

This letter is to inform you of our plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pretesting research (OMB number 0607-0725). The Census Bureau plans to conduct telephone cognitive interviews on six proposed questions for the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey - Insurance Component (MEPS-IC), which is a self-administered mail out/mail return survey (with telephone follow-up) conducted by the Census Bureau for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) on an annual basis. The MEPS-IC is used to collect information from employers who provide health insurance to their employees. Data collected include employment characteristics, business characteristics, number and type of health insurance plans offered and information about health insurance coverage. The study's purpose is to measure State and National levels of health insurance spending as well as to provide data for analyzing the effects of current and proposed healthcare reforms. The six proposed questions ask about topics covered by the Affordable Care Act, which has a set of guidelines that employers that offer insurance need to follow in order to be compliant.

The purpose of these cognitive interviews is to discover how respondents react to the proposed questions. Specifically, we intend to address the following questions: Is the requested information available in respondent's records? Do respondents have issues with comprehending the terminology used in the questions? How burdensome are the questions? The results will be recorded and tabulated and a report produced that assesses the viability of the proposed questions. Findings will be used to determine whether these questions will be added to the 2013 MEPS-IC survey.

Starting in July and continuing into September, 2012, staff from the Census Bureau's Health and Training Surveys Branch (HTSB) will conduct a maximum of 300 interviews with MEPS-IC respondents. We plan to do up to 10 local in-person interviews early in the process and then conduct the remaining interviews by telephone. Training of the HTSB staff will be conducted by a member of the Response Improvement Research Staff (RIRS) of the Census Bureau, who will also conduct a small number of interviews and provide methodological guidance to the HTSB staff throughout the project.

Cases to be selected for debriefing will vary by geographic region and industry, as well as response mode (on-line, mail and telephone). Interviews will be broken into 3 main groups, each consisting of 100 respondents. Group 1 will be composed of respondents who answered that they are self-insured, with two subgroups -- less than 300 employees and 300 or more employees. Group 2 will be made up of respondents who purchased a plan OR were self-insured and will be split into 3 subgroups -- those with less than 100 employees, those with between 100 and 999 employees, and those with 1000 or more employees. Group 3 will be small employers only, split into 3 subgroups -- those who do not offer insurance and have less than 35 employees, those who do not offer health insurance and have 35 to 80 employees, and those who offer insurance and have 80 employees or less.

We plan to divide the testing into three rounds of interviews, evaluating what we've learned after each round and continuing interviews as necessary.

Respondents will be told that their participation is voluntary. Monetary incentives for participation will not be offered. After companies are recruited, Census staff will provide follow-up reminders by telephone and/or fax (if the interview is scheduled for a later time).

We might record some interviews with the participants' permission, to aid researchers in accurately reporting findings and recommendations. We also will inform the participants that the information they provide is confidential and will not be shared with anyone not directly involved in this research project.

Enclosed are copies of the current MEPS-IC questionnaires, the proposed questions, and a draft cognitive interview protocol.

We expect that each interview will last no more than 30 minutes. Thus, the total estimated reporting burden for this research is approximately 150 hours (0.5 hours X 300 interviews).

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and analysis of the respondent debriefing is listed below:

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