AoA Notes on the Special Tabulation of the 5-year ACS Dataset

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to briefly outline the considerations involved in designing a special tabulation of the Census Bureau's five year American Community Survey (ACS). The results from this special tabulations may be used for many important purposes including serving as a component in the allocation formulas for Older Americans Act funding within states and for planning programs and services for the aging at all levels.

Background

The ACS (successor to the discontinued decennial 10% sample or "long form" Census survey) is an ongoing nationwide survey which is now the primary medium for collection of geographically based (below the national and state level) population data on such key areas as:

- Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin
- Ancestry/Citizenship/Nativity and place of birth
- Disability status (full availability delayed – see note below)
- Educational attainment
- Employment status
- Grandparents as caregivers
- Household relationship and family type and size
- Income and Poverty
- Language spoken at home and ability to speak English
- Marital status
- Migration
- Veteran status
- Many Housing characteristics

After the 1990 and 2000 Decennial Censuses, AoA funded the Census Bureau to develop special tabulations on aging of the 10% sample data in order to make available detailed tabulations at all geographic levels on key topics of concern to those who plan and administer programs and services for the aging as well as others interested in aging. The 2000 special tabulation included 116 population tables and 69 housing and household tables which were tabulated by the Census Bureau for AoA from the Census 2000 sample ("long form") data. The topics covered in these tabulations include age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino origin, marital status, income, poverty, disability, and much more. This tabulation provides much more detail on the older population (60+) than is available from other Census sources.

The Census Bureau has discontinued the 10% sample decennial Census form. Instead, it initiated the ACS as an ongoing, large scale sample survey. Since 2005, the annual sample includes valid estimates down to geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more. However, by combining multi-year data, estimates for much smaller populations

are possible. In December 2010, the Census Bureau released the first five year ACS dataset for 2005-2009. The dataset contained estimates down to the Census Tract level. In the future, the Census Bureau plans to continue to release updated five year datasets.

Proposed Ongoing Annual Special Tabulations on Aging

The availability of ongoing detailed five year data provides AoA, state and area agencies on aging, and the entire aging community with both an unprecedented opportunity to obtain timely data on many key concerns at all geographical levels and new challenges in the analysis, display, and interpretation of data. Special tabulations on aging beginning with the 2005-2009 five year ACS dataset will be generated and made available on AGID. Below are some of the considerations and issues addressed in the design of these special tabulations. Comments are invited and should be addressed to AoA.

Considerations in the Design of the Special Tabulation of the Five Year ACS

- **Topical Relevance** – The design focused on the key data needs of state and area agencies on aging and others involved in aging programs and services. Priority consideration was given to data needed for:
    - funding formulas, targeting of services to priority populations and persons most in need,
    - obtaining funding from other sources, and
    - demonstrating the needs and potential vulnerabilities of older people.

  The tables used in the 2000 Special Tabulation on Aging were a useful starting point, but as explained below, a simpler, smaller subset of these tables were selected. Some additional key tabulations needed by the aging network but not included in the latest release could be added in future years.
- **Geographical Coverage** – This tabulation takes full advantage of the ability of the five year dataset to yield valid data down to the Census Tract level. To the extent feasible, the Special Tabulation on Aging displays data at the following levels for the 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico:
    - Total U.S.
    - State
    - Planning and Service Area
    - County (urban and rural component)
    - County Subdivision (2,500 or more population for 12 states) [Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin]
    - Place (2,500 or more population)
    - Census Tract
    - American Indian and Alaska Native Area and Hawaiian Home Land
    - Alaska Native Regional Corporation
    - Congressional Districts
- **Simplicity and minimization of data suppression due to Census disclosure protection rules** – These considerations pointed to a need for less complex tables. The more complex, multi-variable tables used in the 2000 Special Tabulation on Aging (themselves a simplified version of those used in the 1990 Special Tabulation on Aging) had three drawbacks:

1. Some users reported difficulty consolidating the table columns when simpler tables were needed;
2. the large number of table cells resulted in some small cells at lower geographical level which, in turn, resulted in data suppression for some smaller geographical units; and
3. the number and complexity of the tabulations required considerable processing time for Census Bureau which, in turn, delayed the availability of the tabulations.

In addition, to minimize data suppression, less complex tables were designed for the sub-county geographical levels.

Note on Disability Data

The ACS disability questions were significantly revised in 2008. The 2008 questions will be included in the five year dataset for 2008-2012 after they accumulate five years of data.