

ATTACHMENT 6 Incentive Experimentation

Proposed Test of Incentive Use in the National Health Interview Survey

Purpose

To test the use of incentives to improve response rates to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Rationale/Policy Question

The National Health Interview Survey is considered the gold standard of health surveys. It provides benchmarks and is the sampling frame for other federal surveys. Estimates from the NHIS address many of the Department's initiatives. Response rates on the NHIS, as with other surveys, have been gradually declining. Much effort has gone into increasing the salience of the survey to the public and these efforts will continue. Prepaid incentives are known to improve completion rates¹ but have never been used by NHIS as they have in other major federal surveys. This project would test the use of incentives on the NHIS to determine whether the erosion of response rates can be slowed or reversed and whether there is any consequent improvement in data quality.

Approach

This plan will address overall survey participation rates using different levels of prepaid financial incentives. A Census Regional Office (RO) with lower response rates than the average of all six ROs Q2 of 2013 will be used. In two quarters of 2014, about 6,000 households will be divided into three groups with random assignment: \$0, \$10, or \$20 will be mailed with the advance letter to the household.

The evaluation of the project will include not only response rates but also the level of effort required to complete the interview, the rate of item nonresponse (focusing especially on difficult items like income and permission to link records using the last 4 digits of the Social Security Number), complete versus partial interview rates, and other qualitative factors.

Note: Funding is being sought to conduct this study.

¹Singer, Eleanor and Ye, Cong. (2013) The Use and Effects of Incentives in Surveys. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 2013 645: 112.

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