

Medicare Beneficiaries' Use of Computers and Internet: 1998-2005

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The Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) contains a vast amount of information about the Medicare population. Common characteristics such as demographic, health status, and utilization of various services are included in the survey as well as other less known information. This highlight will look into the use of computers and Internet service by the Medicare population over time using data from 1998-2005 Access to Care Files. Demographic characteristics of the Medicare population who use the computer and Internet will also be examined using MCBS data.

With the abundance of health-related information available on the Internet, it is interesting to see how much of it is being utilized by the Medicare population. In 2003, the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act introduced the Part D prescription drug

program. As expected, usage of the Medicare Web site (<https://www.medicare.gov>) increased significantly between 2004 and 2005. More detailed information about this trend will be available from the MCBS in the next few years.

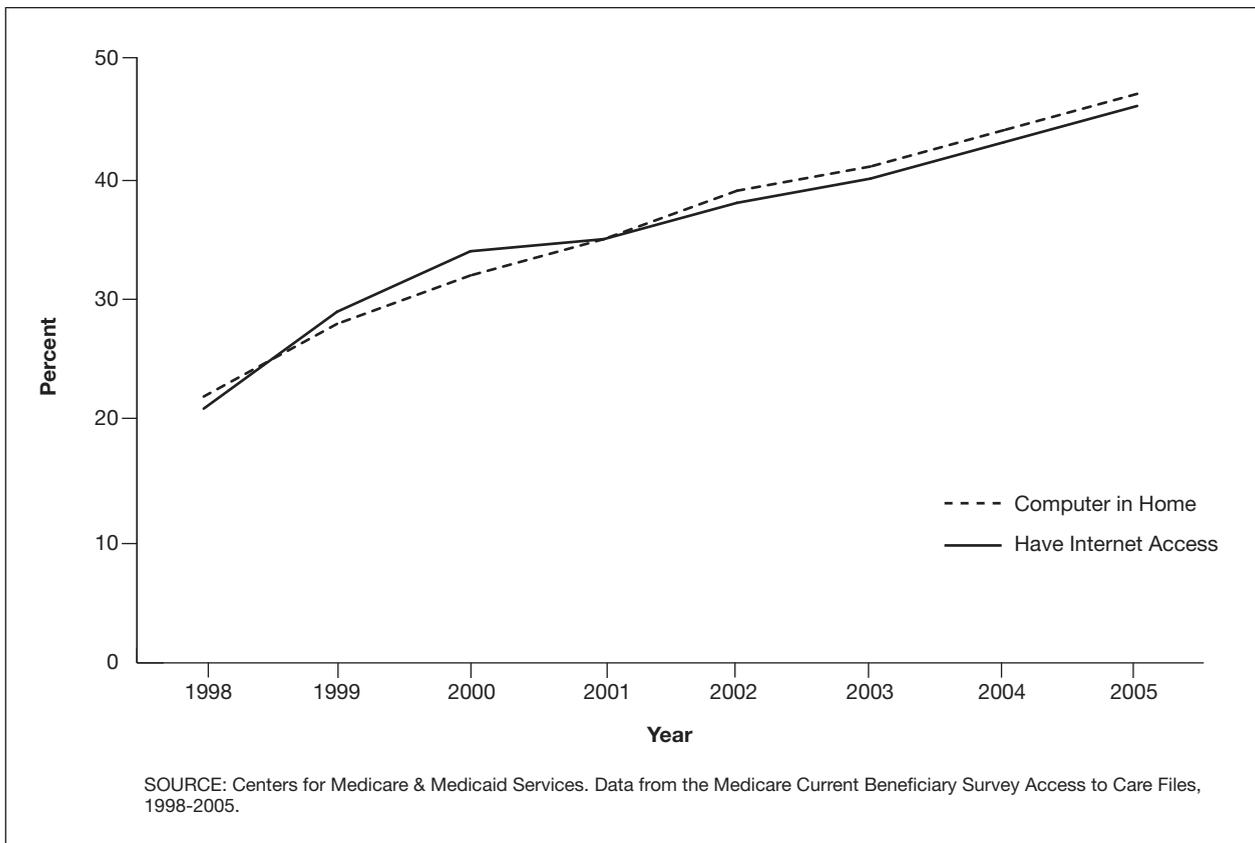
Other results show that 47 percent of the Medicare population owned a computer and 46 percent reported having Internet access in 2005. In many instances, owning a computer might still be a luxury item for Medicare beneficiaries. With health related expenses such as prescription drugs taking an increased percent of their disposable income, owning a computer might not be on many of the beneficiaries' priority lists. Other reasons for not having a computer or not having Internet access could be: lack of interest, confidence, or computer skills.

