



Employer-Sponsored Insurance: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey–Insurance Component

For the 2006 Cover the Uninsured Week analysis we used data from an ongoing federal survey of employers to examine trends in employer-sponsored health insurance coverage and take-up rates across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. We used state and national trend data from 1998 to 2003 on employer-sponsored health insurance offer and take-up rates from the federal Medical Expenditure Panel Survey-Insurance Component (MEPS-IC) to provide national and state-level detail not available from other data sources. MEPS-IC data are collected and distributed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

The MEPS-IC is a valuable data source to provide ongoing monitoring of employer-sponsored health coverage at both the state and national level. National estimates are available for all years. Prior to 2003, extra sampling to produce representative estimates for states was provided to smaller states on a rotating basis; therefore, state estimates for eleven states are not available for each year. Beginning in 2003, representative estimates are provided for all states. This report presents the change from 1998 to 2003 for the forty states that had representative estimates in both 1998 and 2003. For states without enough sampled elements for 1998 estimates, the alternative baseline years of 1997, 1999, and 2000 were used for trend analysis.

The MEPS-IC survey on employer health insurance coverage is an important tool for understanding the macro as well as micro trends in employer-sponsored insurance. Since employer-based health insurance coverage is the foundation of the U.S. health care system, the trends in offer and take up rates will be critical to monitor at the state level over time.

MEPS-IC Methodology

The Medical Expenditure Panel Survey-Insurance Component (MEPS-IC) is a state representative survey of public and private employers in the US sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ 2005b). “The objectives of the MEPS-IC survey are to describe the current employer-provided health insurance system, to examine factors which influence employee choice of health insurance plans, to monitor changes in the health insurance system, to provide data for modeling federal health care policies, and to measure state and national levels of health insurance spending for the National Health Accounts” (AHRQ 2005a).

The MEPS-IC is a cross-sectional survey conducted annually. The reference period for questions on the survey is the previous calendar year. Surveys are conducted by telephone and mail. The survey sample is drawn randomly from local and state government employers and private sector establishments with at least one employee that are listed in the Business Register (maintained by the Census Bureau and derived from administrative records) or the Census of Governments. The Business Register is updated annually and the Census of Governments is updated every five years. From 1996-2002, the sample is allocated by state, sector (public/private), and employer size. Sequential stratified sampling was performed, with public and private establishments sampled in separate strata. The sample design also imposed restrictions in the list sample on the number of establishments sampled per firm (to reduce the burden on firms). Data were sorted by industry categories using Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) until 2000 and thereafter North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). Beginning in survey year 2003, the stratification and allocation for the private sector sample was improved and the restrictions on establishments within a firm were decreased (AHRQ 2005b).

National estimates are available for all MEPS-IC years. From 1996-2002, state representation is dependent upon state population size and funding for the survey. After 2003 the MEPS-IC sample size was increased so that each state and DC is represented in the data (AHRQ 2005b).

The national sample size for private establishments in the MEPS-IC ranges from 27,000 in 1996 (Sommers 1999) to approximately 44,000 establishments in 2003. The response rate for the MEPS-IC averages 78 percent from 1996-2002 (Sommers 2004).

References

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