

2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines

One Version of the [U.S.] Federal Poverty Measure

- [[Federal Register Notice, January 26, 2012](#) — Full text]
 [[Prior Poverty Guidelines and Federal Register References Since 1982](#)]
 [[Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQs)]
 [[Further Resources on Poverty Measurement, Poverty Lines, and Their History](#)]
 [[Computations for the 2012 Poverty Guidelines](#)]

There are two slightly different versions of the federal poverty measure:

- The [poverty thresholds](#), and
- The [poverty guidelines](#).

The **poverty thresholds** are the original version of the federal poverty measure. They are updated each year by the **Census Bureau** (although they were [originally developed by Mollie Orshansky](#) of the Social Security Administration). The thresholds are used mainly for **statistical** purposes — for instance, preparing estimates of the number of Americans in poverty each year. (In other words, all official poverty population figures are calculated using the poverty thresholds, not the guidelines.) [Poverty thresholds since 1973 \(and for selected earlier years\)](#) and [weighted average poverty thresholds since 1959](#) are available on the Census Bureau's Web site. For an example of how the Census Bureau applies the thresholds to a family's income to determine its poverty status, see "[How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty](#)" on the Census Bureau's web site.

The **poverty guidelines** are the other version of the federal poverty measure. They are issued each year in the *Federal Register* by the **Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS). The guidelines are a simplification of the poverty thresholds for use for **administrative** purposes — for instance, determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs. The [Federal Register notice of the 2012 poverty guidelines](#) is available.

The poverty guidelines are sometimes loosely referred to as the "federal poverty level" (FPL), but that phrase is ambiguous and should be avoided, especially in situations (e.g., legislative or administrative) where precision is important.

Key differences between poverty thresholds and poverty guidelines are outlined in a table under [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQs). See also the [discussion of this topic](#) on the Institute for Research on Poverty's web site.

NOTE: The poverty guideline figures below are NOT the figures the Census Bureau uses to calculate the number of poor persons.

The figures that the Census Bureau uses are the [poverty thresholds](#).

2012 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$11,170
2	15,130
3	19,090
4	23,050
5	27,010
6	30,970

7	34,930
8	38,890
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$3,960 for each additional person.	

2012 Poverty Guidelines for Alaska

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$13,970
2	18,920
3	23,870
4	28,820
5	33,770
6	38,720
7	43,670
8	48,620
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,950 for each additional person.	

2012 Poverty Guidelines for Hawaii

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,860
2	17,410
3	21,960
4	26,510
5	31,060
6	35,610
7	40,160
8	44,710
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,550 for each additional person.	

SOURCE: *Federal Register*, Vol. 77, No. 17, January 26, 2012, pp. 4034-4035

The separate poverty guidelines for Alaska and Hawaii reflect Office of Economic Opportunity administrative practice beginning in the 1966-1970 period. Note that the poverty thresholds — the original version of the poverty measure — have never had separate figures for Alaska and Hawaii. The poverty guidelines are not defined for Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Palau. In cases in which a Federal program using the poverty guidelines serves any of those jurisdictions, the Federal office which administers the program is responsible for deciding whether to use the contiguous-states-and-D.C. guidelines for those jurisdictions or to follow some other procedure.

The poverty guidelines apply to both aged and non-aged units. The guidelines have never had an aged/non-aged distinction; only the Census Bureau (statistical) poverty thresholds have separate figures for aged and non-aged one-person and two-person units.

Programs using the guidelines (or percentage multiples of the guidelines — for instance, 125 percent or 185 percent of the guidelines) in determining eligibility include Head Start, the Food Stamp Program, the National School Lunch Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program. Note that in general, cash public assistance programs (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Security Income) do NOT use the poverty guidelines in determining eligibility. The Earned Income Tax Credit program also does NOT use the poverty guidelines to determine eligibility. For a more detailed list of programs that do and don’t use the guidelines, see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQs).

The poverty guidelines (unlike the poverty thresholds) are designated by the year in which they are issued. For instance, the guidelines issued in January 2012 are designated the 2012 poverty guidelines. However, the 2012 HHS poverty guidelines only reflect price changes through calendar year 2011; accordingly, they are approximately equal to the Census Bureau poverty thresholds for calendar year 2011. (The 2011 thresholds are expected to be issued in final form in September 2012; a preliminary version of the 2011 thresholds is now available from the Census Bureau.)

The [computations for the 2012 poverty guidelines](#) are available.

The poverty guidelines may be formally referenced as “the poverty guidelines updated periodically in the *Federal Register* by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the authority of 42 U.S.C. 9902(2).”

Go to [Further Resources on Poverty Measurement, Poverty Lines, and Their History](#)

Go to [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

Return to the main [Poverty Guidelines, Research, and Measurement](#) page.

Last updated: 02/09/12

[ASPE Home](#) | [HHS Home](#) | [Questions?](#) | [Contacting HHS](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Plain Writing Act](#) | [No FEAR Act](#) | [Disclaimers](#)
[The White House](#) | [USA.gov](#) | [Flu.gov](#)

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – 200 Independence Avenue, S.W. – Washington, D.C. 20201