Community Survey. If you want a very brief guide on all the content changes we went over today, we put together this table that indicates the topic, if it is modified or new, which federal agency proposed the change and what the purpose of the change was. You can download this presentation to get this table. In closing, let me share information on how to find answers and get support after this webinar concludes. You can visit our website at census.gov/ACS. It is a great resource with information about the survey, data products, tools for data users, and other helpful information. If you have a question about the ACS, do not hesitate to send us an email at acso.users.support@census.gov or call the number on the screen. Census Academy is our learning hub for data skills found at census.gov/forward/academy. You can learn how to access and use census for your data your

way through our how-to data gem videos and in-depth courses, webinars and tutorials. This page also has a link where you can request a training at no cost from our data dissemination specialist. These folks are located within your region and they can provide you with assistance about Census Bureau data such as how to obtain or understand ACS data. Whether conducting one on one webinars with business startups or conducting large scale presentations at universities, these specialists strive to put the public in touch with the data they need. If you're on social media connect with us at US Census Bureau using the hashtag #ACSdata. And one last thing, this is a reminder, if you're using ACS estimates, please make sure to source the Census Bureau American Community Survey as to where you receive the data. It helps people know that the information they're using is powered by the ACS.

Mary Ana McKay: Thank you so much for spending the time with me, and I hope you enjoyed this presentation. I am now going to pass it over to my colleague Jewel Jordan to go over questions regarding this content changes webinar.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you, Mary. Before we get started into questions I do have a couple of things I wanted to go over with everyone. The first is that next week we will be hosting the prerelease webinar on October 22nd at 01:00 p.m. Eastern Time so you can ask any questions about the release then. We will also be publicly releasing the ACS 1-year estimates on October 29th. For members of the media and that are registered, there will be an embargo period that starts on October 27th. We'll go ahead and get started. Our first question is, "Is there evidence that the new ACS roster question increases the count of young children?" Is there a subject matter expert that can answer?

Elizabeth Poehler: Hi, this is Elizabeth Poehler. So, we did test this question in the content test and overall we did not see a difference in the number of young children included on the roster between the two versions, the test version and what we had previously used. We did see evidence that when we specifically probed about young children, it did result in children being added to the roster, just not enough to affect the overall distribution of the children roster. So, there was no significant difference between the treatments.

Elizabeth Poehler: All of the papers on the topics tested are posted on the ACS website related to the 2022 content test they were published online in the fall of 2023. If you go to

census.gov/ACS, you can navigate to our research and methodology page which lists our working papers related to content changes.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you for your answer, Eli. Our next question, “Do you plan to hold a webinar or offer a blog on how much the ACS data released is changed because of the privacy rule and what level of data has changed or suppressed?” As I mentioned before, there will be a webinar that's done next week on October 22nd at 1pm. That is going to be our pre-release webinar and that webinar will address things that are going to be included in the ACS 1-year release. And then also on release day, October 29th, we will have detailed user notes which will address the impact of the DAO. We'll move on to our next question. “Why should people be cautious about health insurance coverage?” Is there an expert that can answer that?

Liana Fox: Hi, this is Liana Fox for the Economic Characteristics area. So the question was, why should we be cautious? We're just saying you should be cautious making year-to-year comparisons because the question and the processing system has changed. We'll be putting out a blog that we plan to release today, which will talk more about the changes, but we're just saying that year to year comparisons should be done with caution, that the data that we'll be releasing on the 29th for calendar year 2025, that should be good, high-quality data.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you, Liana. Our next question is, “I'm curious if you can share if the SAIHE Program Estimates will work to account for some of these ACS changes to allow for year over year comparability.” Is there an expert that can handle this question?

Nicole Scanniello: Hi Jewel, unfortunately we don't have a subject matter expert in the room, but if that question can be directed to the Public Information Office, we can have somebody get back to the requester.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you. And apologies, I meant to go over this as well. I did want to let you all know that our question and answer period will be kept to about 10 min today. If you are unable to have your question answered during the webinar, please reach out to the public

information office by email, either at PIO@census.gov or by phone at 301-763-3030, and we'll get back to you. So for that question, please do reach out to our office.

