

## FACT SHEET

MCCORMACK GRADUATE SCHOOL OF POLICY AND GLOBAL STUDIES  
GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE

### The Elder Economic Security Index for Berkshire County, Massachusetts, 2011

The *Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index* measures the income that seniors need to maintain independence and meet their basic living expenses in the community. The Elder Index uses an income measure that reflects the actual expenses for basic needs of older adults, and includes cost estimates for housing, food, medical care, transportation, and household essentials. Elder Index values are calculated for each state, on a county-by-county basis, providing policy makers and individuals a benchmark for determining what income or governmental supports are needed in their communities.

The 2011 Elder Index values for Berkshire County seniors are shown below. The annual income required to meet basic expenses ranges from \$22,164 for Berkshire singles living in an owned home with no mortgage, to \$41,340 for Berkshire couples living in an owned home with a mortgage. Values for the Elder Index in Berkshire County are far higher than the Federal Poverty Guideline, which is a common benchmark for economic insecurity; they are also considerably higher than the average Social Security benefit. A single older renter living in Berkshire County on the average Social Security benefit alone would be able to cover only 59% of his or her estimated expenses, as calculated by the Elder Index.



#### Elder Index Values are Significantly Higher Than Common Income Benchmarks in Berkshire County

Massachusetts Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index Per Year, 2011						
	Elder Person			Elder Couple		
	Owner w/o mortgage	Renter, one bedroom	Owner w/ mortgage	Owner w/o mortgage	Renter, one bedroom	Owner w/ mortgage
Berkshire	\$22,164	\$23,904	\$29,472	\$34,032	\$35,772	\$41,340
MA	\$23,052	\$27,048	\$34,068	\$34,332	\$38,328	\$45,348
US	\$19,104	\$22,848	\$28,860	\$29,448	\$33,192	\$39,204

Federal Poverty Guidelines (2011): \$10,890 for an individual; \$14,710 for a couple

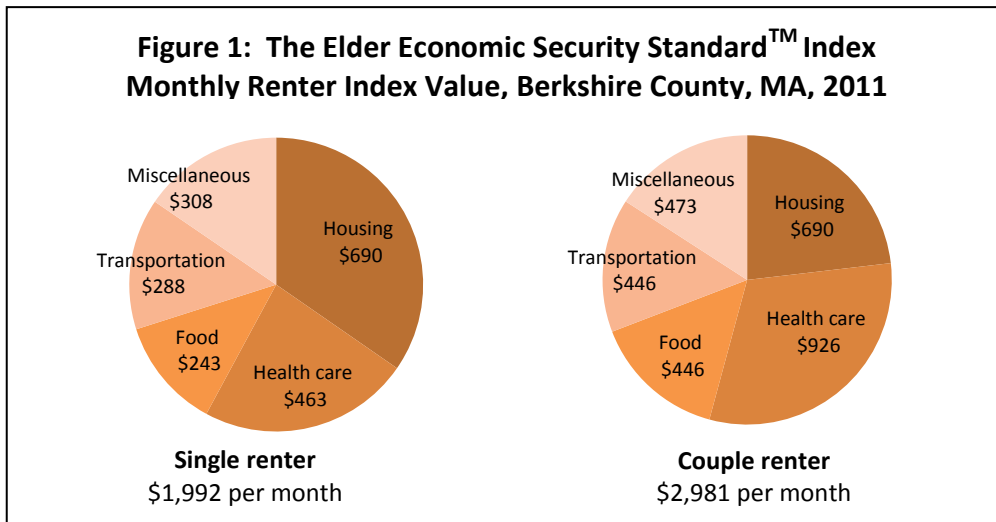
Average Social Security benefit for Berkshire County: \$14,129 for an individual; \$22,934 for a couple

Average Social Security benefit for MA: \$14,257 for an individual; \$23,141 for a couple

Average Social Security benefit for US: \$14,105 for an individual; \$22,895 for a couple

