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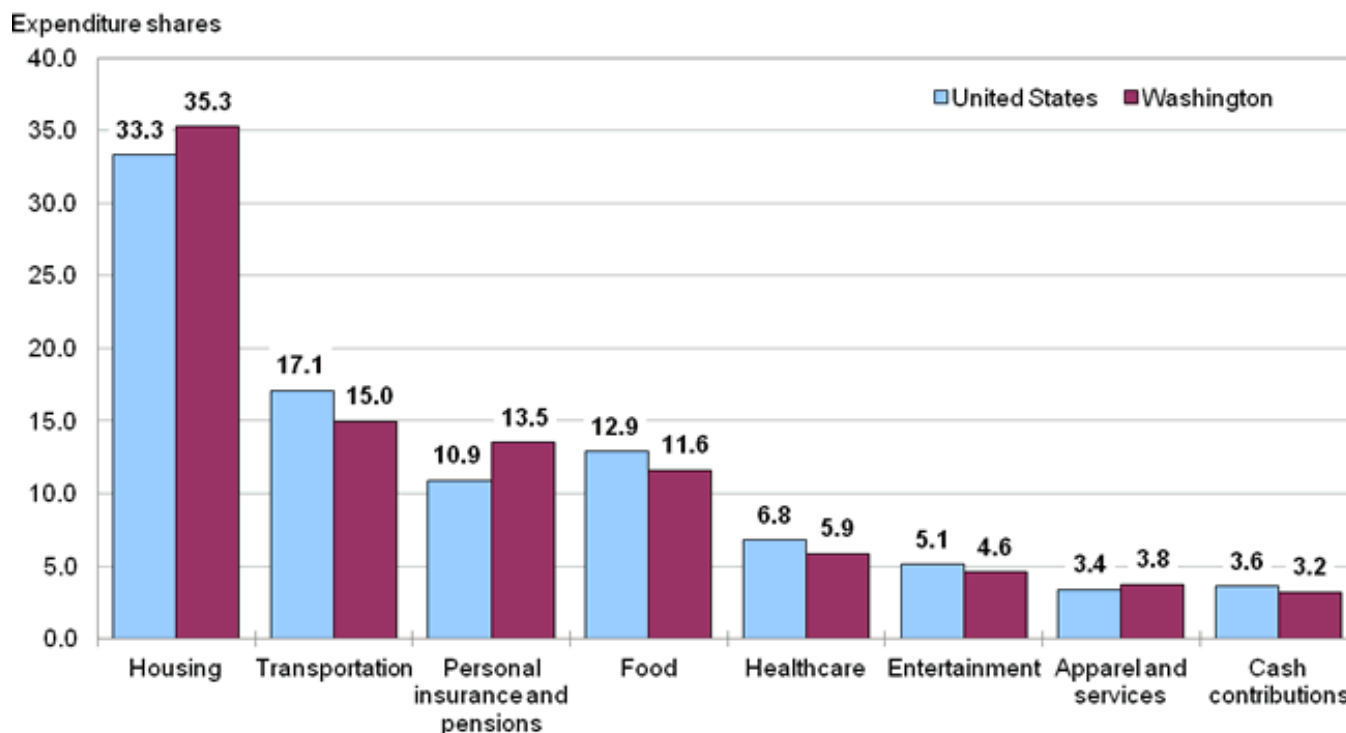
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Consumer Expenditures for the Washington, D.C. Area: 2011-2012

Consumer units¹ in the Washington, D.C.-Md.-Va.-W.Va. metropolitan area spent an average of \$77,943 per year in 2011–2012, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Sheila Watkins, the Bureau's regional commissioner, noted that this figure was over 54 percent higher than the \$50,581 average expenditure level for a typical household in the United States. Not only did households in the Washington area spend more than the U.S. average, they allocated their dollars differently among the major categories, varying significantly in 6 of the 8. For example, the share of expenditures for healthcare, which accounted for 5.9 percent of a typical household's budget in the Washington area, was significantly lower than the nationwide average of 6.8 percent. (See [chart 1](#) and [table 1](#).)

Chart 1. Percent distribution of average annual expenditures for the eight major categories in the United States and Washington metropolitan area, 2011-2012



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Housing in the Washington area averaged \$27,475 annually and was the largest expenditure category, accounting for 35.3 percent of a Washington-area household's total budget. (See [table 1](#) and [table 2](#).) This share was significantly higher than the 33.3-percent national average. Overall, 8 of the 18 published metropolitan areas had expenditure shares for housing significantly above the U.S. average, while 3 had significantly lower-than-average shares. (See [chart 2](#).) Housing expenditure shares among the 18 areas ranged from 39.7 percent in New York to 31.7 percent in Detroit. (See [table 3](#).)

