

Supporting Statement A, Attachment E: Additional Supporting Background on the Household Pulse Survey

As Covid-19 has impacted virtually every aspect of American life, the Census Bureau and its sister Federal statistical agencies recognize the urgent need for data that are more timely and efficient than those produced by our traditional surveys. In this uniquely challenging time for businesses and households, the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies have worked collectively to pilot these Pulse surveys to demonstrate the statistical system's ability to be highly efficient and timely in addressing the range of data needs across the Federal, state and local landscape. The Household Pulse survey has been developed by the Census Bureau in partnership with five other agencies:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
- The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS)
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Each agency has contributed questionnaire items deemed critical to inform their missions and support their stakeholders in understanding the impacts of Covid-19 and how the country may recover from them. The questions selected for inclusion in the survey are a result of intensive negotiations to get at the most critical data needs to support agency missions and the data user community:

The **Employment Questions**, jointly contributed by Census and BLS, will assess changes in the economic well-being of the American people including:

- To understand, objectively and with immediacy, individuals' employment experience in this pandemic, e.g., the degree to which they have lost employment income; experienced changes in work status; and/or are now working without pay.

The **Mental Health & Health Status Questions**, contributed by NCHS, are included to understand ways that individuals' health status may be compromised by the circumstances of the pandemic, above and beyond the acute threat of contracting Covid-19:

- Information on the health impact of COVID-19 on death and hospitalization is available from several sources, but the impact on other measures of health is limited. Key issues relate to access to health care resources (both related and not directly related to COVID-19) along with overall health indicators and indicators of mental health. As some of these measures are key components of core health data collections such as the National Health Interview Survey, the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the proposed survey can be informed by existing information.

- Access to health care is a fundamental determinant of health, and its equitable distribution across the population is a critical issue of health services research and policymaking. Unmet needs are generally the result of cost-related barriers, accessibility problems (lack of transportation or lack of availability in area), and acceptability (personal preferences). The coronavirus pandemic has the potential to exacerbate these causes, especially accessibility problems (for example, due to doctor's offices limiting in-person appointments, urgent care clinics focusing on COVID-19 symptoms and excluding others, or public transportation systems cutting back on service). The inclusion of questions on access to care provides an opportunity to examine the prevalence of persons with recent unmet needs, whether that prevalence changes over time, and whether historic demographic inequities in access to care are widening.
- Positive mental health is critical to work productively, make meaningful contributions, and cope with the stresses of life. In contrast, mental illness and stress can lead to problems functioning in social, work, or family activities. Part of DHHS's strategic goals are to help identify and address mental health problems and to invest in programs and interventions focused on prevention, screening, and early detection of serious problems. Joblessness, social isolation, disruptions to routines, news reports about deaths, and concerns about the physical health of oneself and one's family have the potential to create grief, panic, hopelessness and fear. The inclusion of questions on mental health provides an opportunity to examine the prevalence and characteristics of persons with varying levels of anxiety and depression, and whether that prevalence changes over time.

The **Food Security and Housing Security Questions**, contributed by ERS and HUD, are focused on the way Covid-19 has changed individuals' experiences with regard to their ability to secure food and housing. ERS needs are as follows:

- The Economic Research Service (ERS) monitors food security in U.S. households annually. The Covid-19 Household Pulse Survey provides real-time surveillance and monitoring of food security status on an ongoing basis.
- The COVID pandemic has elevated the households' needs for accessing emergency food and other food assistance programs. These data will be used to understand how households are responding to food hardships and what resources are available in their communities.
- The balance of food-at-home and food-away-from-home spending are shifting in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These data enable us to understand how spending patterns shift as the situation unfolds.

In addition, HUD indicated its desire to include the housing questions to meet the following needs:

- With of \$1.2 trillion of FHA insurance-in-force, HUD has a strong interest in understanding if households made their previous mortgage payment on time and believe they will be able to make their next mortgage payment on time. The COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey data on recent mortgage payment activity and next mortgage payment intentions will fill in these existing data gaps.
- With more than 4 million households receiving HUD rental assistance, HUD has a strong interest in understanding how COVID-19 will impact renter's ability to make their rent payments. The COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey data on recent renter's payment activity and renter's ability to make next rental payment will help HUD better understand the impact of COVID-19 on our rental assistance programs.
- Nearly 700,000 landlords participate in HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program. HUD has a strong interest in understanding how COVID-19 will impact landlord's cash flow. The COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey data on recent renter's payment activity and renter's ability to make next rental payment will help HUD better understand the impact of COVID-19 on landlords.

