

Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) Respondents

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Welcome to the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) Information for Respondents

This website is your source of information about the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE). You'll find [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the survey, results from the [most recently published data](#), and a lot more.

If your address has been selected, it means that we have asked someone in your household to be a respondent for this survey. Your participation is essential in order for the survey to provide a complete, accurate picture of how Americans spend their money.

Knowing what goods and services consumers are buying and how much they are spending is critical information in determining the strength of our Nation's economy and the direction in which it is moving.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics conducts the Consumer Expenditure Survey to gather data needed for the calculation of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a key measure of inflation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has been conducting this survey since 1980.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is conducted in two parts, a quarterly interview survey and a diary survey. The interview survey asks about large expenditures and regular purchases. For the diary survey, respondents are asked to keep two 1-week diaries for recording all purchases. The purpose of the diary survey is to capture small everyday purchases like food, meals, personal care products and gasoline.

Your household has been chosen for only one of these surveys. To find out more information about the survey you have been selected to be in, go to:

- » [CE Interview Survey](#)
- » [CE Diary Survey](#)

If you cannot find the information or answers to questions you are looking for, please contact the [Census Regional Office](#) that serves your area.

We look forward to your participation in the Consumer Expenditure Survey!

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Is the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) a legitimate survey?

You may have concerns about giving your personal information to the Census Bureau's Field Representative. Below are several ways to be sure that the survey and the interviewer contacting you are legitimate.

Consumer Expenditure Survey

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is an official government survey. The survey is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. You can learn more about the data and results from the [Consumer Expenditure Survey](#).

Interviewer Official Identification

Anyone contacting you in person at your home regarding the Consumer Expenditure Survey will:

1. Show their Census Bureau official identification badge which contains their photograph
2. Be carrying a laptop computer labeled with the U. S. Census Bureau's official seal
3. Say the name of the survey
4. Provide a copy of the letter you were sent about the survey

U.S. Census Bureau interviewers working on the Consumer Expenditure Survey will never ask for Social Security Numbers or bank account numbers.

Survey Letter

Before anyone contacts you about the Consumer Expenditure Survey, you may receive a letter from the Census Bureau Director telling you that a Census Bureau representative will visit you.

The letter will appear on official Census Bureau letterhead, and will include information for how to reach the Census Bureau Regional Office that serves your area.

You can confirm the identity of a Census Employee

Please call your [Census Bureau Regional Office](#) if you would like to confirm the identity of anyone contacting you regarding the Consumer Expenditure Survey.

It is illegal for anyone to impersonate a Census Bureau Interviewer

It is a federal offense for anyone to pretend they work for the Census Bureau. Section 912 of Title 18, U.S. Code, states that anyone pretending to be a government employee shall be fined and/or imprisoned for up to three years.



If you have questions about how BLS uses the CE data, you can contact the CE at (202) 691-6900 or by [email](#).

If you have questions about your participation in the CE Survey contact the nearest [Census Bureau Regional Office](#) that serves your area.

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U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics | Consumer Expenditure Surveys, PSB Suite 3985, 2 Massachusetts Avenue, NE Washington, DC 20212-0001
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Am I required to participate?



Your participation in this survey is essential; however, you may choose to decline to answer any particular question. Your voluntary response is essential for ensuring that this survey's results are complete and accurate.

Why me? Why not interview someone else?

Your address, not you personally, was selected as part of a scientifically determined sample. Your household represents thousands of other households. We need to talk with someone from your household because only your household can accurately tell us how you spend your money.

What will you do with my information?

Your information is combined with responses from thousands of other households across the country, to provide summary statistical data that are used by various local, state, and federal agencies.

Federal law authorizes the collection of this information (Titles 13 and 29 of the [United States Code](#)), and Sections 9 and 214 of Title 13 require the Census Bureau to keep all information about you and your household strictly confidential, and to use that information for statistical purposes only.

Please see [Value of the CE](#) for a more detailed explanation of how the data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey are used.

Why should I answer these questions?

The questions for the Consumer Expenditure Survey are carefully chosen, and each question meets an important statistical need. Questions about your household help the government understand the economy and develop cost of living measures.

If you have questions about how BLS uses the CE data, you can contact the CE at (202) 691-6900 or by [email](#).

If you have questions about your participation in the CE Survey contact the [Census Bureau Regional Office](#) that serves your area.

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Why should I participate?

You may be wondering why you should participate in the Consumer Expenditure Survey, or be curious about what is in it for you!