The majority of housing expenditures in Washington went toward shelter, 64.1 percent, which includes mortgage interest, property taxes, repairs, and rent, among other items; nationwide, 58.5 percent of the housing budget was allocated for shelter. (See [table A](#).) Utilities, fuels, and public services expenses accounted for 16.1 percent of the housing budget locally; nationally, they made up 21.9 percent. The rate of homeownership in Washington, at 70 percent, compared to the U.S. average of 65 percent.

Table A. Percent distribution of housing expenditures, United States and Washington, 2011-2012

Category	United States	Washington
Note: Columns may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.		
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At 15.0 percent of the total budget, transportation was the second-largest expenditure category in the Washington area; this was significantly lower than the national average of 17.1 percent. Among the 18 metropolitan areas nationwide, 8 had expenditure shares for transportation that were significantly below the U.S. average; only Houston had a significantly above-average transportation share. (See [chart 3](#).)

Of the \$11,656 in annual spending for transportation in Washington, 89.3 percent was spent buying and maintaining private vehicles; this compared to the national average of 93.9 percent. The remaining 10.7 percent of a Washington household's transportation budget was spent on public transit, which includes fares for taxis, buses, trains, and planes; this allocation was significantly above the 6.1-percent average for the nation. (See [table B](#).) Still, the average number of vehicles per household in Washington (2.1) was slightly higher than the U.S. average (1.9).

Table B. Percent distribution of transportation expenditures, United States and Washington, 2011-2012

Category	United States	Washington
Note: Columns may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.		
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Washington households spent 13.5 percent of their annual budgets on personal insurance and pensions, significantly above the national average of 10.9 percent, making this the third-largest expenditure category for the area's consumer units.

The portion of a Washington consumer unit's budget spent on food, 11.6 percent, was significantly lower than the 12.9-percent U.S. average. Three metropolitan areas (including Washington) had food expenditure shares that were significantly below the nationwide average, while only Los Angeles reported an expenditure share for food significantly above that for the nation. (See [table 3](#).)

Households in Washington spent \$4,778, or 52.9 percent, of their food dollars on food prepared at home

and the remaining 47.1 percent on food prepared away from home, such as restaurant meals, carry-out, board at school, and catered affairs. In comparison, the typical U.S. household spent 59.4 percent of its food budget on food prepared at home and 40.6 percent on food prepared away from home.

As noted, Washington is 1 of 18 metropolitan areas nationwide for which Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) data are available.

Metropolitan area CE data and that for the four geographic regions of the United States are available on our Web site at www.bls.gov/cex/tables.htm. Metropolitan area CE news releases are available at www.bls.gov/regions/consumerspending.htm.Footnotes

¹ See the Additional Information for the definition of a consumer unit. The terms consumer unit and household are used interchangeably throughout the text for convenience. Additional Information

Data contained in this report are from the Consumer Expenditure Survey, which is collected on an ongoing basis by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The CE data were averaged over a two-year period, 2010 and 2011 and are available for the nation, the 4 geographic regions of the country, and 18 metropolitan areas. The metropolitan area discussed in this release is Washington, D.C.-Md.-Va.-W.Va. PMSA, which includes the District of Columbia; Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Washington Counties in Maryland; Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas, and Manassas Park cities and Arlington, Clarke, Fairfax, Fauquier, King George, Loudoun, Prince William, Rappahannock, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Warren Counties in Virginia; and Berkeley and Jefferson Counties in West Virginia.

The survey consists of two components, a diary or recordkeeping survey, and an interview survey. The integrated data from the BLS Diary and Interview Surveys provide a complete accounting of consumer expenditures and income, which neither survey component alone is designed to do. Due to changes in the survey sample frame, metropolitan area data in this release are not directly comparable to those prior to 1996.

A consumer unit is defined as members of a household related by blood, marriage, adoption, or other legal arrangement; a single person living alone or sharing a household with others but who is financially independent; or two or more persons living together who share responsibility for at least 2 out of 3 major types of expenses – food, housing, and other expenses. The terms household or consumer unit are used interchangeably for convenience.

CE metropolitan area estimates are not comparative cost of living surveys, as neither the quantity nor the quality of goods and services has been held constant among areas. Differences may result from variations in demographic characteristics such as consumer unit size, age, preferences, income levels, etc. However, expenditure shares, or the percentage of a consumer unit's budget spent on a particular category, can be used to compare spending patterns across areas. Sample sizes for the metropolitan areas are much smaller than for the nation, so the U.S. estimates and year-to-year changes are more reliable than those for the metropolitan areas. Users should also keep in mind that prices for many goods and services have changed since the survey was conducted.

Expenditure shares for housing and transportation that are above or below that for the nation after testing

for significance at the 95-percent confidence interval are also identified in charts 2 and 3 for the 18 metropolitan areas surveyed.

