

# ATTACHMENT D

## Comments on Federal Register Notice and AHRQ Responses

### *Comment From Dennis J. Fixler, Chief Statistician, Bureau of Economic Analysis*

August 27, 2007

Ms. Doris Lefkowitz  
Reports Clearance Officer, AHRQ  
540 Gaither Road, Room 5048  
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: *Federal Register* notices of June 28, 2007, for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Medical Expenditure Panel Survey--Insurance Component (MEPS-IC) (OMB Number: 0607-0782)

Dear Ms. Lefkowitz:

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) strongly supports the continued collection of data by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) on the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey--Insurance Component (MEPS-IC). The data collected on the MEPS-IC form is critical to key components of BEA's economic statistics.

BEA uses data from the MEPS-IC to derive national estimates of employer contributions for group health insurance for the private sector and state and local government (a component of compensation) and to prepare estimates of employee contributions for group health insurance (a component of personal consumption expenditures). On a regional level, BEA also uses the MEPS-IC to prepare separate, state-level estimates for the employer contributions to the health care cost of their employees for private ownership, for local ownership, and for state ownership. A list of items used by BEA is listed in the attachment below.

Expediting the survey to make the results available a year earlier would reduce the revisions to the BEA health estimates. The magnitude of the reduction in revisions ultimately depends upon the timeliness of data for state and local health coverage and whether the final MEPS-IC data are received prior to the publication of the annual revision to the national accounts which is usually in July of each year.

Your current release schedule of MEPS-IC data in July 2007 for the 2005 survey year is several months too late for BEA to use the data for the annual revisions to the GDP. If the new collection and dissemination method accelerates the timing by several months, this will allow BEA to use the data and lessen the magnitude of the revisions.

The lack of data for 2007 is unfortunate. Although we can interpolate values for the missing year, contributions for health coverage tend to be somewhat volatile, and the interpolated values

are unlikely to be particularly accurate. However, the much more timely receipt of the MEPS-IC data should more than offset the inconvenience of a one-time interpolation.

Please keep BEA informed concerning any modifications to this form. We are particularly interested in any modifications proposed during the forms approval process that would substantially affect our use of these data. For additional information, please contact Ruth Bramblett, Source Data Coordinator, on 202-606-9653 or by e-mail at [Ruth.Bramblett@bea.gov](mailto:Ruth.Bramblett@bea.gov). If you should need assistance in justifying this form to the Office of Management and Budget, please do not hesitate to contact BEA.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dennis J. Fixler  
Chief Statistician

Attachment

## ATTACHMENT

### Uses of the AHRQ MEPS-IC by BEA

Items	Used for
<p>Employer contributions for private and state and local employees</p> <p>Employer and employees contributions for health insurance</p>	<p>National Income and Product Accounts to estimate:</p> <p>Employer contributions for Group Health Insurance</p> <p>PCE health estimates</p>
<p>Total employer contributions for family coverage (current and retirees together)</p> <p>Total employer contributions for single coverage (current and retirees together)</p> <p>Total employment (excludes retirees)</p> <p>Total enrollees (current and retirees together)</p> <p>Total single enrollees (current and retirees together)</p> <p>Total family enrollees (current and retirees together)</p> <p>Total active enrollees (only current employees)</p> <p>Total retiree enrollees (only retirees)</p> <p>Standard errors for each of the preceding variables' values</p>	<p>State Level-Data for all items</p>

*AHRQ Response to Bureau of Economic Analysis*

Dear Dr. Fixler:

Thank you for your comments regarding the 60-Day Federal Register notice for the collection of the 2008-2009 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey - Insurance Component (MEPS-IC).

The Bureau of Economic Analysis's (BEA) strong support for the continuation of the MEPS-IC program that was expressed in your comments is very much appreciated. We are glad that AHRQ's plan to collect and release the annual MEPS-IC estimates a year earlier meets with your approval. The fact that this change will reduce the need for revisions to many BEA statistical series is an important indicator that we have made the correct decision.

Per your request, we will be sure to inform you of any changes to the MEPS-IC survey questionnaires that could affect the BEA's use of the data.

Sincerely yours,

Doris Lefkowitz  
AHRQ Reports Clearance Officer

***Comment From Ms. B Sachau***

DHS AHRQ - 2008 AND 2009 MEDICAL EXPENDITURE PANEL SURVEY

WHY IS THIS CONFIDENTIAL WHEN IT IS DONE WITH AMERICAN TAXPAYERS'S DOLLARS. IF YOU CONSIDER THIS SO ESSENTIAL, THEN THE INFORMATION ALSO NEEDS TO BE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC. IF NOT, THEN DO AWAY WITH THE SURVEY.

WHAT GOOD DOES TAKING THIS SURVEY DO ANYWAY - OTHER THAN SPEND AMERICAN TAX DOLLARS. I CANT THINK OF ONE REASON TO HAVE THIS. MEDICAL INSURANCE COSTS ARE THROUGH THE ROOF.

WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS. NOT KEEP TAKING SURVEYS. IT IS CLEAR THE INCREASES EACH YEAR ARE WAY WAY ABOVE INFLATION AND THAT PROFITEERS ARE RAKING IN THE GOLD.

B. SACHAU

15 ELM ST

FLORHAM PARK NJ 07932

**AHRQ Response to Ms. Sachau**

Dear Ms. Sachau:

Thank you for your comments regarding the 60-Day Federal Register notice for the collection of the 2008-2009 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Insurance Component (MEPS-IC). The purpose of this note is to respond to the concerns expressed in your e-mail.

The MEPS-IC is an ongoing survey of employer-sponsored health insurance coverage that has to date been completed annually for the data years 1996 through 2005. The survey collecting year 2006 information will begin this summer.

The responses we receive from individual private businesses are held confidential by the survey. By law, under Title 13 of the U.S. Code, no information collected from an individual respondent can be released by the MEPS-IC. In fact, not even the names of the businesses that respond to the survey can be made public.

However, there are a large number of summary statistics that are produced by combining the information provided by all MEPS-IC survey respondents. By combining their responses, the information for individual businesses cannot be identified through these summary data. Therefore, these summary statistics are not confidential.

The summary statistics are made available to the public through a variety of tables that can be accessed through the MEPS website at [www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/survey\\_comp/Insurance.jsp](http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/survey_comp/Insurance.jsp). The tables include data on average health insurance premiums paid by businesses and the percentage of establishments (businesses) that offer health insurance to their employees, among many others. Providing this information to the public is one of our primary goals.

Another important goal of the MEPS-IC is to provide information to National and State level policymakers regarding health insurance coverage provided by employers. The majority of Americans receive their health insurance coverage through their own job or through the job of a family member. Therefore, good information about employer-sponsored health insurance is critical to the goal of providing quality healthcare for all Americans. In fact, the State of New Jersey has used MEPS-IC statistics frequently in helping to determine how to best provide health insurance coverage for its citizens.

I hope the information above explains some of the issues that you raised in your e-mail.

Sincerely yours,

Doris Lefkowitz  
AHRQ Reports Clearance Officer