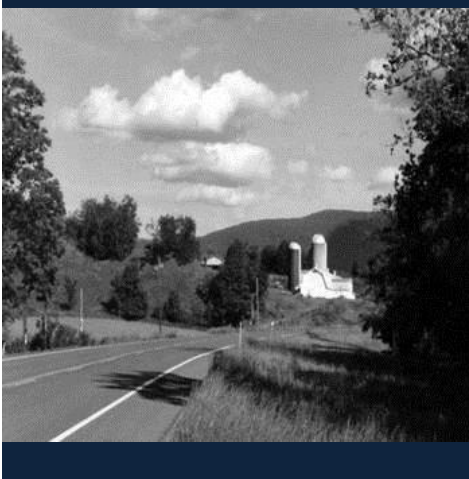


# RURAL RESEARCH NOTE

## THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

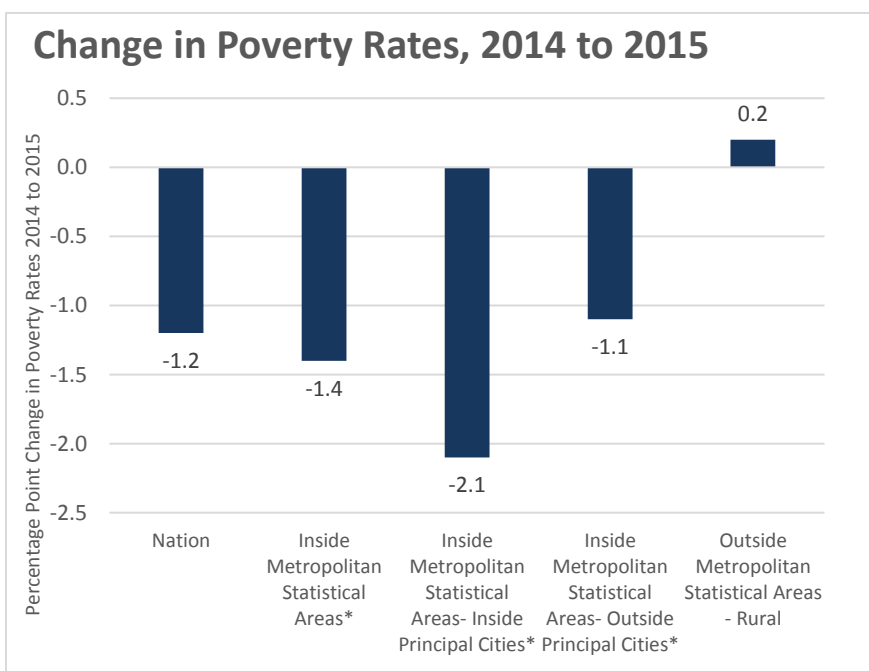
The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit organization that supports affordable housing efforts in rural areas of the United States. HAC provides technical housing services, seed money loans from a revolving fund, housing program and policy assistance, and research and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.



September 13, 2016

## ECONOMIC EXPANSION ELUDES RURAL AMERICA

While the nation is finally beginning to fully recover from the Great Recession that officially ended in 2009, rural America continues to lag behind economically. Released today, the U.S. Census Bureau's annual report, [Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015](#), reveals that both metropolitan areas and the nation as a whole experienced statistically significant decreases in poverty, and increases in median household income, reflecting overall economic improvement. Rural areas, on the other hand, stand out from an otherwise positive report with lower levels of economic gain.



\*Statistically significant estimate

## **Rural Income and Poverty Unchanged**

Overall, the nation's median household income (2015) experienced its first annual statistically significant increase since 2007. Easily overlooked in this generally positive report was the finding that rural areas experienced a decline<sup>1</sup> in median household income (\$45,534 in 2014 to \$44,657 in 2015). While the difference was not statistically significant, it represents one of the only areas of continued income stagnation. The estimated 2 percent decline in rural median household income is in contrast to the statistically significant 6 percent increase in incomes for metropolitan areas.

An estimated 7.4 million rural Americans had incomes below the poverty level in 2015 which represents a statistically significant decline in the absolute number of persons in poverty from the 2014 estimate of 8.2 million. This decline of persons below the poverty level, however, was offset by an even larger decline in rural population, resulting in an actual increase in the rural poverty rate (16.5 percent in 2014 to 16.7 percent in 2015). While the estimated increase in the rural poverty rate was not statistically significant, it was the only area of residence (rural, urban, suburban) where the poverty rate did not decrease. The associated estimate of population loss is an ongoing concern for many rural communities with approximately 1,300 rural counties having lost population over the last five years.<sup>2</sup>

## **Rural Health Insurance Coverage Continues to Grow**

One positive change in rural areas was insurance coverage. According to the Census, rural areas experienced a 1.1 percentage point increase in insurance coverage during the 2014 to 2015 period with the overall rate now exceeding 90 percent coverage. The provision of government health insurance was associated with much of the change in rural coverage (1.8 percent growth), which contrasts with nation as a whole, where increased private health insurance coverage represented a larger part of the expansion in insured households.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rural change in income was not statistically significant.

<sup>2</sup> USDA, Economic Research Services. 2016. Population and Migration Overview. Webpage accessed 9-16-16 at the following url: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/population-migration.aspx>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON POVERTY IN RURAL AMERICA

### Download the Census Bureau's Official Report on Poverty

For more information on poverty and income figures download the U.S. Census Bureau's new report: *Income and Poverty in the United States:2015* at: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>

### Additional HAC Resources on Rural Poverty

*Rural Voices* magazine issue entitled *Revisiting Poverty in Rural America*, <http://www.ruralhome.org/sct-information/rural-voices/1022-rvwinter2014>

*Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty, and Housing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*  
<http://www.ruralhome.org/component/content/article/587-taking-stock-2010>

Access data on poverty and income for your community at HAC's *Rural Data Portal*: [www.ruraldataportal.org](http://www.ruraldataportal.org)

---

## HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

### Contact Us

#### HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

1025 Vermont Avenue, Northwest  
Suite 606  
Washington DC 20005

202-842-8600  
[hac@ruralhome.org](mailto:hac@ruralhome.org)  
[www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org)