Additional information about the MCBS, may be found at: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/mcbs>.

The author is with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The statements expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of CMS.

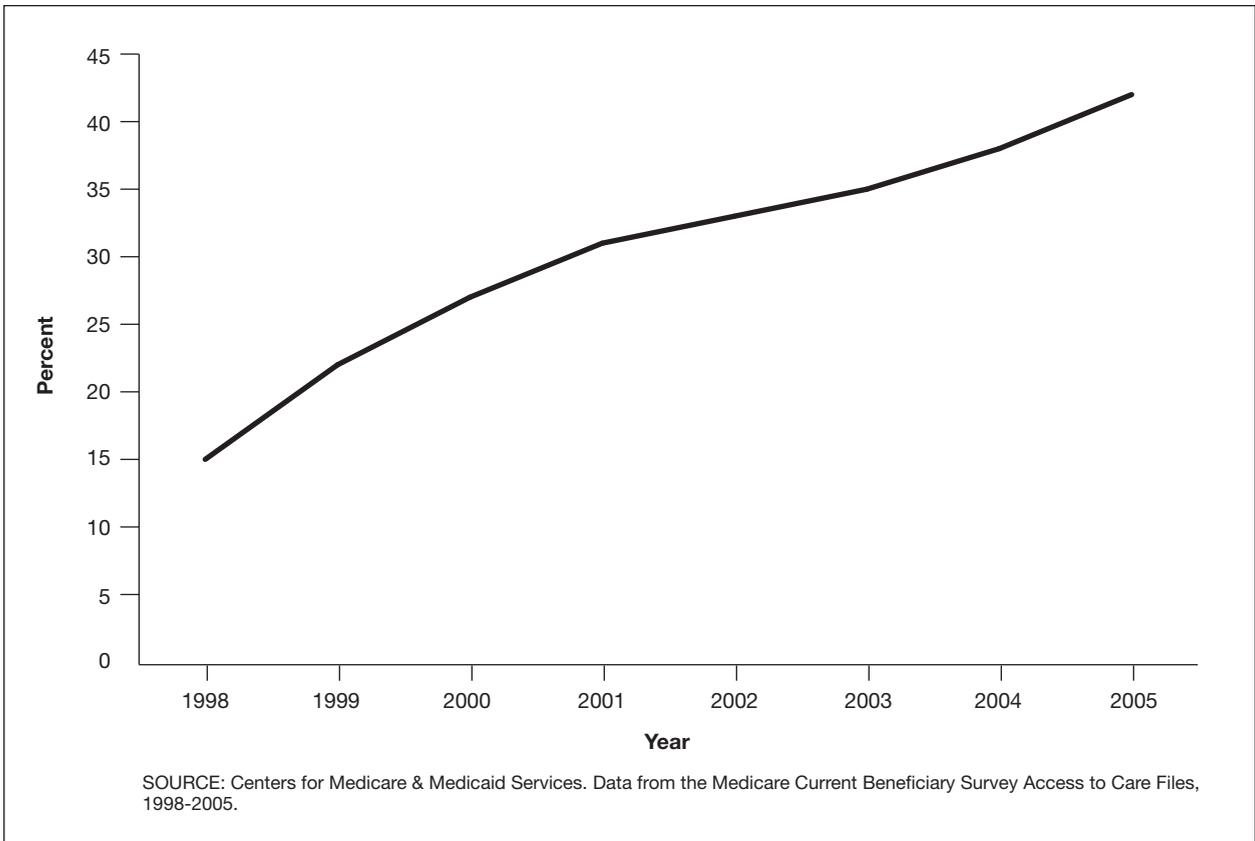
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Figure 1
Percent of Medicare Beneficiaries Who Reported Having a Personal Computer at Home with Internet Access: 1998-2005



