

Attachment 2d - Summary of the need for each topic area of the NHIS Core Module

Conditions

The NHIS is the major source of information on chronic conditions in the U.S. population. Since risk factors for many chronic diseases are well known and modifiable, information on their prevalence is needed routinely to evaluate the impact of prevention programs.

Injuries

Injuries are a leading cause of disability and premature mortality in the United States. The NHIS has long been a major source of data on the incidence of nonfatal injuries. However, more detailed population-based data on the causes and circumstances of non-fatal injuries, which are vital for designing and evaluating injury prevention programs, have been lacking. The National Committee on Injury Prevention and Control has pointed out the need to build upon and improve existing injury surveillance data collection systems such as the NHIS. To support these needs, the NHIS expanded injury questions in 1997 to increase the level of detail on the circumstances of nonfatal injuries.

Limitation of Activities

Limitations in physical functioning and in the ability to perform key activities have long been recognized as major health issues, and assessment of activity limitation has been done in previous NHIS questionnaires. With an aging and increasingly diverse population, the need to better understand activity limitation is imperative since it is higher among elderly, minority, and economically disadvantaged persons. The 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) also underscored the need for clear and objective data on activity limitation. Finally, functional assessment measures are widely used to determine eligibility for numerous federal assistance programs. NHIS data on functional limitations can help measure the impact of changes in these programs.

Health Behaviors

Many risk factors for a number of important chronic conditions are related to lifestyle choices (such as smoking and diet). Many of the national health objectives for the Year 2020 are related to health promotion and risk reduction, and the NHIS has been identified as the major data source to track progress toward achieving many of these objectives. Most of the items included in this section have been included in previously fielded supplements to the NHIS. Because of their relevance to many national health promotion efforts, key health behavior items are incorporated into the NHIS Core Module.

Access to Health Care

Recent changes to the U.S. health care delivery system have focused attention on the need for data to assess the types and sources of health care being utilized as well as barriers to obtaining needed health care.

Health Care Utilization

The NHIS Core questionnaire has always included questions on the utilization of hospital and outpatient care services. This information is important to those making decisions about allocation of health care resources and for evaluating the impact of proposed changes in financing of health care services.

Health Insurance

Since 1990, the NHIS has collected extensive health insurance information on an annual basis. These data are particularly needed by policy analysts to evaluate the impact of changes to health care delivery and financing.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics

As in the past, the NHIS Core Module will collect information on socio-economic and demographic characteristics of survey participants. One of the well-recognized and longstanding strengths of the NHIS is its ability to allow examination of health measures by a number of demographic and economic variables.

Recontact and Matching Information

The NHIS continues to collect, on a confidential basis, data needed to recontact respondents for additional information and to match respondents to administrative records such as the National Death Index. The ability to track respondents and match to other records greatly expands the usefulness of the data at very low cost while mitigating public burden. Collecting data on computer usage and respondents' email addresses provides insight into the best means for recontact. This information can also be used to design follow-back surveys and other special projects aimed at informing changes to the NHIS.