



Statewide Projections and Local Scenario Projections *Different Purposes, Different Methods*

Both statewide and local scenario projections are predictions about the future, but they differ in nature and purpose.

Statewide projections provide one plausible future outcome for all of the localities in the Commonwealth, and for the state overall, by looking at observed past and present trends, and assuming such trends continue. Statewide projections allow comparisons among localities that may be useful for allocating grant funds in areas of greatest need, or for localities to employ as a comparison for their own population patterns. To allow such comparability of data, statewide projections use a uniform process with the same sources of input data for each locality.

Local scenario projections also make assumptions about future conditions, including observations of past trends. These projections, however, typically suggest that past trends may change in the future as the result of local planning and policy priorities; certain environmental or land use constraints; and other factors unique to each locality. These projections provide plausible future outcomes of various "if-then" scenarios and may use data only available in the locality for which the projections are developed.

Both types of projections are valid and useful. An analogy may help to illustrate. Individuals make retirement and financial plans, partly based on their projected longevity. Life expectancies, like statewide projections, are largely based on the observed past, including family history and individual health conditions. They are, by no means, destiny, but rather one of many possibilities. Future conditions and events may change projected life expectancies. Medical advancement may prolong the lifespan; a fatal accident could suddenly end a life. In addition, each individual may actively "plan" for desired future health and longevity, and engage in activities to bring it about, such as quitting smoking and exercising. In this way, life expectancy calculations – like population projections – can be changed based on different scenarios and as a result of external events.

Keep in mind that the future, especially the distant future, is largely unknown and unpredictable. Projections of all types are only as valid as their underlying assumptions. Empirical studies show the average error for 30-year projections at the county level is 36%. Nonetheless, both statewide projections and local scenario projections provide a platform for community and state planning and engagement.