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County poverty rate lower than statewide

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According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, Cochise County's poverty rate over the five-year period from 2011 through 2015 was 17.9 percent. That was lower than the statewide rate of 18.2 percent, but higher than the national rate of 15.5 percent.

Within Cochise County, poverty rates vary widely. Of the seven incorporated cities and towns, Huachuca City had the highest poverty rate over the five-year period at 32.9 percent. That was followed by Douglas (32 percent), Bisbee (29.1 percent), Benson (22.1 percent), Tombstone (21.9 percent), and Willcox (18 percent). Sierra Vista had the lowest poverty rate in Cochise County from 2011 through 2015 at 12.7 percent—considerably below state and national levels.

Three factors stand out as primary influences over whether one will live below the poverty line: family structure, age, and education. In Cochise County, families led by single moms are more than three times as likely to live in poverty as married-couple families with children. Single-mom families with small children (under 5 years old) are nearly five times as likely to be in poverty.

From 2011 through 2015, 45.9 percent of Cochise County households headed by single mothers lived in poverty. The situation is even worst for single-mother families with small children, 55.5 percent of whom lived in poverty. For married-couple families with children, the poverty rate in Cochise County is 14 percent; for married couples with small children it's only 11.5 percent.

Countywide, 24.9 percent of all children live in poverty, compared to 26 percent statewide and 21.7 percent nationwide. The highest child poverty rate of Cochise County's cities and towns is Bisbee at 42.2

percent. Huachuca City is second at 40.4 percent, followed by Douglas (39.7 percent), Benson (26.7 percent), Tombstone (25.5 percent), and Willcox (24.8 percent). Sierra Vista has the lowest childhood poverty rate at 17.1 percent.

Sierra Vista and Willcox are the only cities to have childhood poverty rates below the countywide average. The other five incorporated places (Benson, Bisbee, Douglas, Huachuca City, and Tombstone) are above the countywide rate, which is pulled down considerably by the low rate in Sierra Vista—the county’s most populous city.

Due to social insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare, seniors tend to have lower poverty rates than the general population. In Cochise County, 10.6 percent of those ages 65 and up lived below the poverty line from 2011 through 2015. That was the lowest of all age groups. The countywide senior poverty rate, however, was higher than statewide (8.8 percent) and nationwide (9.4 percent).

Of Cochise County’s incorporated cities and towns, Tombstone has the highest rate of seniors in poverty at 21.5 percent, followed by Douglas (20.2 percent), Benson (15.5 percent), Bisbee (14.8 percent), Huachuca City (8.4 percent), and Sierra Vista (6.5 percent). The senior poverty rate is lowest in Willcox, where only 6.4 percent of those ages 65 and over lived in poverty from 2011 through 2015.

Regarding education levels and poverty, the inverse relationship between the two has been well documented over the years. Douglas has the second highest individual poverty rate in Cochise County and the lowest share of the population with a high school diploma or higher (70.9 percent of the population ages 25 and over). Sierra Vista, which has the lowest poverty rate in the county, has the highest rate of high school graduates at 93.2 percent of the adult population 25 years old and up.

Douglas also has the lowest share of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher at 7.9 percent while Sierra Vista has the highest (30.2 percent).

In a positive sign, Douglas has the largest share of its population ages 25 years and up enrolled in college or graduate school at 36.9 percent. Sierra Vista has the second largest share of college or graduate school enrollees at 30 percent, followed by Huachuca City (29.5 percent), Benson (27.2 percent), Tombstone (18.7 percent), and Bisbee (13.5 percent). The lowest rate of college or graduate school enrollment is Willcox (10.4 percent).

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