



For Release: Thursday, January 11, 2018

18-54-BOS

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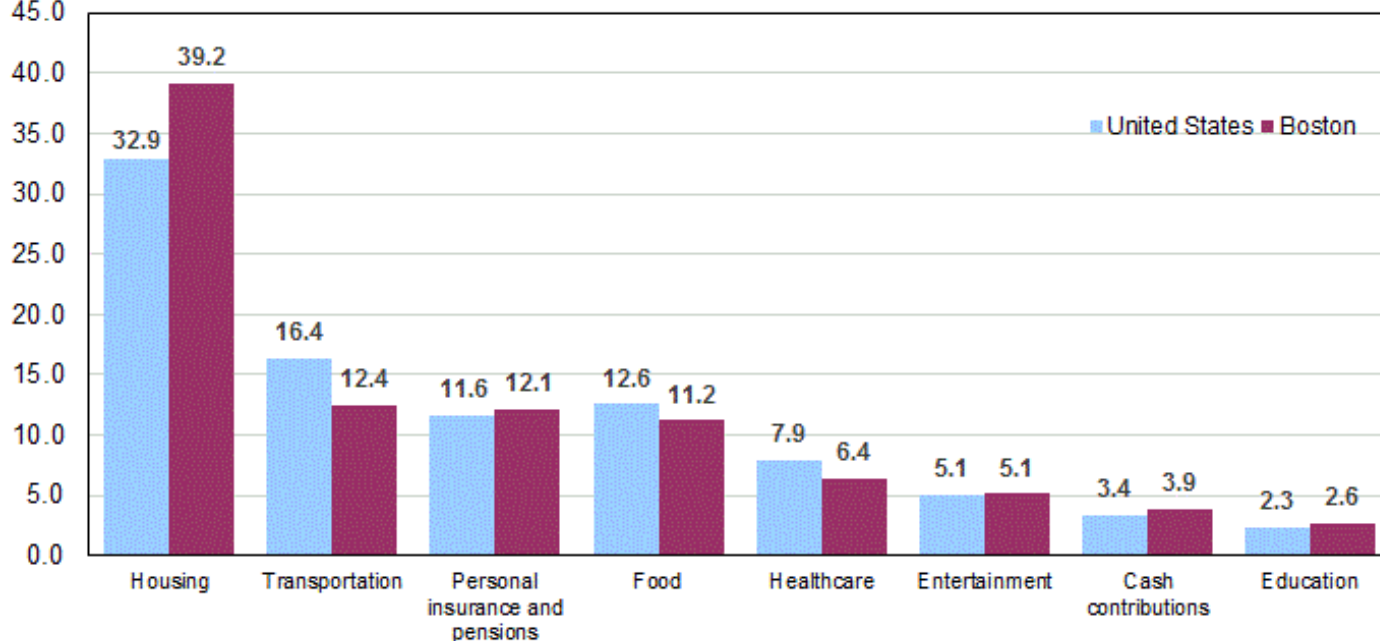
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Consumer Expenditures for the Boston Metropolitan Area: 2015-16

Consumer units in the Boston-Cambridge-Newton metropolitan area spent an average of \$68,119 per year in 2015-16, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Regional Commissioner Deborah A. Brown, noted that this figure was over 20 percent above the \$56,648 average expenditure level for a typical household in the United States. Not only did households in the Boston area spend more than the U.S. average, they also allocated their dollars differently than the nation in 4 of the 8 major expenditure categories. For example, expenditures for housing accounted for 39.2 percent of a household budget in Boston, significantly more than the 32.9 percent national average. (See [chart 1](#) and [table 1.](#))

Chart 1. Percent distribution of average annual expenditures for eight major categories in the United States and Boston metropolitan area, 2015–16

Expenditure shares



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Highlights of the Boston area's 2015–16 spending patterns:

- **Housing:** This was the largest expenditure category for Boston-area households and averaged \$26,671. Housing accounted for 39.2 percent of the area's household budget, significantly higher than the 32.9-percent U.S. average. (See [table 1.](#)) Housing expenditures shares among the published 22 metropolitan areas for which data were available ranged from 40.3 percent in San Francisco to 30.3 percent in Detroit. (See [table 2.](#))

- **Transportation:** Boston-area households spent 12.4 percent of their budgets on transportation, significantly below the national average of 16.4 percent. Of the \$8,465 in annual transportation expenditures in Boston, 87.8 percent was spent buying and maintaining private vehicles compared to the national average of 93.1 percent.
- **Food:** The portion of a Boston household's budget spent on food, 11.2 percent, was significantly below the 12.6-percent U.S. average. Boston-area households spent \$4,702, or 61.6 percent, of their food dollars on food at home and \$2,934 (38.4 percent) on food away from home. In comparison, the average U.S. household spent 56.7 percent of its food budget on food at home and 43.3 percent on food away from home.