**What makes up the Elder Index?**

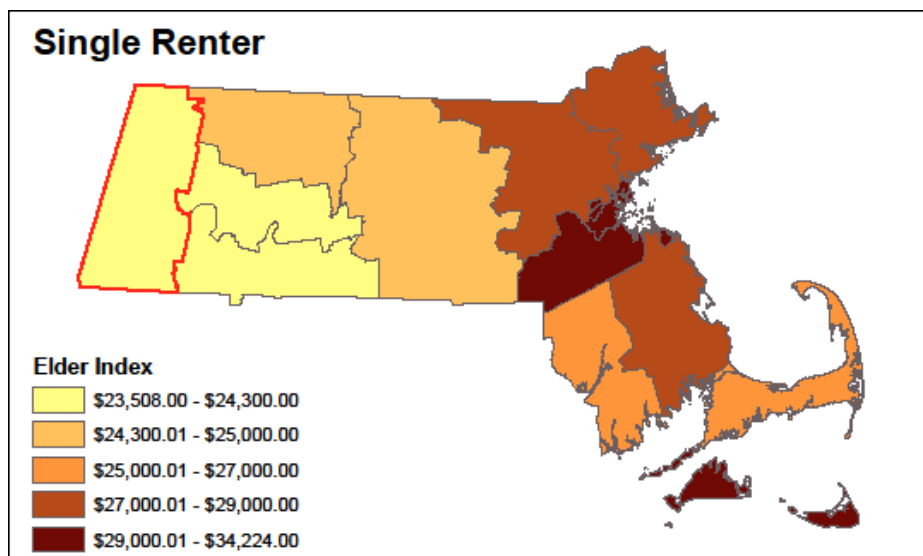
Figure 1 illustrates the expenses embedded within the Elder Index values for Berkshire County seniors, using the examples of individuals and couples who rent a one-bedroom apartment. For singles, housing (including rent and utilities) makes up the most sizable share of estimated living expenses (35%) while health care constitutes another 23%. Couples benefit from economies of scale in many respects; for example, renting the same one-bedroom apartment consumes 23% of their total estimated budget. However, no economies of scale are available for health care. In Berkshire County, 31% of the Elder Index budget is estimated to be taken up by health care expenses for a couple.



**Geographic comparisons**

The Elder Economic Security Standard™ Index is calculated at the county level, facilitating comparisons of cost of living across communities. Compared with other counties in Massachusetts, the cost of living is low in Berkshire County, as highlighted in Figure 2. Statewide, the highest estimated cost for renters is in Nantucket County (\$34,224 for singles, and \$46,104 for couples). The lowest estimated cost for renters in the state is in Hampden County (\$23,508 for singles and \$34,932 for couples).

**Figure 2: Cost of Living in Massachusetts (County-level)**



## **The Elder Economic Security Standard™ Initiative**

The Elder Economic Security Standard Initiative™ seeks to build economic security for older adults through organizing, advocacy and research. The Initiative enables policy makers, aging advocates and others to develop policies and programs to help elders age in place with dignity while promoting their economic security. The Massachusetts Initiative is a partnership between state and national organizations. The Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston developed the Elder Index in partnership with Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). The Massachusetts Association of Older Americans, Inc. (MAOA) is the lead state partner and collaborates with other organizations on the initiative in Massachusetts.

For more information, visit our website <http://www.umb.edu/gerontologyinstitute/>. For county-by-county data on the Elder Index nation-wide, visit <http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org/EI/>

Table 2: Elder Index values for singles and for couples, by housing scenario and county of residence, Massachusetts, 2011

County	Elder Index for singles:			Average Social Security Benefit for Singles	Elder Index for couples:			Average Social Security Benefit for Couples
	Owners, no mortgage	Renters, one bedroom	Owners, with mortgage		Owners, no mortgage	Renters, one bedroom	Owners, with mortgage	
Barnstable	\$23,520	\$26,868	\$33,636	\$14,495	\$35,376	\$38,724	\$45,492	\$23,527
Berkshire	\$22,164	\$23,904	\$29,472	\$14,129	\$34,032	\$35,772	\$41,340	\$22,934
Bristol	\$21,948	\$25,584	\$30,624	\$13,067	\$33,612	\$37,248	\$42,288	\$21,210
Dukes	\$23,892	\$30,252	\$33,936	\$14,847	\$35,772	\$42,132	\$45,816	\$24,099
Essex	\$23,376	\$28,284	\$34,872	\$14,390	\$34,848	\$39,756	\$46,344	\$23,356
Franklin	\$22,104	\$24,348	\$32,124	\$13,336	\$33,972	\$36,216	\$43,992	\$21,646
Hampden	\$21,396	\$23,508	\$31,068	\$13,517	\$32,820	\$34,932	\$42,492	\$21,940
Hampshire	\$22,344	\$24,036	\$31,476	\$13,663	\$34,212	\$35,904	\$43,344	\$22,176
Middlesex	\$23,820	\$28,056	\$36,060	\$15,084	\$34,404	\$38,640	\$46,644	\$24,482
Nantucket	\$23,892	\$34,224	\$33,936	\$16,050	\$35,772	\$46,104	\$45,816	\$26,051
Norfolk	\$24,108	\$29,148	\$37,008	\$15,019	\$35,580	\$40,620	\$48,480	\$24,377
Plymouth	\$22,968	\$28,236	\$33,864	\$14,363	\$34,440	\$39,708	\$45,336	\$23,312
Suffolk	\$23,772	\$29,100	\$37,344	\$12,952	\$35,256	\$40,584	\$48,828	\$21,022
Worcester	\$21,816	\$24,456	\$30,936	\$14,131	\$32,712	\$35,352	\$41,832	\$22,936

Source: The Elder Economic Security Standard Index, 2011, and additional tabulations by the Gerontology Institute. For Elder Index values by county, see <http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org/EI/>. Social Security benefits calculated from the Social Security Administration website [http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/oasdi\\_sc/2010/index.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/oasdi_sc/2010/index.html). Estimates assume that individuals or couples are in good health.