We understand that your time is valuable, and you may not want to spend it answering questions for a survey. It's important that you understand how important your participation in the Consumer Expenditure Survey is and how it affects you, your community, and your country.

Your input is very important. How important? Your address, chosen randomly to participate, actually represents as many as 15,000 other households.

By participating, you make sure that the Consumer Expenditure Survey represents all Americans. The information you provide is your voice in the statistics that are used to evaluate and guide the actions of the Federal Government. By performing this public service you are helping your community, your region, and the Nation. Are you spending more on gasoline or less at restaurants? How much do you spend on travel or school tuition? Your responses are used to give a clear picture of spending trends in America. In return, you can see from the [published tables](#) how the average spending compares with your own spending.

How are the Consumer Expenditure Survey Data Used?

The information you provide for the Consumer Expenditure Survey is used in a variety of important ways. You can learn more about how it is used for the [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\)](#), one of most important economic statistics, and read about [other ways](#) the data are used. We also have [published data](#) available.

If you have questions about how BLS uses the CE data, you can contact the CE at (202) 691-6900 or by [email](#).

To help protect your privacy and ensure [confidentiality](#), please do not identify yourself to BLS as being a respondent in the CE survey.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

On this Page:

As a respondent, you may have some questions about the Consumer Expenditure Survey. Below are some frequently asked questions (FAQs). If you have additional questions not answered below, please contact the [Census Regional Office](#) that serves your area.

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Questions

What is this survey about?

The Consumer Expenditure Survey measures how people in the United States spend their money on items such as housing, food, education, transportation, and healthcare.

Why is this survey important?

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is an essential source of data for the government. The information you provide will affect wages and pensions through adjustments due to changes in the cost of goods and services.

In addition, people in your community and throughout the country use the survey results for planning public services and addressing consumer needs. Your voluntary response is essential for ensuring that this survey's results are complete and accurate.

What kinds of questions will I be asked?

If you have been selected for the Diary survey, you will write down in a diary all the purchases you make for two weeks. We will want to know about your purchases and the purchases of everyone who lives in your household.

If you have been selected for the Interview survey, you will answer a series of questions about purchases that you and other people in your household have made, and bills you have paid, in the past 3 months.

Why me? Why not interview someone else?

Your address was selected, not you personally, as part of a scientifically determined sample. Your household represents thousands of other households. We need to talk with someone from your household because only your household can accurately tell us how you spend your money.

What if I am retired, ill, unemployed, or just don't spend much money?

We are interested in how all Americans spend their money. We can only have a complete picture if we talk to all types of people. You and your household represent thousands of other Americans in similar situations. It is important to hear from and learn about the spending habits of people of all ages and of all levels of spending in order to have data that accurately represents the country.

How long will the interview take?

If you have been selected for the Consumer Expenditure Diary Survey, we expect that it will take about 15 minutes to record your expenditures daily; in addition, it will take about 25 minutes for each of our visits over this two-week period.

If you have been selected for the Consumer Expenditure Interview survey, the average interview takes about 65 minutes. The length of the interview depends on many factors, including the number of people in your household and how your household spends its money.

Where can I find out more about the survey?

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is an official government survey. The survey is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. You can learn more about the data and results from the Consumer Expenditure Survey at www.bls.gov/cex.

If you have questions about how BLS uses the CE data, you can contact the CE at (202) 691-6900 or by [email](mailto:ce@bls.gov).

Please do not identify yourself to BLS as being in the CE survey.

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Confidentiality

BLS and the Census Bureau know how important it is to keep information private, or confidential.

Federal law¹ requires both BLS and the Census Bureau to keep all information about your household completely confidential. That means that no one other than approved, official government representatives can access your personal information.

This law also protects your information from being shared with other federal agencies. No one other than the Census Bureau and BLS has access to your information. The law applies to the Internal Revenue Service, White House, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, police, and welfare agencies — only specially sworn Census Bureau and BLS employees can see your information.

Anyone breaking this law may face severe penalties, including a federal prison sentence of up to five years, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both. More information on the [Census Bureau's data protection policies](#) is available on their web site.

The information that the Census Bureau provides to BLS is in the form of statistics, personal identifiers such as names and addresses are not included. The information you provide is combined with the information provided by all the other households who responded to the survey, and published in a statistical format. If interested, you can see some examples of the [data](#) produced by the CE survey.

