



Consumer spending: Comparing four countries

How do U.S. consumer expenditures compare with those of other industrialized nations? A report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows how people in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan spent their budgets in 2009.

As the chart shows, housing made up the biggest consumer expense in all the countries except Japan. But U.S. consumers spent a larger share of their money on housing than did consumers in any of the other three countries.

The United States topped the other countries in another spending category, too: healthcare. American consumers had the highest share of healthcare expenditures, in part because medical costs in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan are paid indirectly through nationalized healthcare options. Only consumers' out-of-pocket expenses were included in the data.

Additional data show that countries differ in their spending within the categories. Japan's consumers, for example, spent about the same share of their transportation money on public transportation as they did on buying automobiles. U.S. consumers, in contrast, were over 5 times more likely to spend their transportation money on automobile purchases than on public transportation.

Data for shares of U.S. expenditures in the report are from the BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey. For purposes of the analysis, several adjustments were made to expenditures categories of the three foreign countries so that their shares data were comparable with U.S. shares data. To read the full report, see www.bls.gov/opub/focus/volume2_number16/cex_2_16.htm. Data tables, Consumer Expenditure Survey program publications, a glossary, and other information are available at www.bls.gov/cex.

Shares of expenditures for selected categories, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Japan, 2009

