

Health Insurance Estimates Guidance on When to Use Each Survey

When should you use health insurance estimates from the American Community Survey and the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement?

Use the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement– for the Most Comprehensive and Latest National Data

For 2016 national figures, we recommend using the Current Population Survey, as it is the U.S. Census Bureau’s most comprehensive and detailed source of health insurance coverage data.

Data for 2013 and 2016 have been collected using consistent methodology, ensuring a strong baseline for examining year-to-year changes in coverage rates over this period. The calendar year 2013 or later survey data are not comparable to the survey data from prior years due to the redesign of health insurance questions.

Use the American Community Survey – for National, Historical Time Series Data and for States

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

Use the American Community Survey – for Local Areas

There are two different American Community Survey data sets available, each covering different time frames and different geographic areas based on population size: one-year and five-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 five-year data, use the five-year data for all. More guidance on comparisons can be found on the Survey’s website at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/comparing-acs-data.html>.

For more information on when to use each survey, please see the <Health Insurance in Two Surveys> blog.