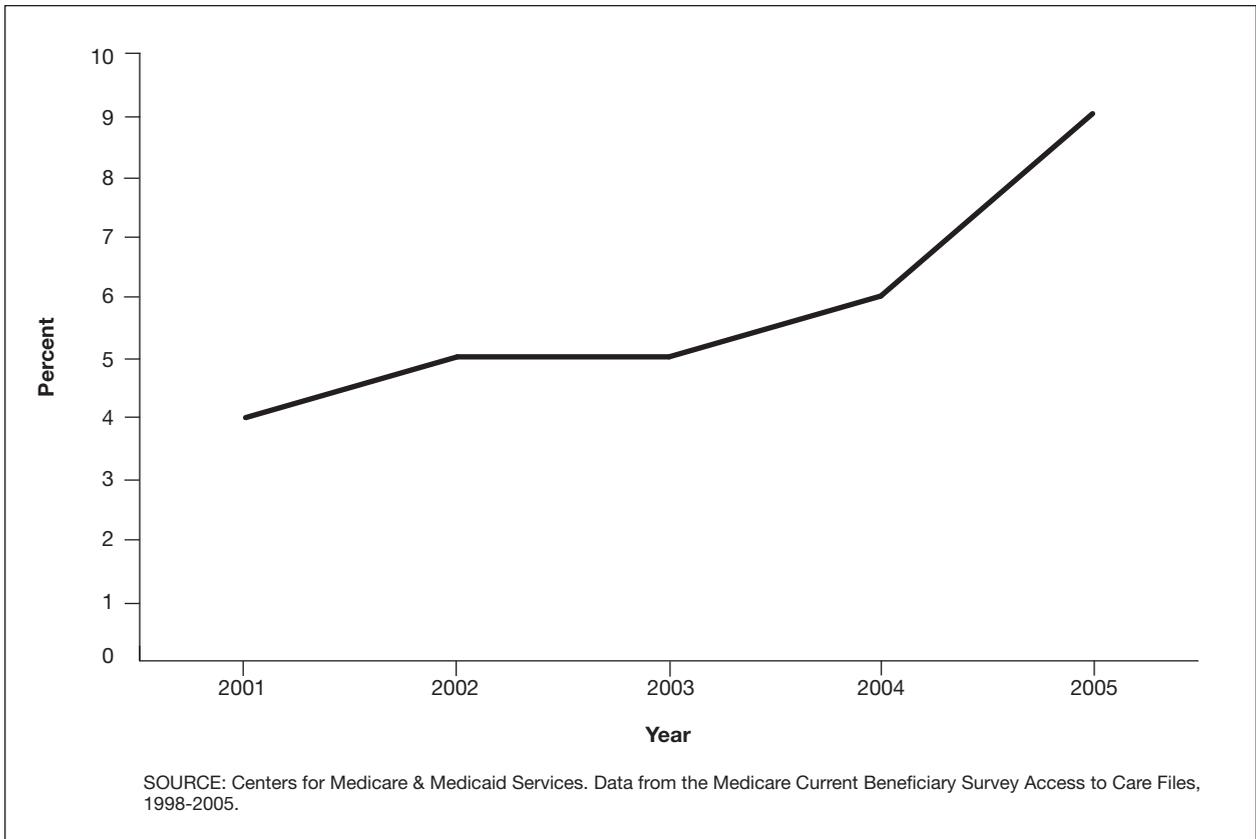
- The percent of beneficiaries who have a computer at home increased from 22 percent in 1998 to 47 percent 2005.
- Those beneficiaries who reported having Internet access for the same time period increased from 21 to 46 percent.