¹ Title 13, United States Code, Section 8b, authorizes the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct this survey. Section 9 of Title 13, United States Code requires all collected data to be kept confidential.

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Value of the CE

The information provided during the Consumer Expenditure survey is invaluable. Although the main use is to update the [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\)](#), it is also used in many other important ways.

Government and private agencies use the data to look at spending patterns of specific groups of people, such as those over 65, or low-income households. This information is used to make important decisions affecting these groups.

Policymakers use the data to study the impact of policy changes on different socioeconomic groups.

Researchers use the Consumer Expenditure data to look at a wide range of topics. Some of these research studies look at spending behavior of different types of families, spending on various products (including newly-introduced goods and services), and gift-giving behavior. Market researchers find the data useful in analyzing consumer or business interest in groups of goods and services.

Some Uses of CE Data

- » Consumer Expenditure Survey data are used to update the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the most widely used measure of inflation.
- » The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses Consumer Expenditure Survey data to estimate the cost of raising a child. Policies on foster care and child support are based on the amounts parents spend on health care, education, transportation and other expenses for their children.
- » The Department of Defense uses Consumer Expenditure Survey data to update cost of living adjustments for military families.
- » The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services uses Consumer Expenditure Survey data to estimate American spending on health care. The Consumer Expenditure Survey measures out-of-pocket expenses for hospital care and is one of the few sources of this important information.
- » The Bureau of Economic Analysis uses information from home owners to measure personal spending for the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

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The CE and the Consumer Price Index

Overview

- » The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is the country's chief measure of retail inflation. It is a measure of the change over time in the prices for a market basket of consumer goods and services. The market basket is a set of items that is priced over time to see how the cost of these items change.
- » The CPI represents virtually all goods and services purchased for consumption by the U.S. urban population.
- » The CPI is the chief measure compiled by the U.S. government that shows changes in the purchasing power of an American consumer's money.

How CE data are used in the CPI

1. The BLS combines the spending information from respondents across the country to see how much is spent on each type of item.
2. All reported expenses are used to estimate how much urban households spend on each item.
3. These estimates are used to construct the market basket which contains a representative sample of expenses.
4. The BLS conducts another survey to find out where consumers purchased items in the market basket.
5. BLS data collectors visit housing units and a sample of the identified stores to obtain current price information on about 80,000 items each month across the country.
6. The BLS combines the information about the items purchased, the expenditures on these items, and their current prices to calculate the CPI.

Importance of the CPI

The CPI affects nearly all Americans by:

- » **Informing Federal decision-makers.** The CPI provides monthly information about price changes which is used by the government, business and many others to make economic decisions. The President, Congress, and the Federal Reserve Board use trends in the CPI to help them make policy decisions. The CPI is often used to evaluate the effectiveness of government economic policy.
- » **Adjusting dollar values.** The CPI is used to automatically provide cost-of-living income adjustments to millions of American workers and retirees, and to adjust income eligibility levels for government programs and government assistance.
- » The CPI affects almost all Americans.
 - » 53.0 million Social Security beneficiaries.
 - » About 25.7 million food stamp recipients.
 - » About 4.5 million military and Federal Civil Service retirees and survivors.
 - » Over 29 million children who receive subsidies for school lunches.
 - » Almost 2 million workers under collective bargaining agreements.
 - » Federal income tax brackets are adjusted each year by the CPI affecting all taxpayers.

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About the BLS

- » The **Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)** is the principal fact-finding agency for the Federal Government in the broad field of labor economics and labor statistics.
- » The BLS is an independent national statistical agency that collects, processes, analyzes, and disseminates essential statistical data to the American public, the U.S. Congress, other Federal agencies, State and local governments, business, and labor. The BLS also serves as a statistical resource to the Department of Labor.
- » The BLS mission states that BLS data must be relevant to current social and economic issues, be timely in reflecting today's rapidly changing economic conditions, be accurate, consistently be of high statistical quality, and maintain impartiality.
- » BLS conducts many surveys on topics ranging from employment, unemployment, inflation and prices, spending and time use, and much more. For more information, visit www.bls.gov/bls/proghome.htm.
- » The Bureau of Labor Statistics has approximately 2,400 employees in its National Office in Washington, D.C., its 6 Regional Offices, and in smaller offices around the country.

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About the Census Bureau

The Census Bureau's mission is to serve as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy. The Nation is constantly changing, and Americans change with it. They grow in number, move, and develop new patterns of living and working. The Census Bureau measures these changes. Policy makers use this information to make decisions which affect our future.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) data is one of several ongoing surveys collected by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Data the Census Bureau Collects

In addition to collecting data for hundreds of other important surveys each year, the Census Bureau is mainly known for the following:

- » Population Census – The Census Bureau's first, largest, and most visible demographic program is conducted every 10 years.
- » Economic Census - A profile of American businesses is conducted every 5 years, and covers nearly all of the U.S. economy in its basic collection of establishment statistics.
- » Census of Governments - Collected every 5 years, this survey identifies the scope and nature of the nation's state and local government sector. It provides authoritative benchmark figures of public finance and public employment; classifies local government organizations, powers, and activities; and measures federal, state, and local fiscal relationships.
- » American Community Survey (ACS) - A nationwide survey providing timely detailed demographic, social, economic data about the country's communities each year. It is designed to provide communities a snapshot at how they are changing.
- » On-Going Surveys – The Census Bureau also collects information for vital demographic surveys which are used by lawmakers and fiscal planners to make important decisions regarding programs and services and across the country. For example, data from the Current Population Survey are used to determine the Nation's monthly unemployment rate. Other on-going surveys include the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the National Health Interview Survey, the Nation Crime and Victimization Survey, and the American Housing Survey.

You can find additional information about the [Census Bureau](#) and its programs on their website.

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Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) Respondents

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Contact Information

If you have any questions about your participation in the Consumer Expenditure Survey, please contact the [Census Bureau Regional Office](#) that serves your area.

If you have questions about how BLS uses the CE data, you can contact the CE at (202) 691-6900 or by [email](#).

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CE Interview Survey

The Consumer Expenditure Interview Survey asks questions about recent expenses and bills anyone in your household has made.

The Interview Survey asks about a wide range of expenses, including:

- » [Housing \(including mortgage, rent, and utilities\)](#)
- » [Construction and Repairs](#)
- » [Appliances](#)
- » [Furniture](#)
- » [Clothing](#)
- » [Vehicle Purchases, Rental and Repairs](#)
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During the interview, the interviewer will show you an Information Booklet which provides examples of the types of expenses the questions ask about. We encourage you to look at receipts, bills and other records to help remember your purchases.

Interviewers are highly trained to answer any questions the respondent has, and to help them answer the interview questions.

The average interview is 65 minutes, though the actual length will vary depending on the number of people in your household and your spending patterns. The interviewer is trained to make the interview go as smoothly and quickly as possible.

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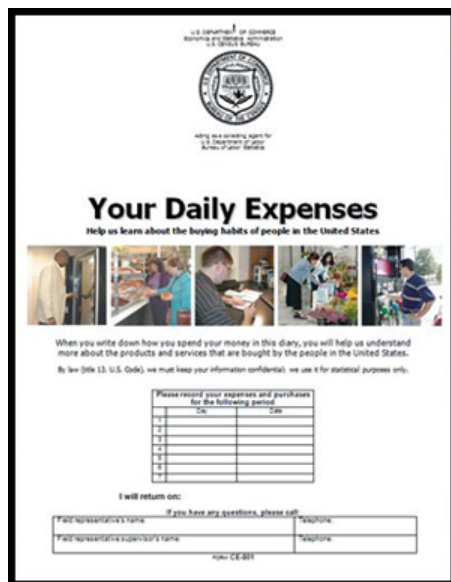
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CE Diary Survey



If you are a respondent in the Consumer Expenditure Diary Survey, we will ask you to write down all purchases and expenses made by anyone in your household over a period of two weeks.

The Diary is divided into four sections:

- » **Food Away From Home:** any meals, snacks or beverages anyone in your household purchased to eat while away from home
- » **Food for Home Consumption:** any food, such as groceries, anyone in the household purchased to prepare or eat at home
- » **Clothing, Shoes, Jewelry and Accessories:** any of these items anyone in the household purchased
- » **All Other Products, Services and Expenses:** any other spending anyone in the household did during the week

A Census Bureau interviewer will go over the diary form with you at your home, and will explain how to fill it out. You can also contact the interviewer to answer any questions the household may have while completing the diary.

After one week, the interviewer will return to pick up your diary for the first week's expenses. The interviewer will work with the household to determine if all expenses were recorded, and to answer any questions you may have. During this visit, the household will receive another diary to complete for a second week.

After the second week, the interviewer will again return to pick up the diary, review it and answer any questions. The interviewer will also ask some questions about your household which provide information necessary for BLS to use the data.

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