

Revised CPS ASEC Health Insurance Data - released September 2014 - User Note

In the 2014 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), the Census Bureau implemented redesigned health insurance questions to replace the existing questions in the CPS ASEC. The new questions improve upon the previous questionnaire, capturing more instances of health insurance coverage than the preceding CPS ASEC.

Estimates of health insurance coverage in the CPS ASEC were not in line with estimates from other sources. As a result, the Census Bureau spent over a decade researching limitations in the survey design and suggesting ways to improve it. In 2010 and 2013, the Census Bureau field tested the redesigned survey, which was ultimately implemented in the 2014 CPS ASEC.

The goal of the CPS ASEC is to collect information on income and health insurance coverage during the entire previous calendar year. The long reference period of the health insurance questions, which asked exclusively about the previous calendar year, possibly contributed to response error. For example, people may have misreported coverage about the previous calendar year because they were either thinking about their present coverage status or may have forgotten spells of coverage they had last year. To address this concern, the redesigned questionnaire asks a new question on current coverage to improve responses to questions about health insurance coverage in the previous calendar year. It also asks about specific gaps in coverage and allows the opportunity for the respondent to report additional coverage.

Research also suggested that the household-level flow of the survey questions may have led to underreporting of health insurance coverage if the respondent did not include all household members in their answers. To address this limitation, the redesigned survey includes questions at both the household- and person-level. In this way, questions do not have to be repeated for each person once the information is obtained, and at the same time, all household members are mentioned individually.

Finally, another major change is that the new questions are designed to simplify reporting about plan types. The survey uses information about age and other coverage within the household to present appropriate follow-up questions designed to capture underreported plans. It also includes new questions about coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace (and other exchanges), and questions on employer offered health insurance.

With the implementation of this redesign in the 2014 CPS ASEC, prior to the major changes from the Affordable Care Act, the estimates for calendar year 2013 provide a baseline year for accurately measuring future year changes.