

Health Insurance Estimates

Guidance on When to Use Each Survey

When should you use health insurance estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS)?

Use the CPS – for the Most Comprehensive and Latest National Data

For 2015 national figures, we recommend using the CPS, as it is the Census Bureau's most comprehensive and detailed source of health insurance coverage data.

Data for 2013, 2014, and 2015 have been collected using consistent methodology, ensuring a strong baseline for examining year-to-year changes in coverage rates over this period. The 2013, 2014, and 2015 CPS data are not comparable to the CPS data from prior years due to the redesign of health insurance questions.

Use the ACS – for National, Historical Time Series Data and for States

The ACS provides annual national and sub-national estimates of health insurance coverage back to 2008. Also, the ACS makes it possible to analyze dynamics in health insurance coverage at a finer level of geography. Use ACS 1-year estimates for analysis of health insurance trends at the state, county, city, and congressional district levels.

Use the ACS – for Local Areas

There are two different ACS data sets available, each covering different time frames and different geographic areas based on population size: 1-year and 5-year. The size of the areas being compared will determine which of these data sets you should use. Single-year health insurance estimates back to 2008 are available for all areas with a population of 65,000 or more, including counties, cities and all congressional districts. Five-year estimates are available for the nation's smallest areas, such as census tracts and block groups.

When making comparisons, always use the same data set for all geographies, even if some areas qualify for more than one data set. For example, if only some counties in a state have one-year data but all have 3-year data, use the 3-year data for all. More guidance on comparisons can be found on the ACS website <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/comparing-acs-data.html>.