



For Release: Friday, October 02, 2020

20-1820-PHI

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Consumer Expenditures for the Washington Metropolitan Area: 2017-18

Households in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-MD-VA-WV, metropolitan area spent an average of \$95,441 per year in 2018–19, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Regional Commissioner Sheila Watkins noted that this figure was significantly higher than the \$62,395 average expenditure level for households in the United States. Washington-area household expenditure shares were significantly different from the nation in four major components. For example, the share of expenditures for personal insurance and pensions, which accounted for 14.8 percent of the average household's budget in the Washington area, was significantly higher than the national average of 11.6 percent. (See [chart 1](#) and [table 1](#).)

Highlights of the Washington area's 2018–19 spending patterns:

- **Housing:** This was the largest expenditure component for Washington-area households and averaged \$31,694. Housing accounted for 33.2 percent of the area's household budget, similar to the 32.7-percent U.S. average. (See [table 1](#).) Housing expenditure shares among the 22 areas nationwide for which data were available ranged from 38.0 percent in New York to 30.3 percent in Detroit. (See [table 2](#).)
- **Personal insurance and pensions:** Washington households spent 14.8 percent (\$14,095) of their annual budget on personal insurance and pensions, making this the second-largest expenditure component for the area's households. The portion a local-area household's budget spent on personal insurance and pensions was significantly above the national average of 11.6 percent.

- **Transportation:** Washington-area households spent 14.3 percent of their budgets on transportation, compared to the national average of 16.8 percent. Of the \$13,646 in annual transportation expenditures in Washington, 85.4 percent was spent buying and maintaining private vehicles; this compared to the national average of 92.4 percent. Among the 22 metropolitan areas published nationwide, Washington was among the 8 areas to have a transportation expenditure share that was significantly lower than the national average. Transportation expenditure shares for the 22 published metropolitan areas ranged from 19.0 percent in Miami to 12.5 percent in New York.
- **Food:** The portion of a Washington household's budget spent on food, 12.2 percent, was similar to the 12.9-percent U.S. average. Washington-area households spent \$5,927 (51.1 percent) of their food dollars on food at home and \$5,681 (48.9 percent) on food away from home. In comparison, the average U.S. household spent 56.6 percent of its food budget on food at home and 43.4 percent on food away from home.

Technical Note

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, 2018 and 2019.

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 component, 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/cex/home.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 the Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area which includes the District of Columbia; Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties in Maryland; Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas, and Manassas Park cities and Arlington, Clarke, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, Rappahannock, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Warren Counties in Virginia; and Jefferson County in West Virginia. Metropolitan area news releases for the Consumer Expenditure Survey are available at www.bls.gov/regions/subjects/consumer-spending.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 Washington, DC metropolitan area, 2018–19

Category	United States	Washington, DC
Consumer unit characteristics:		
Income before taxes.....	\$80,750	\$128,871
Age of reference person.....	51.3	50.6
Average number in consumer unit:		
People	2.5	2.7
Children under 18.....	0.6	0.7
Adults 65 and over	0.4	0.3
Earners.....	1.3	1.6
Vehicles	1.9	1.9
Percent homeowner	64	68
Average annual expenditures.....	\$62,395	\$95,441*
Percent distribution		
Total	100.0	100.0
Food	12.9	12.2
Alcoholic beverages	0.9	1.3
Housing	32.7	33.2
Apparel and services.....	3.0	3.3
Transportation	16.8	14.3*
Healthcare	8.1	7.1*
Entertainment.....	5.1	4.4*
Personal care products and services	1.2	1.3
Reading	0.2	0.1
Education	2.3	2.5
Tobacco products and smoking supplies.....	0.5	0.1*
Miscellaneous.....	1.5	1.8
Cash contributions.....	3.1	3.6
Personal insurance and pensions	11.6	14.8*

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, 2018–19

Area	Housing	Transportation	Food
United States	32.7	16.8	12.9
Anchorage	30.5*	17.3	13.4
Atlanta	33.1	15.4	12.8
Baltimore	31.7	17.1	10.9*
Boston	36.1*	14.1*	12.0
Chicago	36.5*	14.0*	13.7
Dallas-Fort Worth	37.6*	15.6	11.4*
Denver	33.5	16.2	11.5*
Detroit	30.3*	17.3	12.7
Honolulu	36.4*	13.2*	18.9*
Houston	32.1	16.4	11.4*
Los Angeles	35.3*	15.7	13.1
Miami	35.6*	19.0	11.0*
Minneapolis-St. Paul	31.7	13.2*	11.6*
New York	38.0*	12.5*	13.3
Philadelphia	35.3*	15.4	12.2
Phoenix	32.3	18.8	12.4
San Diego	35.8*	15.1	13.8
San Francisco	36.6*	12.7*	13.2
Seattle	36.0*	14.2*	12.7
St. Louis	32.8	17.2	12.0
Tampa	33.9	18.1	15.3*
Washington, DC	33.2	14.3*	12.2

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