

MEPS
“YOUR ROLE IN SHAPING THE NATION’S HEALTH”

MEPS. What is it? And why is your participation so important?

MEPS is the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. It is an ongoing national study that has become a main source of facts about how people in the United States get and pay for health care. Government and private researchers use MEPS data to help understand our health care system and the impact of health care policy. As you know, these issues affect everyone’s lives.

MEPS is sponsored by two agencies that are part of the US Department of Health and Human Services: AHRQ, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. AHRQ manages the project.

MEPS households are selected from among households like yours which participated in the National Health Interview Survey. MEPS households are chosen this way in order to create a survey that is both scientifically accurate *and* as cost-effective as possible. MEPS focuses on: health care use and cost, the quality of care, and access to care. The data comes from two main sources: you and your health care providers.

MEPS provides insight into many different aspects of our healthcare system. The fact that MEPS includes families and health care providers makes this study unique because with your consent it combines information about your health events with medical cost information from your providers. The result is an accurate reflection of the expenditures for health care in this country.

This information becomes part of a national data library that can be used to help answer questions about health care and health care policy. For example, information collected in MEPS shows how the costs of getting different types of health care services change over time. MEPS also collects other kinds of information, like how people feel about the health care they receive. AHRQ responds to thousands of requests a year for MEPS data.

The value of MEPS data was acknowledged by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, which awarded MEPS its 2008 Policy Impact Award. The award recognizes the study’s “extraordinary, long-term group effort in contributing timely data and research that has informed US health care policy decisions”.

Like all other survey research, MEPS uses information from a sample of households who represent many other similar households. The identity of each individual household member who

participates in MEPS is kept confidential. This confidentiality is written into the same law that authorizes MEPS. No information that might identify an individual can be released to the public without that person's consent. We protect your data by removing all personal identifying information before it is made available for study and analysis.

So, what will you be asked to do?

MEPS participants keep records about their health care and answer questions about their health care use and how it is paid for during a series of interviews conducted in their homes by professional interviewers. Everyone can be present, but usually one adult answers questions for the whole family.

There will be five interviews over a two and a half year period. We ask you to do all five interviews in order to get accurate information about *changes* in health care. When the same household is surveyed multiple times, changes in *health care* are easier to see. The length of the interviews vary based on the size of the family, but it typically takes about two hours. And if you have notes or records of your family's health care, the interview can go faster.

The interviewer who will contact you is an employee of Westat, a nationally recognized research organization based near Washington, DC. Westat has been collecting MEPS data for AHRQ since 1996. You can get more information about Westat at www.westat.com. If you'd like more information about the MEPS survey and your participation, please visit the MEPS website at www.meps.ahrq.gov.

Participation in MEPS is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there's no penalty and you won't lose any of the government benefits to which you're entitled.

If you do participate, you can withdraw or choose not to answer something for any reason, at any time. But no one else can do this for you, and every answer you give is valuable.

We are counting on your help to obtain a detailed picture of the health care issues American families face today. Thank you.