Figure 2
Percent of Medicare Beneficiaries Who Reported Having Used the Internet or Other Online Services: 1998 to 2005



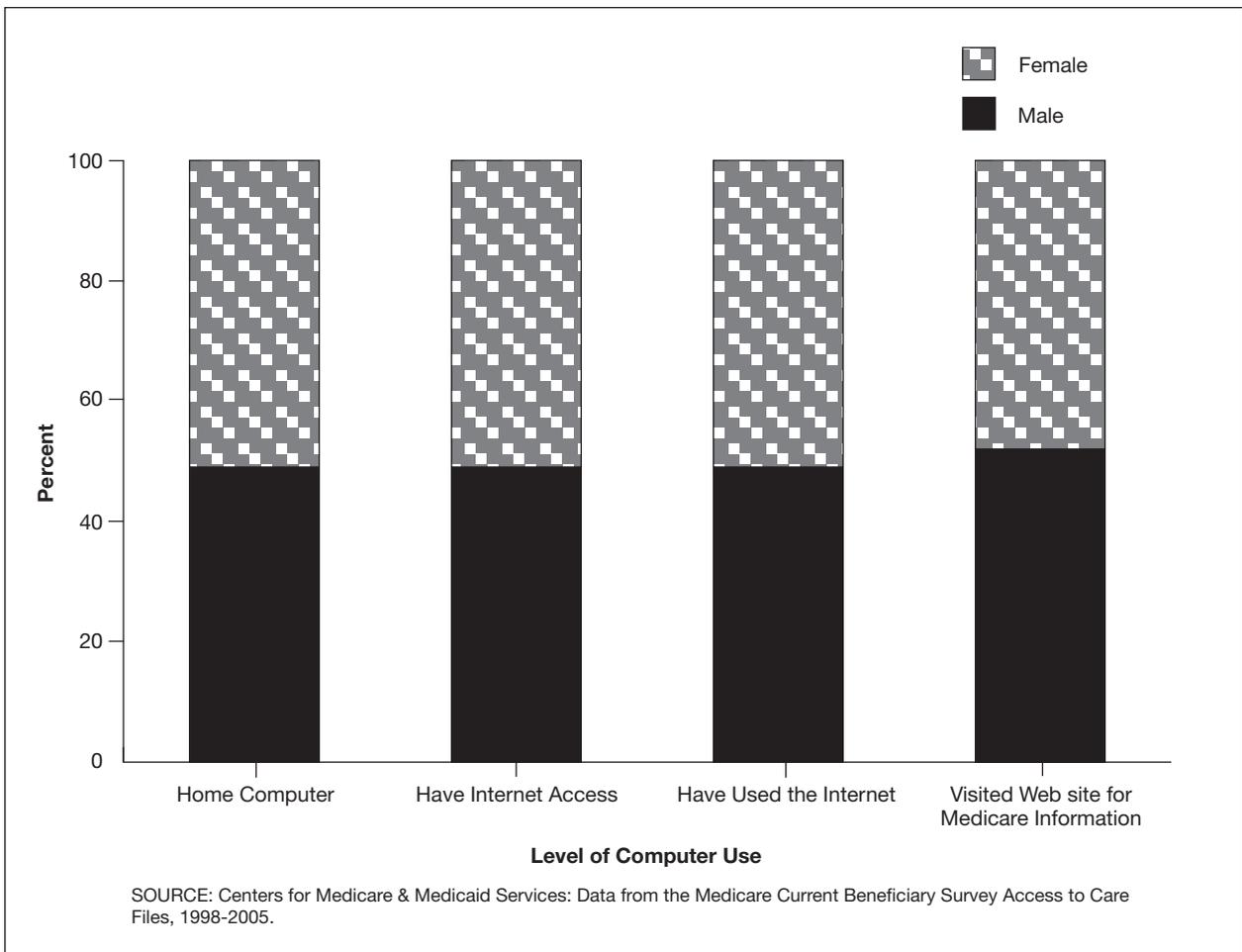
- The percent of beneficiaries who reported having used the Internet or other online services increased from 15 percent in 1998 to 42 percent in 2005.

Figure 3
Percent of Medicare Beneficiaries Who Reported Having Visited Web Site for Medicare Information: 2001-2005



