



The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) conducts many annual and periodic surveys to produce its wide range of vital and health statistics. The decision of when and how to collect specific types of information is based on many factors, including the nation's health priorities and concerns, the data needs of many user groups, technological capabilities and developments, and staff and budget resources. The NCHS feature in this issue of *Public Health Reports* will provide an overview and schedule of NCHS' data collection programs and background information on the budget and how funding levels impact upon survey planning.

NCHS Data Collection Programs

A brief description of NCHS' major data collection systems is shown subsequently along with the latest information on scheduling. This listing covers planned data collection activities through 1988.

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) collects data on the incidence of illness and injuries; prevalence of chronic diseases and impairments; disability; physician and dental visits; hospitalizations; and other health topics; and on the relationships between demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and health status. The data are obtained from household interviews with a sample of the nation's civilian, noninstitutionalized population; the survey is conducted annually. In addition, each year special health topics are included such as the health of the elderly, cancer risk factors, health promotion and disease prevention, and others. (See the January–February 1987 issue of *Public Health Reports*.)

The special health topics planned for the 1988 NHIS and the agencies that will sponsor them are these: use of medical devices and implants including pacemakers, heart valves, intraocular lenses, silicone implants, and artificial joints (Food and Drug Administration); child health (Maternal and Child Health and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development); alcohol consumption

(National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse); and occupational-related illnesses (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) collects data on the prevalence of specific conditions or chronic diseases and physiological and body measurements. The program also monitors nutritional status and the extent of nutritional deficiencies in the population. Findings are based on physician examinations, laboratory procedures, medical history, and standardized tests administered in mobile examination centers, as well as on interviews in the home.

The next cycle of the NHANES will begin in 1988 and collect data on the prevalence of cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, kidney disease, digestive disorders, arthritis, and selected infectious diseases. To aid in the estimation of the extent of osteoporosis in the population, measurements of bone density will be added to the examination survey. As in the past, this cycle of the survey will include dental, hearing, and vision examinations.

Among the risk factors or health behaviors included in the survey are use of tobacco, physical activity, reproductive health, and psychosocial factors. Special emphases will be placed on child health, the health of older Americans, occupational health, and environmental health.

A new design feature of the NHANES permits tracking of survey respondents to facilitate possible followup surveys.

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Epidemiologic Followup is a nationwide followup interview survey conducted in 1982–84 of approximately 14,000 persons who participated in the examination survey, 1971–75. Respondents were asked about their health and hospitalization history, measurements of weight and blood pressure were taken, and household data were augmented by data from hospital records and death certificates. Continued followup of the study's elderly cohort was conducted by telephone in 1986. In 1987, contact will be made with the full sample by telephone.

NCHS conducts three major surveys of health care utilization. (See the March–April 1987 issue of *Public Health Reports*.)

The National Hospital Discharge Survey is an annual survey of the use of non-Federal short-stay hospitals. Data on diagnoses, surgical procedures, and characteristics of inpatients are collected. The survey also produces information by size, location, and ownership of hospital. Survey data are abstracted from a sample of records of 500 participating hospitals.

The National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey is the source of data on the care provided by physicians in private practice. Data on patients' symptoms and physicians' diagnoses and on diagnostic or therapeutic services performed or ordered are produced. The survey was conducted annually from 1974 to 1981 and again in 1985. Beginning in 1980, data were collected on the number and names of specific drugs prescribed.

The National Nursing Home Survey is the source of data on nursing homes, their services, staff, and financial characteristics; and on residents' personal and health characteristics. The survey has been conducted periodically since 1963, and most recently in 1985.

The National Master Facility Inventory is a listing of inpatient health facilities in the United States. The inventory gathers data on services, locations, staff, and other characteristics of the facilities and has been conducted periodically since 1963. The final hospital survey was 1976; nursing homes surveys were fielded in 1980 and 1982. An expanded inventory of long-term care places was conducted in 1986.

The Vital Statistics Program is responsible for the nation's official vital statistics. Based on records filed in State vital statistics offices, the national program coordinates reporting, coding, and transmission of data on births, deaths, fetal deaths, induced terminations of pregnancy, marriages, and divorces. The vital statistics program produces annual data for the United States and for States, counties, and other local areas, and monthly provisional data for the United States and each State.

The National Survey of Family

Growth is the source of data on family planning practices and attitudes, factors influencing trends, and differences in fertility and related aspects of maternal and child health. The first two cycles of the survey were conducted in 1973 and 1976 with a sample of ever-married women ages 15-44. The survey was expanded to all women regardless of marital status for the cycle conducted in 1982-83. The survey will be fielded again in 1987. Data are collected through household interviews.