A value that is statistically different from another does not necessarily mean that the difference has economic or practical significance. Statistical significance is concerned with our ability to make confident statements about a universe based on a sample. It is entirely possible that a large difference between two values is not significantly different statistically, while a small difference is, since both the size and heterogeneity of the sample affect the relative error of the data being tested.

For additional technical documentation and related information, see www.bls.gov/opub/hom/homch16.htm.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 691-5200; Federal Relay Service: (800) 877-8339.

Table 1. Percent distribution of average annual expenditures, United States and Washington, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-12

Item	United States	Washington
Note: Columns may not add to 100 due to rounding.		

Table 2. Consumer unit characteristics and average annual expenditures, United States and Washington, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-12

Category	United States	Washington
Consumer unit characteristics:		
Income before taxes	\$64,649	\$111,926
Age of reference person	49.9	49.0
Average number in consumer unit:		
Persons	2.5	2.5
Children under 18	0.6	0.6
Persons 65 and over	0.3	0.3
Earners	1.3	1.5
Vehicles	1.9	2.1
Percent homeowners	65	70
Average annual expenditures	\$50,581	\$77,943
Food	6,529	9,040
Food at home	3,880	4,778
Cereals and bakery products	534	637
Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs	843	1,048
Dairy products	413	486
Fruits and vegetables	723	956
Other food at home	1,367	1,651
Food away from home	2,649	4,262
Alcoholic beverages	454	792
Housing	16,846	27,475
Shelter	9,858	17,603
Owned dwellings	6,101	11,510
Rented dwellings	3,109	4,396
Other lodging	648	1,697
Utilities, fuels, and public services	3,687	4,413
Household operations	1,141	2,238
Housekeeping supplies	612	788
Household furnishings and equipment	1,547	2,433
Apparel and services	1,738	2,932
Transportation	8,649	11,656
Vehicle purchases (net outlay)	2,942	3,890
Gasoline and motor oil	2,706	2,983
Other vehicle expenses	2,472	3,530
Public and other transportation	529	1,253
Healthcare	3,436	4,584
Entertainment	2,589	3,586
Personal care products and services	631	1,027
Reading	112	195
Education	1,130	1,855

Table 2. Consumer unit characteristics and average annual expenditures, United States and Washington, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-12 - Continued

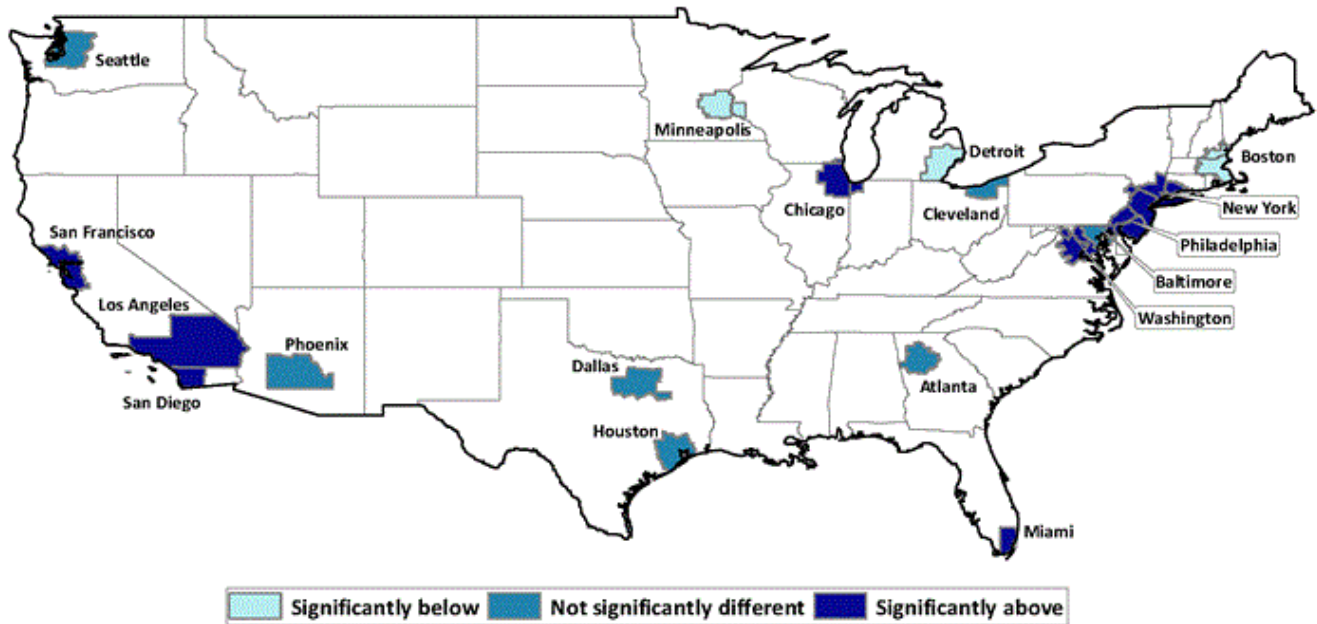
Category	United States	Washington
Tobacco products and smoking supplies	341	291
Miscellaneous	802	1,448
Cash contributions	1,818	2,512
Personal insurance and pensions.....	5,508	10,548
Life and other personal insurance.....	335	866
Pensions and Social Security	5,173	9,682