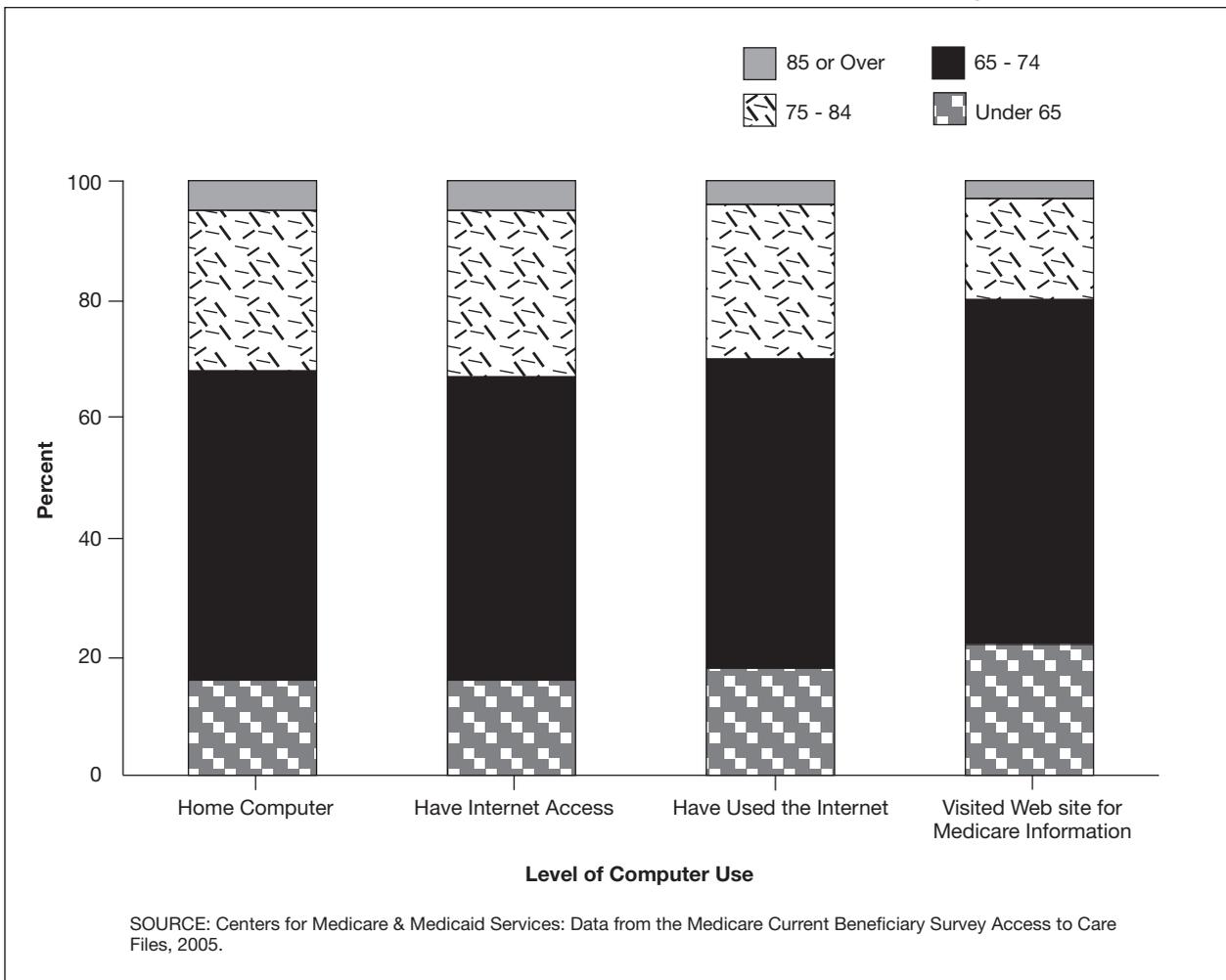
- The percent of beneficiaries who visited or accessed the www.medicare.gov Web site for Medicare information increased from 4 percent in 2001 to 9 percent in 2005.
- The largest increase was from 2004–2005 a reported 50 percent increase in usage.

Figure 4
Medicare Beneficiaries' Use of Computers and the Internet, by Sex: 2005



- In 2005, those who reported having a computer in home or used the Internet, the distributions of males (49 percent), and 51 percent of females are almost identical.
- A slightly higher percent of males (53 percent) than females (47 percent) visited Medicare's Web site for information.

