

DATA BRIEF: Suburban Poverty: Assessing Community Need Outside the Central City — 2014 Update

In 2014, the Allegheny Department of Human Services (DHS) published the report, “Suburban Poverty: Assessing Community Need Outside the Central City,” which proposed a new matrix for understanding and illustrating relative levels of need in Allegheny County communities outside of the City of Pittsburgh¹ using 2000 census data and 2005 through 2009 American Community Survey (ACS)² five-year estimates. A related data brief updated the information in that report utilizing 2008 through 2012 ACS estimates. This data brief utilizes the ACS five-year estimates for 2010 through 2014 and compares them to the 2008 through 2012 estimates in order to determine changes in communities’ relative need levels during that time period.

The Community Need Index was designed to identify suburban Allegheny County communities that are in greater need and/or at greater risk of further economic decline relative to other communities. Most other methodologies for assessing need rely on poverty rates. However, a community’s level of need is related to more than just the economic status of its residents, and other indices that take this into account address issues specific to urban settings without considering the different types of need that people living in suburban areas face.

To address the lack of suburban-specific indicators in other need indices, DHS developed the Community Need Index. It includes indicators relevant to suburban communities and assesses need at the census tract level, a relatively small unit of analysis that can reveal a diversity of local conditions that would otherwise be masked by examination at the larger municipality level.

Using the Index, Allegheny County suburban census tracts were placed in one of 10 tiers, with 10 representing the highest level of estimated need. To establish tracts’ placement within the 10 tiers, tracts were assigned a rank for each of the seven indicators (see **Table 1**) based on how they compared to other census tracts. Ranks across each indicator were summed into a single figure for each tract. Communities’ ranks were then examined to see how their ranking changed over time.

1 For the full report, see [Suburban Poverty: Assessing Community Need Outside the Central City](#). For a 2012 update, see [Suburban Poverty: Assessing Community Need Outside the Central City – 2012 Update](#)

2 Produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, the ACS is a nationwide survey that collects information on demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics every year. The five-year estimate uses data collected over five years of sampling; for example, the five-year estimate released in 2014 uses data from 2010 through 2014. For the purposes of this report, “2014 data” refers to the ACS five-year estimates released in 2014. The Census Bureau recommends five-year estimates as the most reliable when examining small local geographic units.

TABLE 1: Community Need Indicators

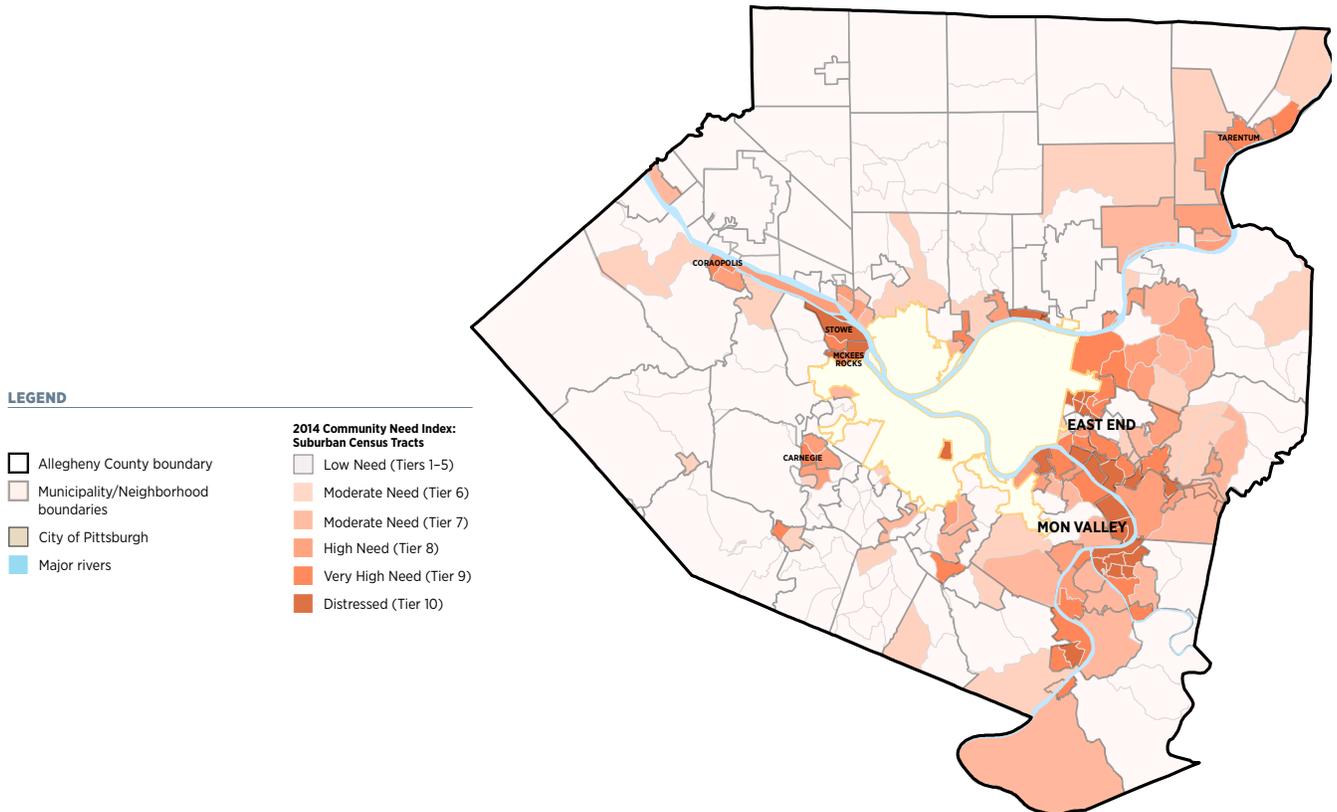
1. Percentage of population below 100% of the federal poverty line
2. Percentage of population below 200% of the federal poverty line
3. Percentage of families headed by single females
4. Percentage of civilian males ages 16–64 who are unemployed or not in the labor force
5. Percentage of residential units vacant
6. Percentage of households with no available vehicle
7. Percentage of population age 25 and older who have not received a high school diploma³

