

National Survey of Prison Health Care

Data limitations and considerations

Data from the National Survey of Prison Health Care (NSPHC) are subject to several limitations. Data were gathered at the state level; therefore, any facility-level variation in services was not captured. For example, if urban facilities within a state had different screening practices than the state's rural facilities, this was not captured in the data collected through NSPHC.

Another limitation of NSPHC data is the inability to identify or measure the extent to which services were provided in a certain location. For example, some states responded to the questions about the location of a service as "both on-site and off-site" simply because extreme cases involving surgeries would be sent off-site, but all other care was provided on-site. States sending their prisoners off-site one-half of the time would also respond "both." In some cases, the qualitative information collected helped to distinguish between these two situations, although exact counts were not obtained or necessarily available.

Similarly, data collected through NSPHC do not capture how often screening tests were conducted in many cases. For example, states responding "yes" to whether they tested for hepatitis C during the admissions process might have differed in that one state tested universally during the admissions process while the other state tested only upon clinical indication. Again, in some cases, the qualitative data collected helped to distinguish between these different approaches on the part of the state Departments of Corrections.

When analyzing the NSPHC dataset, it is **critical** to use the comments collected and contained in the qualitative dataset as they provide additional information that facilitates correct interpretation of the quantitative data. Many respondents provided additional details, caveats, or qualifying information behind the numbers they provided for a question, which must be considered when looking at the quantitative dataset. It is also important to consider item non-response when analyzing NSPHC data. States were able to answer most questions, but there was a high level of item nonresponse for questions related to contracting and staffing.