



The Federal Statistical System and NCHS's Contributions— Innovation Viewed from Outside

Constance F. Citro, *Director, CNSTAT*
NCHS – Washington, DC – August 17, 2010

What is the Committee on National Statistics?



Established in 1972 as a standing unit of the National Academies on the recommendation of the President's Commission on Federal Statistics to provide an independent, objective resource for evaluation and improvement of federal statistical methods and operations.

What is the Committee on National Statistics?



CNSTAT's mission is to improve the statistical methods and information on which public policy decisions are based. It also serves as a coordinating force in the decentralized U.S. federal statistical system.

Over its 38-year history, CNSTAT has produced over 200 consensus, interim, letter, and workshop reports.

Every October and May, CNSTAT holds a public seminar on a topic of broad interest to the federal statistical and research communities.

CNSTAT Membership— Multidisciplinary



Lawrence Brown (*chair*), statistics

John Abowd, economics

Alicia Carriquiry, statistics

William DuMouchel, computer
science

V. Joseph Hotz, economics

Michael Hout, sociology

Karen Kafadar, biostatistics

Sallie Keller, statistics

Sally Morton, biostatistics

Lisa Lynch, economics

Joseph Newhouse, health
economics

Samuel Preston, demography

Hal Stern, statistics

Roger Tourangeau, survey
research

Alan Zaslavsky, health statistics

Serve pro bono to oversee CNSTAT's project portfolio

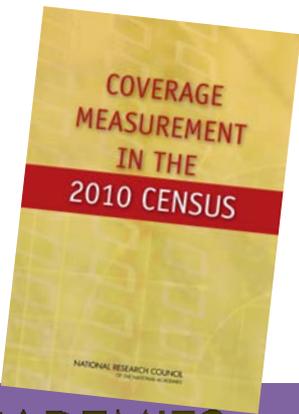
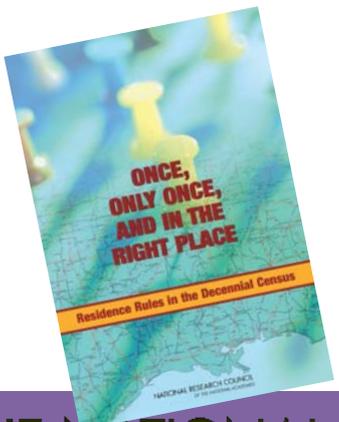
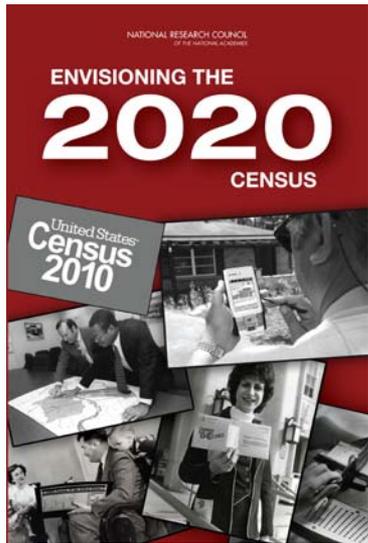
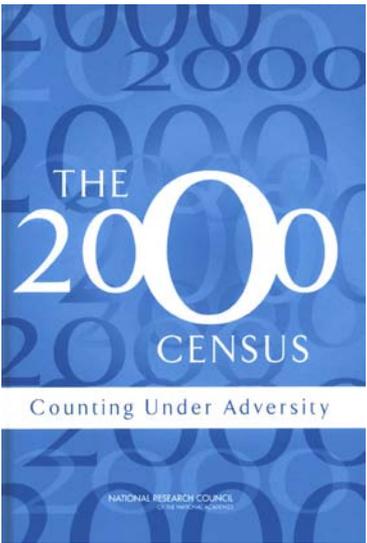
The CNSTAT Portfolio