Jewel Jordan: Our next question, “I assume that lots of people in agencies request that new questions get added to the ACS. Could you briefly describe the process you use to decide who are the fortunate few who get their questions added?” Is there an expert that can address this question?

Elizabeth Poehler: Hi yes, so the ACS content is designed to meet the needs of federal agencies and we have a robust interaction with federal agencies. They can submit requests to change content to the survey at any time, but those requests must be accompanied by the legal citations that indicate if the request is required by federal law and then we go through an intensive content testing process to ensure that the content meets the rigorous requirements of the ACS and will produce accurate results before we add questions to the ACS. We do have information online and I think as Mary pointed out earlier in the webinar, we do have with a webinar posted on the website that talks about the ACS content process.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you. Our next question is, “will the HIC five table be released for historical health insurance data for children at the state level?” Is there an expert that can answer that?

Liana Fox: Hi, this is Liana Fox. Yes, that table will be released as normal, we'll have an asterisk on the 2025 number just to indicate that that should be compared with caution to any of the prior historical years, but it will be released.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you, Liana. The next question is also for you. “When you say health insurance data will not be available for 2021-to-2025-year data on data.census.gov, does that mean it will not be available via the API or the summary files either?”

Liana Fox: Hi, this is Liana Fox again. We won't have any health insurance data on the 5-year files. So that means any of our tables, any of our API, any of the ways that you interact, with the exception of the demonstration products that we will be releasing, it's actually four

demonstration tables, showing some information at the, like high level information about insured and uninsured. So those will be released, but otherwise there won't be any health insurance in the 5-year file.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you for that. Our next question asked, “What is the prerelease webinar going to be about?” Is there an expert that can talk about that?

Nicole Scanniello: Hello, this is Nicole Scanniello from the American Community Survey Office. Our prerelease webinar will follow the usual format. We will talk about what's new and different for the release that includes items like table changes, geography changes, and comparability of statistics over time and how to access the estimates. So we encourage you to attend. Thank you.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you, Nicole. Our next question is about educational attainment. “How often does the Census Bureau revise the wording or response categories? Is this the first time ‘no schooling completed; has been revised to ‘less than 1st grade?’ Is there an ACS webpage or documentation where we can track historical changes to the specific question over time?”

Eric Hernandez: Hi, this is Eric Hernandez with the Education and Social Stratification branch. This is the first time that “no schooling” has been collapsed into “less than grade one”, so there have been no changes with that category in the past. In terms of looking at the documentation, we don't have a historical trend because this is the first time we've made the change, but we do have a content test publication explaining the change for the variable.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you for that. Our next question asked, “will the recording of this webinar be made available and where thanks?” Yes, there will be a recording of this webinar posted to the Census Academy but also to our press kit, which is currently up on [census.gov](https://www.census.gov) in the newsroom.

Jewel Jordan: Please allow for a few days for the recording and transcript to be added to both locations. Our next question is “when will the 2025 ACS PUMS be released?” Is there an expert that can speak to this?

Nicole Scanniello: This is Nicole Scanniello from the American Community Survey Office. We are still determining the remainder of our ACS data releases and we'll make those dates available when we have them.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you for that, Nicole. And it looks like our last question is going to be, “as the webinar noted, the health insurance question data will not be in 2021 to 2025 5-year data file. When will that data be back in the 5-year file?”

Liana Fox: Hi, this is Liana Fox again. It will be in for the next 5-year file. Our goal is to release a working paper by the end of this year talking about how we will bridge the health insurance estimates in the 5-year files, so for 2022 to 2026, we're hopeful that the health insurance variables will be back then.

Jewel Jordan: Thank you for that response, Liana. And thank you all so much for joining today's webinar. That will end our question and answer session for today. As a reminder, the 2025 ACS 1-year prerelease webinar will be next week on October 22nd at 01:00 p.m. Eastern time. And during that webinar, we will discuss more about the upcoming release of the ACS one-year estimates. The estimates are scheduled for embargo on October 27th and for public release on October 29th. I will now hand it back to Kira to wrap up the webinar.

Kira O’Bradovich: This concludes today’s webinar. Thank you for your participation, you may disconnect at this time.