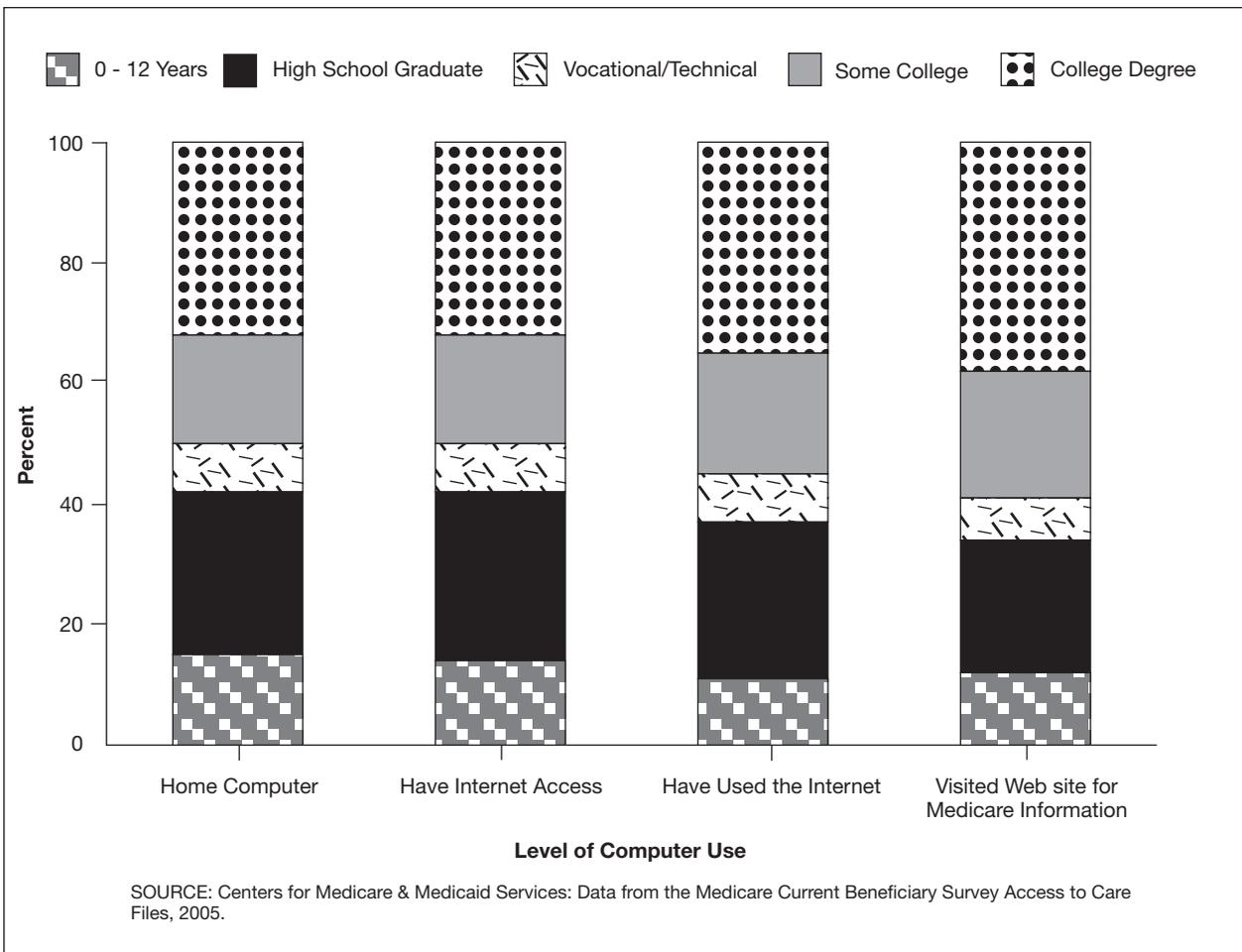
Figure 5
Medicare Beneficiaries' Use of Computers and the Internet, by Age: 2005



- Beneficiaries in the age group 65-74 comprised the largest group of computer and Internet users (approximately 52 percent).
- The second largest group of computer users was the age group 75-84 (approximately 27 percent).

Figure 6

Medicare Beneficiaries' Use of Computers and the Internet, by Educational Level: 2005



- Those beneficiaries with a college degree were the largest group of internet users (34 percent). They were twice as likely to have a computer in their home as those without a high school diploma (31 versus 15 percent).
- Beneficiaries who were high school graduates were more likely to have a computer and internet than those beneficiaries with vocational/technical training and those with some college education (27, 8, and 20 percent, respectively).