Decennial Census Coverage and Quality—over

30 reports—

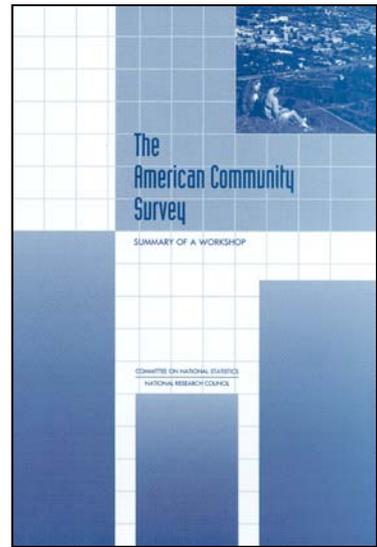
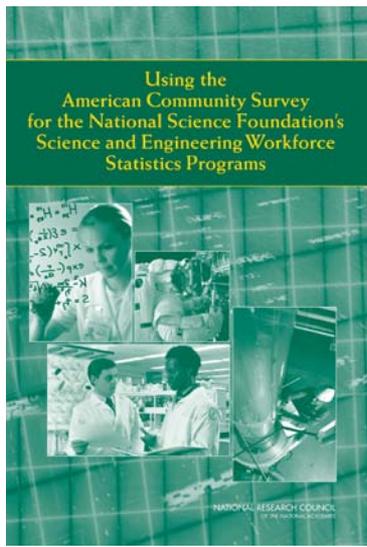
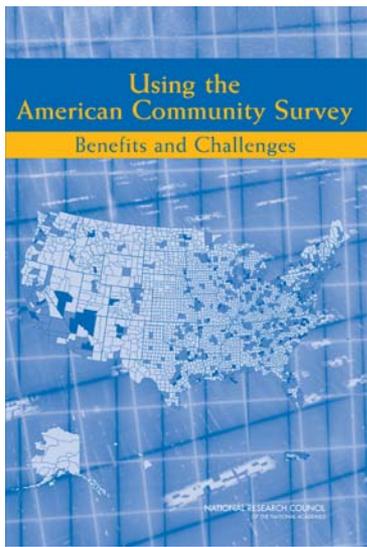
Current project on
evaluating 2010
and planning for 2020



The CNSTAT Portfolio



American Community Survey (replacement for the census long-form sample)—3 reports, 3 current studies, and counting—

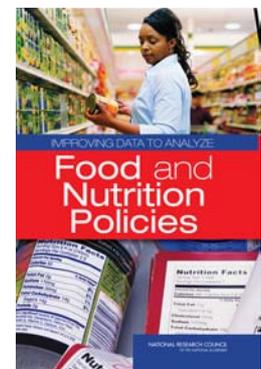




The CNSTAT Portfolio

Health and Health Care Measures, Statistics, and Surveys

- Accounting for medical care expenditures and health outcomes (panel study, workshop)
- Data needs for food and nutrition monitoring and assistance (panel study, workshop)
- Data needs for measuring health disparities (panel study)
- Disability concepts and statistics (4 workshops)
- Health statistics for the 21st century (workshop)
- Medical care provider surveys (panel study)
- Public health performance measures (panel study)
- Vital statistics (workshop)

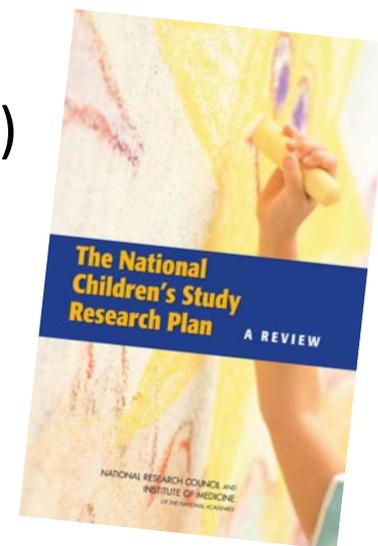


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Related Measures, Statistics, and Surveys

- Agricultural Resource Management Survey (crop management practices, e.g., organic farming)
- Crime Victimization Survey
- Environmental monitoring and accounting
- National Children's Study
- Occupational safety and health statistics
- Poverty and medical care risk measurement
- Small-area estimates of income, poverty, and health insurance coverage
- Survey of Income and Program Participation
- Time use measurement

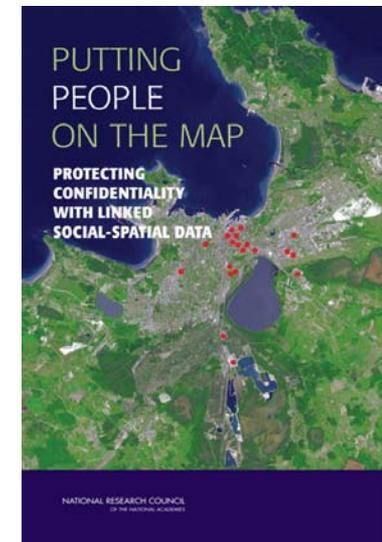
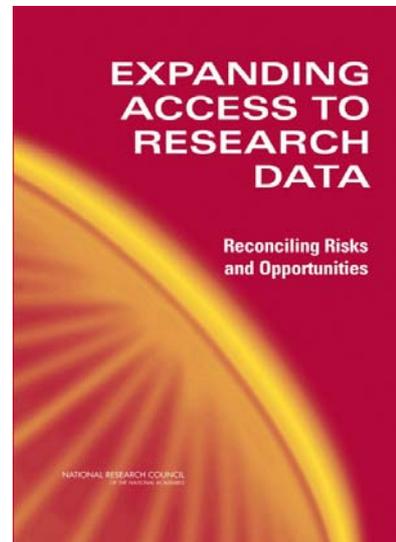
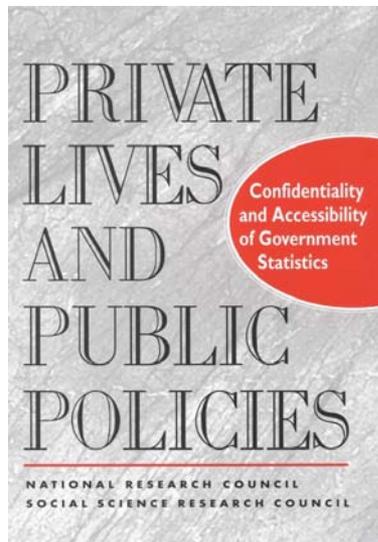




