

Census: No. of Americans on assistance may be leveling off

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The once-increasing number of Americans getting some kind of public assistance from the U.S. government may be slowing down, according to new information from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Approximately 52.2 million Americans—or 21.3 percent—participated in one or more of six poverty assistance programs on average each month in 2012, a new Census report released Thursday said. Although higher than the 20.9 percent found in 2011, government officials said the 2012 number is not a statistically significant change from the previous year's.

The number of people participating in assistance programs had been on the rise from 18.6 percent in 2009 to 20.2 percent in 2010 to the 20.9 percent in 2011.

The programs tracked were Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and general assistance.

Medicaid was the most used program in 2012, with an average monthly participation rate of 15.3 percent, followed by SNAP at 13.4 percent, housing assistance at 4.2 percent, SSI at 3 percent and TANF and general assistance at 1 percent.

During an average month in 2012, 37.3 percent of people who did not

graduate from high school received benefits, compared with 21.6 percent of high school graduates and 9.6 percent of people with one or more years of college. And the average monthly participation was highest for African Americans at 41.6 percent, compared with Asian/Pacific Islanders at 17.8 percent and non-Hispanic whites at 13.2 percent.

The average participation rate for Hispanics—36.4 percent—was also higher than that of non-Hispanics whites—13.2 percent.

Female-only or female-led households also were more likely to participate in assistance programs than married couple or male or male-led households. Fifty percent of female households with no spouse presents got assistance in an average month in 2012, compared with 14 percent of married couple households and 29.5 percent of male households with no spouse present.

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