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Local households still worse off than 2007

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By most measures of economic wellbeing, individuals and households in Cochise County were better off in 2015 than in 2014, but remained worse off than in 2007—the year before the nationwide Great Recession began.

According to the most recent American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, median family income in Cochise County was \$55,443 in 2015, up 2.2 percent from 2014 but still down 9.2 percent from 2007, after adjusting for inflation.

Per capita income countywide in 2015 was \$24,140, up 2.6 percent from 2014 (but down 3.6 percent from 2007).

Social assistance programs have been responsible for some of the increase in levels of family and per capita income. In 2015, 4.1 percent of Cochise County households received cash public assistance income (up from 3.4 percent in 2014 and 2 percent in 2007).

Of Cochise County households, 16.1 percent received food stamp assistance in 2015 (up from 15.2 percent in 2014 and 9.3 percent in 2007).

One measure that did not improve in Cochise County from 2014 to 2015 was median household income, which was \$43,291 in 2015—down 5.4 percent from 2014 (after the inflation adjustment). The county's median household income in 2015 was down nearly 15 percent from 2007.

In 2015, 17 percent of Cochise County's population lived below the poverty line. That was down from 18.4 percent in 2014, but still up from 15.5 percent back in 2007 before the Great Recession.

The poverty rate for the elderly in Cochise County was 9.3 percent in 2015 (down from 13.8 percent in 2014, but still up from 7.6 percent in 2007). The elderly population is generally less likely to live in poverty due to programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

Children, on the other hand, are more likely to live in poverty but substantial gains have been made in recent years. For children in Cochise County, the poverty rate in 2015 was 21.9 percent (down from 24.6 percent in 2014 and 26.2 percent in 2007).

High childhood poverty rates are largely driven by single-parent homes, which have the highest rates of poverty although the situation has been improving. In 2015, 49.1 percent of households in Cochise County that were led by single moms lived below the poverty line (down from 56.1 percent in 2014 and 61.1 percent in 2007).

For married-couple families with children, the poverty rate in 2015 was 9.8 percent (down from 11.9 percent in 2014, but still higher than the rate of 8.3 percent back in 2007).

In Cochise County, 6.4 percent of the population was without health insurance in 2015. That was down considerably from 10.3 percent in 2014 and 9.9 percent in 2009 (the first year data were published).

The uninsured rate for children in Cochise County was 3.7 percent in 2015, less than half the rate of 7.7 percent in 2014 and down substantially from 6.3 percent in 2009.

One of the signs of financial success and hallmarks of the American Dream is home ownership, which was up marginally in Cochise County in 2015, but still down from 2007 before the housing market crash and Great Recession. The home ownership rate countywide in 2015 was 67.6 percent (up from 67.1 percent in 2014 but still down from 69.8 percent in 2007).

A home is also the largest investment most people make and the value of that home is the main component of household wealth. The median value of owner-occupied homes in Cochise County in 2015 was \$146,900 (up from \$144,800 in 2014 but down considerably from \$156,100 in 2007—before the housing market crash).

On the cost side, housing constitutes the largest share of expenses for most households. Housing that costs more than 30 percent of gross household income is generally regarded as unaffordable. About 26.2 percent of homeowners with a mortgage in Cochise County paid 30 percent or more of their income toward housing costs in 2015 (down from 29.7 percent of homeowners in 2014).

Housing costs impact renters even more, with 47.5 percent of renters countywide paying 30 percent or more of their income toward housing costs in 2015. Despite a decline rental rates, that was still up from 46.8 percent in 2014. The median monthly rent in Cochise County in 2015 was \$746, which includes utilities (down from \$783 in 2014).

One of the most effective pathways out of poverty and to higher income is education. In this area we saw a decline in 2015 after many years of growth. In 2015, 19.8 percent of Cochise County residents had a bachelor's degree or higher (down considerably from 24.8 percent in 2014 and below the rate of 19.9 percent back in 2007).

The education picture does not look good moving forward with only 21.2 percent of Cochise County residents enrolled in college or graduate school in 2015 (down from 27.2 percent in 2014 and 23 percent in 2007). Declining educational attainment and college enrollment is largely attributable to the departure in recent years of many high-tech defense contractor jobs associated with Fort Huachuca.

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