

July 25, 2022

Doris Lefkowitz
Reports Clearance Office
AHRQ
540 Gaither Road
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: *Federal Register* notice of July 11, 2022, for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) Medical Expenditure Panel Survey - Household Component (MEPS-HC) (OMB Number: 0935-0118)

Dear Ms. Lefkowitz:

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) strongly supports AHRQ's updated questions related to COVID-19 in the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey--Household Component (MEPS-HC). As the only government-administered nationally representative survey of this nature, the data collected on the MEPS-HC form are invaluable components of BEA's economic statistics. The proposed questions related to COVID-19 in MEPS should not affect BEA's use of the data and may, in fact, enhance its use for research to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the health of the U.S. population and of the economy.

BEA uses the following data from the MEPS-HC:

- Prescribed Medicines
- Office-Based Medical Provider Visits
- Outpatient Visits
- Emergency Room Visits
- Hospital Inpatient Stays
- Home Health
- Full Year Consolidated Data File
- Condition-Event Link File

On an annual basis, the Office of the Chief Economist uses MEPS-HC data to estimate disease-specific spending for BEA's Health Care Satellite Account (HCSA). BEA also uses the MEPS-HC demographic information to create population weights for the HCSA. We expect the COVID-19 pandemic to trigger dramatic changes to disease prevalence and health care spending as the peak of the pandemic spurred increased emergency visits, decreased in-person elective visits, and increased use of cost saving telehealth visits. Consequently, the addition of COVID-19 related questions will greatly benefit accurate measurements in the satellite account.

Please keep BEA informed of modifications to these forms. We are particularly interested in modifications that are proposed during the forms' approval process that might substantially affect our use of the data collected through these forms. For additional information, please contact Tiffany Burrell, Source Data Coordinator, on (301)278-9618, or by e-mail at Tiffany.Burrell@bea.gov. Should you need assistance in justifying these forms to the Office of Management and Budget, please do not hesitate to contact BEA.

Sincerely,

Dennis Fixler
Chief Economist