The **Education Questions** were contributed by NCES. Given the scope of educational disruptions at all levels, NCES sees the Covid-19 Household Pulse Survey as providing insight on:

- The modes of educational delivery to households with school-age children when COVID-19 caused suspension of most in-person educational activities in public and private schools.
- The burden placed on households for the education of school-age children as a result of school closures.
- The degree to which technology is available to households for education of school-age children to facilitate online and distance learning.
- Differences in the ability to provide educational continuity to students based on geography and socioeconomic characteristics.

There may be additional **Economic Impact Questions** fielded at a later point in the data collection period, subject to additional approval by OMB. Such questions, developed by BLS, would be designed to provide insight on:

- What strategies households are taking to manage economic impacts from Covid-19, including use of impending stimulus payments, unemployment insurance benefits, borrowing from family or friends, taking on additional debt, withdrawing from savings, or using their own sources of income.
- Expectations individuals have with regard to the economic impact (stimulus) payments; how much they expect to (or have) received; and how it was (or will be) spent, e.g., essential needs (food, medical care, home), debt reduction, savings or more discretionary consumer spending.

- For many the economic impact payment will enable them to remain afloat financially; for others it will not be sufficient to cover basic needs; and for some it will add income to what they are currently receiving. Understanding how the stimulus is received and used and will inform additional efforts by federal, state, and local governments to make targeted decisions about additional interventions under consideration.

This survey will be deployed in a manner outside of the federal statistical system's established, benchmark surveys. It is designed to respond to an emergent data need and produce near real-time data. The production and dissemination of these data will take place under the auspices of the Census Bureau's Experimental Statistical Product Series (see <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html>). As part of this process, the Census Bureau will be transparent about limitations in data quality. Despite anticipated limitations, the Census Bureau expects this survey will produce more comprehensive and timely data of higher quality than national phone surveys and anecdotal information as the agency will remain guided by its Quality Standards. The Census Bureau's goal is accurate and unbiased estimates, and it will be transparent about the quality of the estimates obtained. The agency will continue to make improvements to the survey over time as it learns more about response rates and those responding to the survey to refine and improve statistical methods and make higher quality estimates.

Decision-makers will be asked to consider response rates and other quality limitations when analyzing data at any geographic level. The Census Bureau will produce timely estimates of nonresponse bias. In the absence of any other sources of comprehensive and timely information, these survey estimates with quality indicators will provide needed evidence of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

An important feature of the survey design is that one may expect consistent estimates of weekly change. Each weekly sample is selected to be representative of the population, and the design does not make one weekly sample more or less biased than any other week. Therefore, comparisons of the overlapping sample between weeks should be an accurate assessment of actual change affecting the population.

The Census Bureau will compare the demographic distributions of the respondents to the COVID-19 survey to similar distributions from benchmark data sources, such as the official population estimates or the American Community Survey (ACS), at the national, state and metropolitan area levels. These comparisons are expected to be available within a few days of release of the survey estimates.

For example, the Washington DC metropolitan area is split essentially equally between males and females, with 3.8 million people of each sex according to the 2018 ACS estimates. If the COVID-19 survey, which will be weighted to the occupied number of ACS households, yields an estimate of 3.3 million males and 4.3 million females, then data users will see the potential

nonresponse bias in the survey and can adjust their decision-making appropriately. The Census Bureau expects to refine our weighting processes over time to make better use of available information and to reduce nonresponse bias in the estimates.

At the same time, analysts will need to consider the potential effects of the pandemic on the survey controls when assessing potential nonresponse bias. For example, the age distribution of a metropolitan area like Boston is likely affected by the lack of college students. These effects are not quantifiable, however, because such changes occurred rapidly.

Survey estimates are expected to be available one week after the end of data collection. The first few weeks of dissemination will probably take longer to release as the agency defines the methodology and implements it.

Transparency is a core tenet of this effort. While the data themselves are critical as the nation grapples with the social and economic impacts of Covid-19, the Census Bureau is approaching these surveys as a demonstration project that builds the federal statistical system's capabilities and responds to long-standing criticism that federal data are not sufficiently timely for many needs. This will be clear in all communications, including prior to launch and with each weekly release of data.

The Census Bureau will pilot these surveys as a demonstration project indicative of the Federal statistical agencies' ability to respond in a crisis, work across agencies and produce data that are extremely timely, efficient, and collected without prejudice. This has not been the nation's first crisis, nor will it be the last. Demonstrating that the statistical system has the capability to operate with agility in times like this builds public confidence and enhances its relevancy.