The National Maternal and Infant Health Survey to be conducted in 1988 has three components covering natality and fetal and infant mortality. Live birth, fetal death, and infant death records will be sampled and questionnaires sent to mothers and physicians, hospitals, and other medical care providers used by the mother. The major areas of investigation are causes of low birth weight infants and infant deaths; prenatal care; the effects of maternal smoking, drinking, and drug use; the effects of sexually transmitted diseases on pregnancy outcome; and the use and evaluation of public programs, such as WIC and Medicaid. The survey was conducted periodically in the 1960s and in 1972 and 1980.

The National Mortality Survey is designed to provide data on socioeconomic characteristics of deceased persons, use and payment for hospitals and institutional care during the patient's last year of life, and factors associated with health status, such as smoking habits. The data are collected with the use of questionnaires sent to the decedents' next of kin and to the institutions which provided health care, including hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and other facilities. The survey was conducted annually from 1961 through 1968 and most recently in 1986.

NCHS Budget

A significant factor in determining the timing and content of NCHS' surveys is the availability of funding and staff support. As the preceding description of surveys shows, some data systems are conducted annually, while others are conducted on a periodic basis. As a result, the budget required by NCHS to support its basic program of data collection can change considerably from year to year.

Over the last 5 years, the NCHS appropriation has moved up and down

within the range of about \$40 to \$52 million. Due to the length of the budget process, preliminary plans often must be made more than 2 years in advance of the year in which funding is needed. The difficulty in predicting the amount of funding that will be available in future budgets often complicates the survey planning process, and NCHS has had to delay a number of periodic surveys from its normal schedule when budgets were tight.

For fiscal year 1987, the current year, the NCHS appropriation is about \$52 million. Roughly \$32 million of this amount is devoted to relatively fixed costs such as salaries for NCHS' staff of nearly 500, data processing, and support costs for building and equipment rental and maintenance. The remaining \$20 million is the variable amount that can be allocated to support field work on surveys, agreements with the States for vital statistics, and other work performed under contract.

One key feature of NCHS' surveys is the ability to modify or add to their content to meet specific data requirements of other agencies or programs, or to promote collaborative projects of interest to both NCHS and other agencies. In many cases, these agencies provide funding to NCHS to cover the cost of special data collection through NCHS' Reimbursable Work Program. NCHS has specific legislative authority to conduct this program, including the authority to carry funding for multiyear projects across normal fiscal year barriers. As with the NCHS appropriation, the amount of funding received through the Reimbursable Work Program varies from year to year depending on activities underway. On the average, NCHS receives between \$4 and \$6 million per year under the Reimbursable Work Program, mostly from other PHS agencies.

Survey planning at NCHS is a dynamic process with a number of opportunities for agencies and organizations to discuss data needs and appropriate funding. While many data collection activities have been planned for 1987 and 1988, there are still a number of decisions to be made on the scope and timing of future health surveys.

New Reports and Data Files

Advance Data No. 129—Visits to Office-based Physicians by Hispanic Persons: United States, 1980-1981
Vital and Health Statistics Series 4,

No. 24, Statistical Aspects of Physician Payment Systems: A Report of the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00986-2; Price \$4

Vital and Health Statistics Series 11, No. 237, Prevalence of Diagnosed Diabetes, Undiagnosed Diabetes, and Impaired Glucose Tolerance in Adults 20-74 Years, United States, 1976-1980; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00988-9; Price \$3

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 88, Surgical and Nonsurgical Procedures in Short-Stay Hospitals, United States, 1983; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00983-8; Price \$2.75

Vital and Health Statistics Series 13, No. 89, Inpatient Utilization of Short-Stay Hospitals by Diagnosis, United States, 1984; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00996-0; Price \$4.50

The 1982 edition of *Vital Statistics of the United States* is now available. Published in four volumes, this report is the most detailed compilation of data on births, deaths, infant deaths, marriages, and divorces issued by the National Center for Health Statistics. Part A, *Mortality*, contains detailed tabulations by cause of death and demographic characteristics and special sections on infant mortality, accidental mortality, and life expectancy. Part B of the mortality volume has extensive geographic detail, including data at the State and county levels and in some instances for localities over 10,000 population. Individual volumes are these:

Volume I, *Natality*; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00984-6; Price \$29

Volume II, *Mortality*, Part A; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00971-4; Price \$32

Volume II, *Mortality*, Part B; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00975-7; Price \$36

Volume III, *Marriage and Divorce*; GPO Stock No. 017-022-00967-6; Price \$15

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

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