Generic Clearance Collection Request:
Cognitive Testing for COVID-19 Questions on the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey –
Insurance Component

Request: 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 respondent pretest interviews on additional proposed questions for the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Insurance Component (MEPS-IC). The MEPS-IC is a self-administered mail out/mail return survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) on an annual basis. Data from the survey are used to create national and state level estimates on employer sponsored health insurance coverage. These estimates are used to track industry trends and examine how these trends have changed health insurance coverage over time. Policymakers at the national and state level use the data to assess the status of employer-sponsored health insurance throughout the U.S. and monitor the impact of laws governing health insurance. Researchers, policy analysts, and other government agencies also use the data for a variety of analyses.

This survey is conducted by the Census Bureau under the authority of Title 13 U.S.Code (U.S.C.), Section 8(b), on behalf of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, whose collection authority is Section 913 of the Public Health Service Act (Title 42, U.S.C., Section 299b-2). Section 9 of Title 13 U.S.C. ensures the confidentiality of data reported by private companies. The protocol for this pretest was developed by the U.S. Census Bureau with input from AHRQ. Further information regarding the MEPS-IC can be found at this website:
https://meps.ahrq.gov/survey_comp/Insurance.jsp

Purpose: The purpose of the pretest is to determine the respondent's interpretation of and ability to answer proposed questions that would collect additional data from businesses and government units. The pretest, which is sponsored by AHRQ, will include questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organizations- including its impact on staffing and health insurance coverage. This research expands upon prior approved research testing for the 2021 MEPS conducted Summer 2020 (approval date: May 15). All coronavirus pandemic questions for the pretest are for to obtain additional information and were developed by the sponsor AHRQ with guidance from HSB and ESMD. Respondents will be selected based on their response to the 2019 MEPS-IC form. The Census Bureau will prepare a report that outlines the findings of the pretest and discusses the possibility of adding new questions in subsequent survey years. This report will be used by the Census Bureau and AHRQ to make informed decisions for 2021 questionnaire design and the inclusion of questions about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population of Interest: The population of interest are respondents to the MEPS-IC survey. The MEPS-IC is an annual sample survey, with the sample consisting of approximately 40,000 private industry establishments and 4,000 state and local governments.

Timeline: Testing will occur from October to December 2020.

Language: Testing will be conducted in English only.

Method: Staff from the Health Surveys Branch (HSB) at the U.S. Census Bureau will conduct up to 50 telephone interviews. Due to Title 13, we are unable to use email for the pretest for private companies. We did not want to treat the governments any differently and so we agreed to do telephone interviews only. Interviews are aimed at understanding the way that respondents interpret survey items that are being presented to them, in order to understand and reduce potential measurement error. The interviews will follow a semi-structured interview protocol (Attachment A). Additionally, PIA will be communicated to all participants prior to the evaluation about the privacy, confidentiality and burden associated with participation (Attachment B). Training of the HSB staff will be conducted by Susanna Winder, a survey statistician who has had pretesting experience/training , who will oversee the work of the HSB staff and will also conduct pretest interviews. Staff from ESMD work collaboratively with HSB staff to train them in cognitive interviewing procedures and most have prior experience

Sample: We plan to conduct iterative testing with 50 interviews total across two rounds. Midway through testing changes may be implemented to reflect lessons learned during testing . HSB will sample from the 2019 MEPS-IC for recruiting. The samples will include contact information and a size indicator for the organization. We will contact potential participants via phone, explain the nature of our research, and ask them to participate in our study. The sample of participants will be those who are able to be contacted and who agree to participate in the study. Efforts will be made to sample respondents with a variety of sizes and types (i.e., industries) of organizations, though the sample will ultimately be dependent on who chooses to participate in the research. Participants will be informed that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be seen only by Census Bureau employees and those with special sworn status. Respondents who are interested in participating will be given the choice of scheduling the interview for a future date, or having the interview take place at that moment.

Recruitment: Cases to be selected for this pretest will include responding units from the 2019 MEPS-IC that offered health insurance. Nonresponders will not be included in the pretest since the likelihood of obtaining participation is low. Cases will be selected to cover both private industry establishments and government establishments. Respondents will be informed that their participation is voluntary. The interviews will not be audio recorded.

Use of incentives: Monetary incentives for participation will not be offered.

Length of interview: We expect that each interview will last no more than 20 minutes (50 cases x 20 minutes per case = 16.7 hours). Additionally, to recruit respondents we expect to make up to 5 phone contacts per completed case. The recruiting calls are expected to last on average 3 minutes per call (5 attempted phone calls per completed case x 50 cases x 3 minute per case = 12.5 hours). Thus, the estimated burden for this project is 29.2 hours (16.7 hours for interviews + 12.5 hours for recruiting).

Enclosures: Enclosed are a copy of the draft MEPS-IC testing protocol with proposed questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Attachment A) . Attachment B contains the PIA content that will be communicated to respondents prior to the evaluation to inform them about privacy, confidentiality and burden associated with participation.

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

> Temika Holland
> Data Collection Methodology & Research Branch
> Economic Statistics and Methodology Division
> U.S. Census Bureau
> Washington, D.C. 20233
> (301) 763-5241
> Temika.holland@census.gov

CC:

Nick Orsini	(DIR) with enclosures		
Carol Caldwell	(ESMD)	"	"
Diane Willimack	(ESMD)	"	"
Amy Anderson Riemer	(ESMD)	"	"
Kristin Stettler	(ESMD)	"	"
Danielle Norman	(PCO)	"	"
Mary Lenaiyasa	(PCO)	"	"
Paul Beatty	(ADRM)	"	"
Jennifer Hunter Childs	(ADRM)	"	"
Jasmine Luck	(ADRM)	"	"
Marleen Livesay	(HSB)	"	"
Susanna Winder	(HSB)	"	"
Belitza Rojas Lopez	(HSB)	"	"
Karen Davis	(AHRQ)	"	" (Karen.Davis@ahrq.hhs.gov)
David Kashihara	(AHRQ)	"	" (David.Kashihara@ahrq.hhs.gov)