³ This indicator, previously “percentage of youth ages 16–19 without a high school diploma, and not enrolled in school,” was altered from the original report because the metric lacked variance and was frequently zero. In calculating change in tiers, this change was made both to the more current data, and retroactively to the past work underlying the brief released in 2014.

2014 COMMUNITIES IN NEED

Figure 1 shows the 2014 need tiers for suburban census tracts. Similar to the 2012 data, the 2014 census data still find the areas outside of the city with the most clustered need to be in the Mon Valley and the East End, as well as in communities to the immediate north and northwest of the city (such as Stowe and McKees Rocks). Clusters in and near Coraopolis, Carnegie and Tarentum also remained at relatively high need.

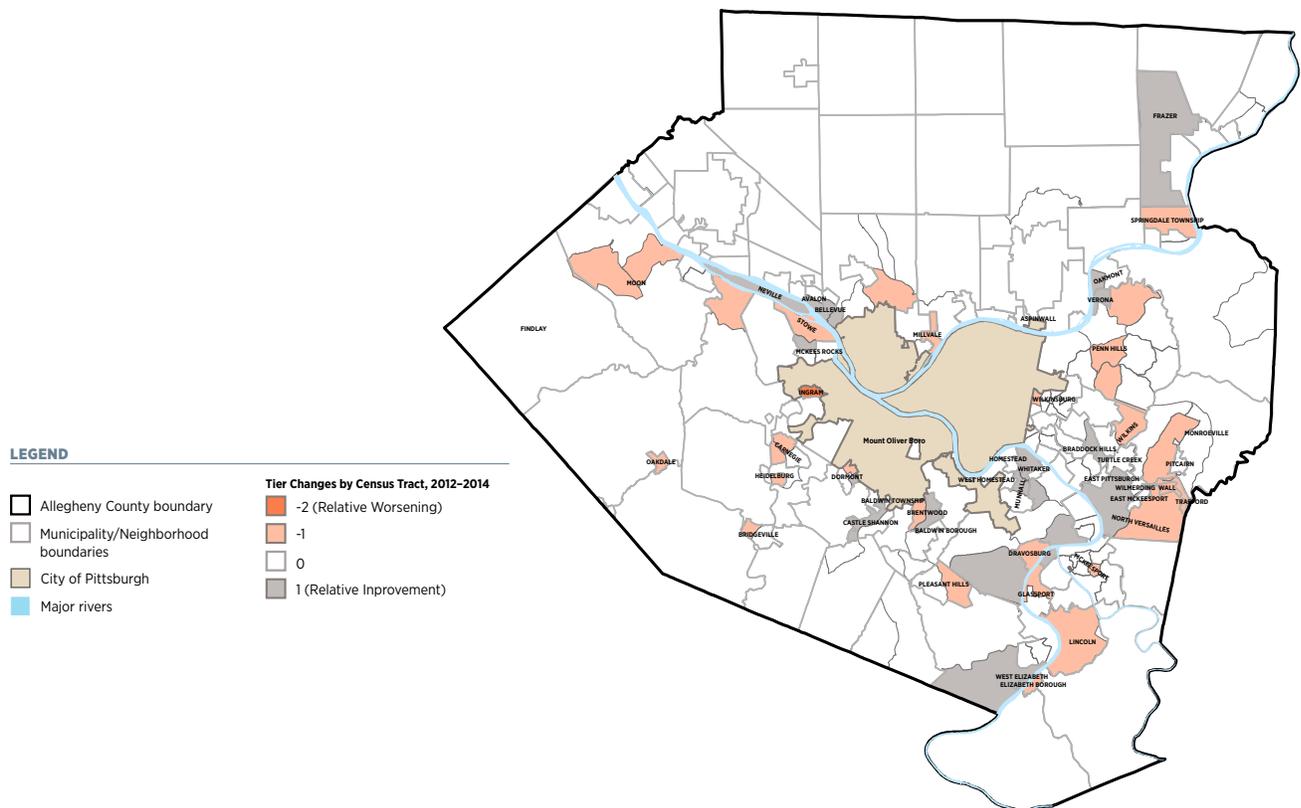
FIGURE 1: 2014 Community Need Index: Allegheny County Suburban Census Tracts



CHANGES OVER TIME, 2012 TO 2014

Because only two years have passed since the last Community Need Index update, the current five-year estimates share three years of underlying sampling data with the prior estimates. As a result, we would not expect to see changes as significant as those that might be apparent after five years. And, in fact, only 12 out of 265 Allegheny County census tracts moved by two or more relative tiers in either direction. Another 119 moved by only one tier, and the remaining 146 tracts (55%) showed no change. Given the inherent statistical margins of error in ACS estimates, changes of only one tier may not reliably represent significant (or even real) change for any single tract, but observing geographically clustered changes might signal meaningful regional trends.

FIGURE 2: 2014 Community Need Index Tiers Relative to 2012



*Map highlights only those census tracts that were in tiers 6–10 in 2014.

REGIONAL TRENDS