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Effective Data Access—critical for data use; must be balanced with Confidentiality Protection—

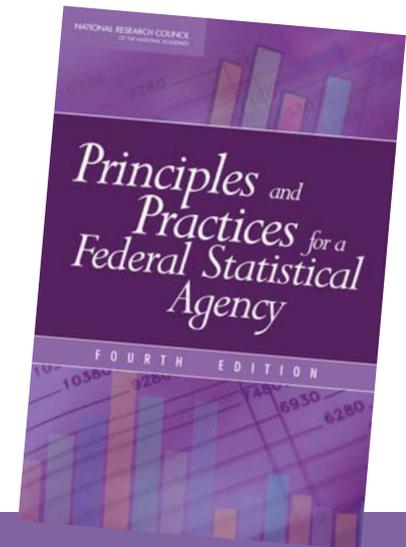
Over a dozen studies and workshops—challenges and opportunities keep evolving





The CNSTAT Portfolio

Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency – now in its 4th edition; emphasizes statistical agency independence to make possible the production of relevant, high-quality, timely, and nonpartisan statistics.
[NCHS orders boatloads]



CNSTAT Observations



Structure of decentralized U.S. statistical system another barrier to innovation—

Up side—potentially more sources of innovation

Downside—particularly in tight budget times and given many small agencies with limited resources, decentralization can impede major innovation

Coordination mechanisms aren't sufficiently funded to facilitate effective transfer of innovations across agencies—although this may be changing

National Center for Health Statistics



A leader in innovation despite constraints

- NCHS is a middle-size statistical agency (aka a small federal agency—its budget is tiny compared with the value of its data)
- Funding and staffing have been flat or worse for many years until last year
- NCHS is many layers down in the massive DHHS bureaucracy

National Center for Health Statistics



Yet its record of innovation is stellar

- One of first statistical agencies to establish a laboratory for cognitive testing of survey content (vital for respondents to understand the questions)
- Pioneered in obtaining physical measurements and specimens (including DNA in a secure environment) in its NHANES mobile exam trailers
- In forefront of providing viable access and protection methods for microdata (first agency to have a secure, remote access system in its RDC and to deposit files with the Census Bureau's RDCs)

National Center for Health Statistics



Its record of innovation is stellar (cont'd)

- Leader of effort to harmonize measures of disability status across agencies in U.S. and worldwide
- Active participant in linkages of administrative records and surveys—e.g., Medicare claims records and NHANES, National Death Index—which add value to the data
- Proactive in working with other agencies to break down barriers to improved data—e.g., dietary information on NHANES, MEPS as a subsample of NHIS

National Center for Health Statistics



Accounting for NCHS's stellar record

- Goal-oriented leadership, open to new ideas and technologies (e.g., electronic health records)
- Emphasis on research and development
 - Office of Research and Methodology reports directly to the Office of the Director, similar to operating divisions
 - Active, attractive fellowship programs in methods and research
- Willingness to work with partners in the states, federal agencies, web community, and abroad

National Center for Health Statistics



Challenges for future innovation

Three specific ideas to further NCHS's record of innovation that adds value to health statistics in a cost-effective manner—

- Linked NHIS and NHANES
- ACS and small-area estimates
- Longitudinal data

National Center for Health Statistics



Linked NHIS and NHANES

Drawing NHANES as a subsample of NHIS (similar to the current MEPS design) could conserve resources and add value to NHANES from having a previous self-reported interview available to compare with physical measures.

National Center for Health Statistics



Use of American Community Survey for small-area estimates

It could be very useful to add a question on self-reported health status to the ACS that would make possible small-area estimates on a continuous basis for monitoring public health initiatives. (NOTE: Federal program agency support would be needed to effect this change.)

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Longitudinal data

- At present, NCHS does not field longitudinal surveys, although it develops some longitudinal data (e.g., linking NHIS and NDI)
- Proactive efforts to piggyback NCHS question content to other longitudinal surveys could be cost-effective way to add value for analysis

National Center for Health Statistics



User support and input are essential

In a time of budget constraints, data users cannot assume resources will be forthcoming; NCHS users need to—and I'm sure will—be proactive in supporting this productive, innovative agency so that it has adequate resources to serve the nation.

Users will also, I'm sure, continue a dialogue of constructive feedback with NCHS.

Thank You!



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CNSTAT reports are available at

www.nap.edu.