Additional Information

Data in this release are from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE), which the U.S. Census Bureau conducts for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The data in this release were averaged over a 2-year period, 2015 and 2016.

A household in the CE survey is defined as a consumer unit which includes families; single persons living alone or sharing a household with others but who are financially independent; or two or more persons living together who share expenses. The terms household or consumer unit are used interchangeably for convenience.

Differences in spending among metropolitan areas may reflect differences in the cost of living, but they also may reflect other causes. Spending differences may result from different consumer preferences or variations in demographic characteristics, such as household size, age, or income levels. However, expenditure shares, or the percentage of a household'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.

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. A large difference between two values may not be statistically significant, while a small difference could be significant; both the sample size and the variation among the values in the sample affect the relative error of the estimates.

For additional technical and related information, see www.bls.gov/opub/hom/homch16.htm. Data for the nation, the four geographic regions of the U.S., and 22 metropolitan areas nationwide are available at www.bls.gov/cex/tables.htm. Metropolitan definitions used in the survey are available at www.bls.gov/cex/ce_msa_201516.htm. The metropolitan area discussed in this release is Boston-Cambridge-Newton, Mass.-N.H., which is comprised of Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth, and Suffolk Counties in Massachusetts, and Rockingham and Strafford Counties in New Hampshire. Metropolitan area news releases for the Consumer Expenditure Survey are available at www.bls.gov/regions/home.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. Average annual expenditures, characteristics, and percent distributions, United States and Boston metropolitan area, 2015–16

Category	United States	Boston
Consumer unit characteristics:		
Income before taxes.....	\$72,156	\$91,781
Age of reference person.....	50.7	49.4
Average number in consumer unit:		
People	2.5	2.2
Children under 18.....	0.6	0.5
Adults 65 and over	0.4	0.4
Earners.....	1.3	1.3
Vehicles	1.9	1.4
Percent homeowner	62	54
Average annual expenditures.....	\$56,648	\$68,119*
Percent distribution		
Total	100.0	100.0
Food	12.6	11.2*
Alcoholic beverages	0.9	1.0
Housing	32.9	39.2*
Apparel and services.....	3.2	2.6
Transportation	16.4	12.4*
Healthcare	7.9	6.4*
Entertainment.....	5.1	5.1
Personal care products and services	1.2	1.1
Reading	0.2	0.2
Education	2.3	2.6
Tobacco products and smoking supplies.....	0.6	0.4*
Miscellaneous.....	1.6	1.6
Cash contributions.....	3.4	3.9
Personal insurance and pensions	11.6	12.1

Note: An asterisk (*) represents a statistically significant difference from the U.S. average at the 95-percent confidence level.

Table 2. Percent share of average annual expenditures for housing, transportation, and food, United States and 22 metropolitan areas, 2015–16

Area	Housing	Transportation	Food
United States	32.9	16.4	12.6
Anchorage	31.7	19.1	11.8
Atlanta	34.1	18.3	10.2*
Baltimore	34.5	16.6	12.1
Boston	39.2*	12.4*	11.2*
Chicago	35.2*	14.5*	13.2
Dallas-Fort Worth	34.2	16.0	11.9
Denver	32.9	16.5	11.3*
Detroit	30.3*	16.4	12.9
Honolulu	36.3*	14.2	15.4*
Houston	31.8	21.0*	14.2*
Los Angeles	36.2*	15.6	12.4
Miami	36.4*	14.8	12.3
Minneapolis-St. Paul	30.9	15.4	11.0*
New York	38.8*	11.4*	10.7*
Philadelphia	33.8	14.4*	11.7
Phoenix	32.2	15.1	12.1
San Diego	35.1*	13.7*	11.4
San Francisco	40.3*	11.9*	11.5
Seattle	33.4	13.4*	13.6
St. Louis	31.7	16.1	13.2
Tampa	33.7	17.7	12.6
Washington, D.C.	35.7*	12.8*	10.8*

Note: An asterisk (*) represents a statistically significant difference from the U.S. average at the 95-percent confidence level.