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Why the Lehigh Valley Needs You to be Counted in the 2020 Census

If someone was willing to give you \$2,093 for filling out a 12-question survey of routine queries like name, address and age, would you do it?

Well, that's sort of what happens when you fill out the Census, because that count dictates how \$26.7 billion -- \$2,093 for every person in Pennsylvania -- will fund everything from roads to hospitals to schools to housing, according to a study by George Washington University. Getting undercounted means getting underfunded, as money that should be coming here goes elsewhere.

That's one of the many factors that makes filling out the 2020 Census more important than ever.

Beyond that, accurate count data is vital in planning for the future, its effects how much say our region has in federal government policy, and it plays a role in whether people and businesses want to come here.

In other words, missing people means missing out on a lot.

"Not only is filling out the Census part of your civic duty, but it dictates how \$675 billion a year is spent for the next 10 years," said Census Media Specialist John Buffone. "If you use the roads, go to hospital or your kids go to school, this affect you. Funding all those things is impacted by this count."

The 2020 Census push intensified earlier this month when post cards were mailed to people telling them how, for the first time ever, they can fill out the Census online in five to ten minutes. This full, person-by-person count is done once every 10 years, helping to set a direction in virtually every aspect of life nationwide.

For an organization like the LVPC, an accurate count is vital in preparing for the future. Knowing how – and particularly where – the Lehigh Valley and nation are growing is key to predicting and shaping the future.

"The Census is key to all of our modeling and much of the analysis we do," said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. "It impacts how we adjust our road network, recommendations we make for housing and land use, and really almost everything we do to manage the region's growth, while preserving its charm. We can't overstate how important this is to our future."

The federal government uses it to map out funding and long-term programs such as Social Security, while businesses use it to determine where to locate, where to place distribution centers and where they can find the best pools of workers.

Even how much say your community has on federal policy is affected, because Congressional seats are placed – and sometimes removed – based on each state's population.

The Census has come a long way since the first count in 1790 was done on horseback, didn't have to go much beyond the 13 original states and topped out at fewer people than now live in Los Angeles.

Because so much is riding on this, the Census Bureau now has a team of 500,000 temporary, part-time and full-time people working from more than 200 offices to count every head, including the homeless, transient, elderly and often marginalized populations.

And if you don't reply soon, you're likely to get a visit from one of them.

Here are some things to remember when filling out the Census:

- The Census has never been easier. It is 12 questions that can be answered in under 10 minutes, with options to do it online, by phone or by mail. The questionnaire is offered in 59 languages. Sample the questions you'll be asked at <https://2020census.gov/en/about-questions.html>
- Where you live on April 1 is your Census residence. That includes college students. If they're at schools like Lehigh University, Lafayette College or Muhlenberg College, their residents is there, not at mom and dad's house. That's particularly important in a region that has eight colleges and universities and two community colleges.
- Children under 5 are the most undercounted population. An estimated 1 million were not counted in 2010. Remember, it's where they live most of the time.
- Low-income, Black and Latino families are among the most undercounted in this region. In the Lehigh Valley in 2010, more than a dozen Census tracts in Allentown and Bethlehem had response rates below 70%. All of them have high poverty rates. The correlation between poverty and Census response can be found at <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2017/geo/roam.html>
- It's the first ever chance to file online. Using a secure code you should have gotten by mail by now, you can file on your computer or even mobile device in minutes.

- Ignoring the Census mail will bring a Census worker to your door. The Census Bureau will send several mail pieces in late March and throughout April, but if they're ignored, they send a worker to your door. If you're not home, they'll begin knocking on your neighbors' doors. Respond once and the mail and visits stop.
- The census will never ask for your Social Security number, bank account numbers, money or your political affiliation. Any survey that does, in the name of the Census, is a scam.
- It's confidential. No personal information collected by the Census will be shared with any other government office. Census workers are sworn to secrecy, under penalty of jail and fines up to \$250,000.

The Census push will continue through this summer, with the first numbers being delivered to Congress and the President in December.

More information is available at 2020census.gov or by calling 844-330-2020.

You Count.