



Board of Scientific Counselors National Center for Health Statistics Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Dear Ed:

The Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is pleased to submit a commissioned review of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). As part of the BSC's ongoing program, we commissioned a panel of experts in the field to review the data collection and program activities of the NHANES and provide specific recommendations for data collection and dissemination. The panel submitted the enclosed report to the BSC.

Dr. William Kalsbeek of the University of North Carolina was the chair of the panel. The other panel members are listed in Appendix A of the report. After careful review, the BSC commends Dr. Kalsbeek and his fellow panel members for an outstanding review and report, and forwards the report to you for action.

The review panel and the Board recommend without reservation that the NHANES program of data collection and dissemination continue. The NHANES is too vital and central to the nation's health statistics system to be discontinued, or compromised scientifically, by reduction or elimination.

The report contains seven additional key recommendations, four of which we highlight.

1. The review panel recommends that NCHS create a standing external advisory committee charged with advising the NHANES program on methods, content, and strategic planning. The standing external advisory committee can advise on the development and prioritization of NHANES content, survey methodology, and analysis and dissemination of data and findings. At a time when NHANES leadership may be in transition, an external advisory committee would benefit NHANES strategic planning through the insight of those experienced in public health data needs and advances in survey methodology. External advice from a standing committee could be sought on issues such as the maintenance of the physical infrastructure needed to implement the NHANES, user fees, and possible longitudinal components of data collection.
2. The review panel recommends NCHS initiate a process to determine whether integration of the NHANES and National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) would benefit both surveys and the Center through efficiencies in data collection. Careful examination of NHANES and NHIS goals is necessary to assure that an integrated system would meet the needs of the public health communities which depend on these surveys for accurate and timely information about the nation's health.



3. NCHS should continue, and expand, the use of NHANES data to provide estimates for large state and metropolitan areas to assist policy development, program planning, program administration, and monitoring of progress to local public health goals. Creativity in seeking revenue sources to benefit local public health policy development and monitoring is a key aspect of this recommended initiative.
4. The review panel recommends as well that NCHS continue to pursue possible mechanisms for longitudinal follow-up of NHANES subjects while preserving the essential present cross-sectional survey features. The analytic value of longitudinal data should be documented, the objectives clearly specified, and the sample size requirements reported so that the Department of Health and Human Services and others can weigh the benefits of NHANES longitudinal and cross-sectional data for the public health community, and carefully balance them through adequate funding to maintain both types of data collection.

Finally, the products and expertise of the NHANES program should be aggressively marketed to current and potential users and potential funders. The future fiscal well-being of NHANES depends on a vibrant and active community of supporters who not only depend on its products for their own work but promote its continuation through helping to generate adequate funding. The NCHS Director's Office has the responsibility and the capacity to bring professional marketing expertise to develop a strategy that will help secure a better fiscal future for NHANES.

We hope that you will take the review panel's full set of recommendations into consideration in view of the challenging issues NCHS faces today. We welcome your response and continued dialogue on how the BSC can assist in implementing the recommendations of the NHANES review panel.

On behalf of the Board of Scientific Counselors, I respectfully submit the enclosed report.

Sincerely,

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Irma T. Elo, PhD
Chair, Board of Scientific Counselors of the National Center for Health Statistics