

A Word from the Director

As the Director of the National Center for Health Statistics, I would like to welcome you to this new feature that will be appearing in each issue of *Public Health Reports*. The Center's programs over the past 25 years have resulted in a unique body of information about health status, utilization of health resources, and health care expenditures. The statistics have described the progress made in extending life expectancy to record levels, providing health resources to a larger and older population, and modifying lifestyles in more healthful directions.

One of my goals as the Director of NCHS is to improve the availability and usefulness of the data we collect in order to better address new and emerging public health issues. Data collection cannot be an end in itself. As we expand the Center's data systems to cover these new issues, we must also increase our ability to transform health statistics into health information.

If the data and analyses are to be useful in guiding decisions, the timeliness of the release of statistical findings, reports, and public use data tapes is critical. One of our strategies in this area is to improve the availability of our data to researchers outside of the Center. The Center has an active program for the distribution of publications and public use data tapes. Data tapes are available at nominal cost, and we provide technical assistance to users through conferences and seminars as well as on an individual basis. However, researchers are often not aware of what data have been collected until the first reports from a given data base have been published. This usually occurs about a year after the data collection has ended and often results in delays in the research planning process.

We plan to use this page to announce, at the beginning of each data collection activity, what new types of data are being collected. This will allow researchers to request copies of questionnaires well in advance (usually at least 2 years) of the release of public use data tapes. Using this approach investigators will have a longer

period to develop a research agenda, obtain required resources, and conduct their research on a more timely basis. We will also periodically present highlights of the findings from the Center's data systems and announce when our publications and public use data tapes are available, where they may be obtained, and their cost.

I encourage readers to follow this feature in the journal to learn about the recent research and data activities of NCHS, and I welcome your suggestions for additional types of information we might provide.



Manning Feinleib, MD, DrPH



National Health Interview Survey's Current Health Topics Offer Analytical Opportunities

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is one of the major data collection programs of the National Center for Health Statistics. NHIS has been a continuous national survey since 1957. The data collection instruments include a basic health and demographic questionnaire that is repeated from year to year and current health topics that change annually. Current health topics are selected after consultation with agencies within the Public Health Service and after an assessment of priority health issues and the related need for population-based data.

Cancer Risk Factors, 1987

For 1987 the topic will be cancer risk factors. The objectives of this study are to provide benchmark estimates of prevalence of the major cancer risk factors and screening practices by age, race, and socioeconomic status, health status, and region of the country. Among the risk factors to be studied are smoking, diet, family history of cancer, cancer survivorship, alcohol use, and reproduction factors.

Data on knowledge and attitudes related to key aspects of cancer prevention and control will be collected in the study. One adult person in each of the 48,000 households in the survey will be asked to complete one of two questionnaires on cancer risk factors. Two questionnaires are being used because of the volume and range of information to be collected and the need to keep the response burden low. One questionnaire focuses on health practices and behavior, and the other on knowledge and attitudes.

The study oversamples the Hispanic population in three metropolitan areas—Miami, Chicago, and New York—in order to produce additional data on this population group. Since the Hispanic population is relatively young, analysis of data from this survey could lead to especially effective intervention and prevention programs.

1986 Health Topics

Health insurance, dental health, vitamin and mineral intake, longest job worked, and functional limitations were the current health topics for the NHIS in 1986. The health insurance questions update those which have been asked periodically throughout the 1970s and most recently in 1984. Dental health questions appeared on the questionnaire in 1983 and functional limitations were covered in detail in 1984 and in 1979. Vitamin and mineral intake is a new topic, and data on longest job worked will be produced for the first time.

Health Promotion, 1985

The 1985 Health Promotion and Disease Prevention study of the NHIS was designed to monitor progress toward achieving the 1990 health promotion objectives of the Department of Health and Human Services. The study is devoted primarily to the collection of baseline data on general health (including nutrition), injury control, high blood pressure, stress, exercise, smoking, alcohol use, dental care, and occupational safety and health.

The survey also measured health knowledge and awareness of disease risk factors. For the Health Promotion

and Disease Prevention Questionnaire, self-response was required, and one adult per family in the survey was randomly selected as the respondent. The number of completed questionnaires was 33,360, representing an estimated 90 percent of eligible respondents. Provisional data from the survey are presented in a year-end report available from NCHS. The public use file can be ordered from NCHS; the cost is \$160. This issue and the November-December *Public Health Reports* carry a number of articles on the health promotion study.

Supplement on Aging, 1984

The public use file on the Supplement on Aging (SOA) is also now available. The SOA was designed to obtain information about older people who were living in the community, and included questions on family structure, relationships, support, and living arrangements; community and social support; occupation and retirement; conditions and impairments; activities of daily living; instrumental activities of daily living; nursing home stay; health opinions; and other health-related and social information about middle-aged and older people. All members of households in the NHIS ages 65 and older and half of the sample of those 55-64 years were included in the SOA sample. Of the 16,148 persons who were in the study, 91.5 percent answered questions for themselves. The response rate was 96 percent. Five reports, listed at the end of this page, have been published and can be requested from NCHS.

To review the available data on this or any of the NHIS current health topics, users can refer to the questionnaire which appears in the annual report, "Current Estimates," or request copies of the questionnaires from NCHS.

1987 Public Health Conference to Focus on Data on Aging

The 1987 Public Health Conference on Records and Statistics will be held in Washington, D.C., July 13-15. The conference theme is "DATA FOR AN AGING POPULATION: Issues in Health, Research, and Public Policy for Now and into the 21st Century." This conference is jointly sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and

the Bureau of the Census. Sessions will be organized around three general themes: Methodology and Measurement, Data for Public Policymaking, and Baseline Data and Implications of Trends. Running through each theme will be tracks designed for specific audiences—researchers, epidemiologists, national and state policymakers, vital registrars, and statisticians. A conference information packet is available from NCHS.

New Reports and Data Files

Five *Advance Data* publications present findings from the 1984 NHIS Supplement on Aging. They all carry "Aging in the Eighties," as part of the title and present preliminary data covering January-June, 1984 for the population 65 years of age and older.

Advance Data No. 115 - Background Data

Advance Data No. 116 - Living Alone, Contacts with Family, Friends and Neighbors

Advance Data No. 121 - Prevalence and Impact of Urinary Problems

Advance Data No. 124 - Use of Community Services

Advance Data No. 125 - Impaired Senses for Sound and Light

Advance Data No. 126 - Summary Data from the 1985 Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Survey

Advance Data No. 127—1985 Summary: National Hospital Discharge Survey

Vital and Health Statistics Series 10, No. 160, 1985 Current Estimates; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00979-0; Price \$9.

Vital and Health Statistics Series 10, No. 156, 1984 Current Estimates; GPO Stock No. 017-022-0096-8; Price \$9.50.

Vital and Health Statistics Series 11, No. 234, Blood Pressure Levels in Persons 18-74 Years of Age in 1976 and Trends in Blood Pressure from 1960 to 1980 in the United States; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00963-3; Price \$3.75

Vital and Health Statistics Series 11, No. 236, Total Serum Cholesterol Levels of Adults 20-74 Years of Age, United States, 1976-80: GPO Stock No. 017-022-00954-4; Price \$3.25

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 87, Utilization of Short-Stay Hospitals by Diagnosis Related Groups,

United States, 1984; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00962-5; Price \$2.75

Order from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

For More Information

Contact the Scientific and Technical Information Branch, 3700 East-West Highway, Hyattsville, MD, 20782 or phone (301) 436-8500 for more information about the activities and data resources reported in this feature.