East of Pittsburgh: One of the most noticeable clusters of tracts in the upper half of relative need and also trending toward higher need appeared in municipalities on the east side of the county, such as **Penn Hills, Monroeville, Wall, Trafford** and **North Versailles. Plum** and other parts of Monroeville also featured tracts trending toward higher relative need but not yet falling within **Figure 2's** illustration of tiers 6 through 10.

Mon Valley: As with past estimates, most of the model's higher-need tiers were in the Mon Valley area. Change in the Mon Valley was mixed, with **Munhall, West Mifflin** and the stretch of **North Versailles** along the Monongahela River improving in tier, but tracts in **Dravosburg, Glassport, Lincoln** and **Elizabeth Borough** falling within the upper half of tiers and worsening.

Southwest: A few communities stood out in the southwestern part of the county. Each of **Bridgeville's** tracts increased in relative need in the 2014 data. Tracts in **Carnegie** and **Heidelberg** increased by a tier. Though still relatively low-need, one tract in **North Fayette** was the only tract to decline by three tiers from 2012 to 2014 estimates, and adjacent **Oakdale** also worsened by one tier to tier 6. **Ingram's** census tract worsened by two tiers and registered in tier 7 for 2014.

STABILIZING AREAS

The original suburban poverty report defined a stabilizing community as one that had improved by two or more tiers after being in tiers 6 through 10 previously. Using that definition, tracts in the following municipalities met the criteria for stabilizing in 2014 compared to their 2012 status: **Emsworth, Kennedy, Reserve, West Deer** and **West Mifflin**. Of the stabilizing communities, Reserve saw the largest change in tiers; it had a change of three tier levels, indicating a relatively large decrease in need during the period.

CONTENT AND ANALYSIS

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