



National Center for Health Statistics

Monitoring
the Nation's
Health

President's FY 2005 Budget Calls for \$22 Million Increase for NCHS

CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) provides critical information to guide actions and policies to improve the health of the American people. Recognizing the need to reinforce and improve these national data resources, the President has recommended a budget of \$149.6 million in Fiscal Year 2005—an increase of \$22 million over the President's FY 2004 budget.

Why is NCHS Important?

The National Center for Health Statistics is the centerpiece of our Nation's efforts to understand existing health problems and to address emerging health challenges. The health statistics produced by NCHS guide national policy and support public programs and goals. NCHS data document the health status of the U.S. population and identify disparities in health status and use of health care by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, region, and other population characteristics, and help identify health behaviors and associated risk factors. They are instrumental in planning and evaluation of programs that can lead to improvements in health and quality of life.

What Has Changed To Require More Funding?

Maintaining and building on NCHS's capacity to monitor the Nation's health is especially critical in this time of rapid change in health and welfare policy, medical practice, biomedical knowledge, and technology. NCHS has struggled to maintain the viability of its major surveys in the face of rising costs, the need for transformations of these surveys to address new data needs, and the need to perform continuous upgrades in the technology and design of these surveys. NCHS data systems also face the challenges of an increasingly mobile population, a more complex health care system, and a more challenging agenda of health and social issues.

What Does the Requested Funding Accomplish?

The additional \$22 million budgeted for Fiscal Year 2005 will allow NCHS to prevent further erosion of its statistical capacity and to position its surveys to meet new challenges. At this increased level, NCHS will be able to take a major step toward maintaining and transforming its data systems – averting difficult tradeoffs that would result in the reduction or termination of important national data sources. The proposed FY 2005 budget will permit NCHS to focus efforts on:

- *Preserving and modernizing the nation's vital statistics system,*
- *Sustaining and transforming basic operations for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey,*
- *Maintaining and redesigning systems for tracking the health care delivery system, and*
- *Restoring the full sample size and redesigning the sample for the National Health Interview Survey.*

Steps CDC/NCHS Will Take to Strengthen Core Data Systems

The proposed FY 2005 budget will permit CDC/NCHS to focus efforts on:

- ***Preserving and modernizing the nation's vital statistics system*** – NCHS will work with partners in states and Federal agencies to build a re-engineered, web-based vital statistics system that will involve initial recording of birth and death certificates via electronic systems in hospitals and funeral homes, with secure Internet transmission to state authorities and NCHS for translation into aggregate statistics. These steps will result in more rapid release of data for decision-making. As an important prerequisite, the President's budget calls for the full funding of CDC/NCHS' contract with states for the collection of these data; funding shortfalls in the last several years has risked significant reductions in the scope, timeliness, and quality of these data.
- ***Sustaining and transforming basic operations for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)*** – NHANES provides essential detailed, objective measurement of human health and related diet, environmental, and personal risk factors. The additional investment will provide for maintaining the full field operations for NHANES, without reductions in the overall scope, content, and detail from the current survey. NCHS will be able to stabilize the underlying survey mechanism and continue to work with collaborators on specialized survey content to meet critical program and research needs. NCHS will also be able to work with partners on the development of models and alternative strategies for obtaining physical examination data for states or localities.
- ***Maintaining and redesigning systems for tracking the health care delivery system*** – New investments will allow NCHS to undertake a long-range transformation of the National Health Care Survey, which provides information on the delivery of care to the population, the structure and functioning of the health care delivery system, and the changing roles of health care providers. Investments will provide for the redesign of existing surveys in the area of long-term care, as well as steps toward understanding the distribution, capacity, and roles of the changing mix of health professionals, institutions, and plans. NCHS will also implement new methods to take better advantage of existing records systems--especially electronic systems--and incorporate a wider range of data items such as prescription drugs and clinical quality measures.
- ***Restoring the full sample size and redesigning the sample for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)*** – Additional resources will allow NCHS to resume efforts to redesign the sample of households that are surveyed for the next decade. The NHIS is among the nation's most important population surveys, and sample redesign is needed to reflect the changing demographics identified in the decennial census and to refocus these surveys on population groups that are growing. These new resources are needed to conduct the detailed field work needed to prepare the NHIS for the next decade. Additionally, an important step toward getting the most use from the NHIS is to restore the sample size to full strength, reversing several years of sample reductions necessary due to budget limitations.

For further information, contact NCHS Office of Planning, Budget and Legislation at 301-458-4100.