Table 3. Percent share of average annual expenditures for housing, transportation, and food, United States and 18 metropolitan areas, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-2012

Area	Housing	Transportation	Food
United States	33.3	17.1	12.9
Atlanta	34.7	16.9	11.7*
Baltimore	33.8	13.7*	12.7
Boston	31.8*	14.8*	13.2
Chicago	34.9*	15.0*	12.3
Cleveland	31.9	17.8	12.3
Dallas	32.9	18.6	12.5
Detroit	31.7*	18.8	13.3
Houston	31.9	20.3*	12.5
Los Angeles	37.7*	16.0*	13.6*
Miami	38.4*	17.0	13.7
Minneapolis	31.8*	17.5	12.6
New York	39.7*	13.7*	12.4
Philadelphia	37.9*	14.4*	12.7
Phoenix	34.8	15.9	13.0
San Diego	38.5*	15.6	12.0
San Francisco	35.2*	14.2*	11.5*
Seattle	34.1	15.7	12.8
Washington	35.3*	15.0*	11.6*

*Statistically significant difference from the U.S. average at the 95-percent confidence level.

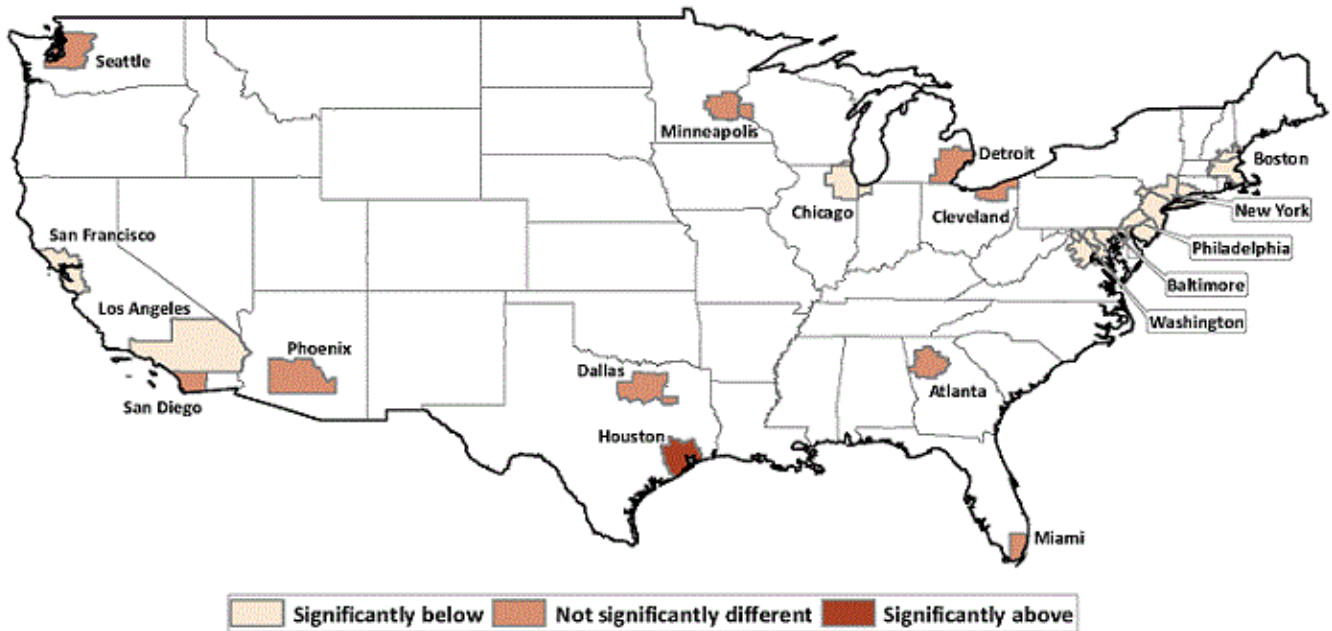
Chart 2. Expenditure shares spent on housing in 18 metropolitan statistical areas compared to the U.S. average, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-2012



Note: Statistical significance testing at the 95-percent confidence interval.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Chart 3. Expenditure shares spent on transportation in 18 metropolitan statistical areas compared to the U.S. average, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2011-2012



Note: Statistical significance testing at the 95-percent confidence interval.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics