

2019 American Housing Survey Housing Insecurity Research Module Background

Overview

Housing Insecurity is a concept used by researchers, policymakers, program leaders, and practitioners to inform decision making and improve outcomes, but has not been defined or measured in one consistent way throughout the research literature. There is currently no standardized household-level measurement tool that captures the various dimensions of housing insecurity across a continuum. The various measurement methods currently employed inform the conceptual framework for developing a comprehensive consensus measure, but alone are insufficient for measuring housing insecurity across a continuous scale. This makes it difficult to consistently track prevalence of housing insecurity from year to year and to examine the correlation of housing insecurity with health, education, employment, and criminal justice outcomes.

Since there is no comprehensive transferable instrument for measuring housing insecurity that is currently used by national surveys, the Office of Policy Development & Research (PD&R) at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development identified the development of a housing insecurity module as a research priority in their “[HUD Research Roadmap: 2017 Update](#).”

Short-Term Goal

The short-term (2-3 years) goal of developing the housing insecurity module is to explore the feasibility of constructing a standardized series of questions to measure the continuum of housing insecurity in the model of the transferable U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module developed by the USDA. To achieve this goal, HUD and Census will first collect data using the 2019 AHS.

With the data from the Housing Insecurity Research Module, HUD will launch a research project that aims to use data reduction techniques like exploratory factor analysis and principal components analysis to identify a smaller set of questions that can be used in a validated index of housing insecurity. HUD commits to engage in discussions with OMB, interagency partners, and housing insecurity experts as it explores whether it is possible to develop a housing insecurity scale from questions evaluated in this research project and analyzes potential scale options, including whether the proposed multidimensional framework may be reduced to a unidimensional scale. Any initial proposals for a scale developed through this research would need to be assessed and calibrated over time.

Long-Term Goal

The long-term goal is to develop a empirically-sound transferable housing insecurity survey module will help researchers build a more robust and coherent body of knowledge around housing needs, trade-offs, and correlates, enhancing the quality and consistency of policy-relevant research, and amplifying the visibility of the continuum of housing needs. A transferable

module that produces a household-level housing insecurity score will be a tool for studying both the extent to which housing insecurity explains other observed outcomes and which interventions are likely to improve housing security.

Technical Approach

The Housing Insecurity Research Module sample will draw upon the 117,500 sample housing units expected for the AHS regular production sample. The target sample size for the Housing Insecurity Research Module is 4,000 housing units. Sample size and eligibility criteria were designed to capture low-income households more likely to experience policy-relevant housing problems, account for differences in tenure distribution by income, account for variation in population size and tenure across Census divisions, and produce statistically-supported options for developing a housing insecurity index.

Questionnaire

The HIRM questionnaire will include questions on the following topics:

- a. **Screener**: The screener will include questions about the respondent's home type, tenure, mortgages, household roster, demographics, length of time living at current home, and tenure of previous home. The main purpose of the screener is to ensure that the HIRM questionnaire is collected from the same household living in the housing unit during the AHS regular production interview.
- b. **Affordability**: The Affordability section will ask about the respondent's difficulty affording their home and necessities such as utilities, food, or childcare. It also includes questions about the respondent's level of stress or worry due to financial difficulty.
- c. **Stable Occupancy**: The Stable Occupancy questions will ask about forced moves from a home such as eviction or foreclosure, and reasons for forced or voluntary moves from a home. It also includes questions about temporary housing situations, and the respondent's level of stress or worry about forced moves.
- d. **Decent and Safe**: The Decent and Safe questions will be about the condition and safety of the respondent's home.