

2021



National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report

Introduction and Methods



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2021 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report Introduction and Methods

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
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www.ahrq.gov

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Primary AHRQ Staff: David Meyers, Jeff Brady, Erin Grace, Karen Chaves, Darryl Gray, Barbara Barton, Romsai Boonyasai, Irin Azam, Cecilia Hahn, and Doreen Bonnett.

HHS Interagency Workgroup (IWG) for the NHQDR: Girma Alemu (HRSA), Irin Azam (AHRQ), Andreea Balan-Cohen (IMPAQ), Barbara Barton (AHRQ), Doreen Bonnett (AHRQ), Deron Burton (CDC), Victoria Chau (SAMHSA), Karen Chaves (AHRQ), Xiuhua Chen (Atlas Research), Deborah Duran (NIH-NIMHD), Melissa Evans (CMS), Camille Fabiyi (AHRQ), Darryl Gray, (AHRQ), Kirk Greenway (IHS), Sarah Heppner (HRSA), Ed Huff (CMS), DeLoris Hunter (NIH-NIMHD), Susan Jenkins (ACL), Christine Lee (FDA), Doris Lefkowitz (AHRQ), Jesse Lichstein (HRSA), Lan Liang (AHRQ), Shari Ling (CMS), Iris Mabry-Hernandez (AHRQ), Marlene Matosky (HRSA), Tracy Matthews (HRSA), Christine Merenda (FDA), Kamila Mistry (AHRQ), Ernest Moy (VHA), Samia Noursi (NIH-NIDA), Kathy O'Connor (CDC), Rajasri Roy (NIH-OD-ORWH), Dianne Rucinski (OASH), Asel Ryskulova (CDC), Adelle Simmons (ASPE), Robin Streeter (HRSA), Loida Tamayo (CMS), Caroline Taplin (ASPE), Emmanuel Taylor (NIH-NCI), Michelle Washko (HRSA), and Ying Zhang (IHS).

NHQDR Team: Irin Azam (CQuIPS), Barbara Barton (CQuIPS), Doreen Bonnett (OC), Romsai.Boonyasai (CQuIPS), Xiuhua Chen, (Atlas Research), James Cleeman (CQuIPS), Camille Fabiyi (OEREP), Erin Grace (CQuIPS), Darryl Gray (CQuIPS), Cecilia Hahn (CQuIPS), Lan Liang (CFACT), Kamila Mistry (OEREP), Margie Shofer (CQuIPS), Abigail Woodroffe (IMPAQ).

HHS Data Experts: Cuong Bui (HRSA), Lara Bull (CDC), Robin Cohen (CDC-NCHS), Joann Fitzell (CMS), Elizabeth Goldstein (CMS), Shiromani Gyawali (SAMHSA), Irene Hall (CDC-HIV), Pradip Muhuri (AHRQ), Jessica King (NPCR), Amanda Lankford (CDC), Denys Lau (CDC-NCHS), Lan Liang (AHRQ), Sharon Liu (SAMHSA), Marlene Matosky (HRSA), Tracy Matthews (HRSA), Robert Morgan (CMS), Richard Moser (NIH-NCI), Kathy O'Connor (CDC-NCHS), Krishna Palipudi (SAMHSA), Robert Pratt (CDC), Asel Ryskulova (CDC-NCHS), Alek Sripipatana (HRSA), Reda Wilson (CDC-NCCDPHP-ONDIEH), and Xiaohong (Julia) Zhu (HRSA).

Other Data Experts: Mark Cohen (ACS NSQIP), Ashley Eckard (University of Michigan), Sheila Eckenrode (MPSMS-Yale), Clifford Ko (ACS NSQIP), Vivian Kurtz (University of Michigan), Leticia Nogueira (American Cancer Society), Robin Padilla (University of Michigan KECC), Yun Wang (MPSMS-Yale), and Robin Yabroff (American Cancer Society).

Other AHRQ Contributors: Cindy Brach, Edwin Lomotan, Karen Migdail, Pamela Owens, Wendy Perry, Mary Rolston, Bruce Seeman, and Michele Valentine.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

This **Introduction and Methods** document provides background on the annual *National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report* (NHQDR) and modifications that have occurred over time. This document includes an overview of the methods used to generate estimates, measure trends, and examine disparities.

Background on the National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report and Related Chartbooks

For the 19th year in a row, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has reported on progress and opportunities for improving healthcare quality and reducing healthcare disparities. As mandated by the U.S. Congress, the report focuses on “national trends in the quality of health care provided to the American people” (42 U.S.C. 299b-2(b)(2)) and “prevailing disparities in health care delivery as it relates to racial factors and socioeconomic factors in priority populations” (42 U.S.C. 299a1(a)(6)).

The NHQDR is produced with the support of a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Interagency Work Group (IWG)ⁱ and guided by input from AHRQ’s National Advisory Council and the Institute of Medicine (IOM), now known as the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

The 2021 report tracks about 230 healthcare process, outcome, and access measures, covering a wide variety of conditions and settings. Data years vary across measures; most trend analyses include data points from 2000-2002 to 2013-2019. An exception is rates of uninsurance, which are reported through 2021.

Measures used in the NHQDR fall into two categories:

- Core measures are used in the main NHQDR, or “core report.” These summarize the status of overall quality, status of disparities, and trends in quality and disparities. Core measures are approved by the IWG for inclusion and are nationally representative. AHRQ receives these data regularly.
- Supplemental measures are not discussed in the core report, except to highlight important topical issues. Supplemental measures are typically new measures and/or have limited data availability. These measures have not been approved by the IWG for inclusion in the core measure set and core measure summary analyses.

Both categories of measures are available in the [Data Query Tool](#).

ⁱ Federal participants on IWG: AHRQ, Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Community Living, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, Indian Health Service, National Institutes of Health, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Veterans Health Administration.

Changes to the National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report

The NHQDR was significantly shaped by several IOM reports. Two of these reports, *Crossing the Quality Chasm*¹ and *To Err Is Human*² raised awareness about gaps in the quality of healthcare and patient safety. The extensive literature review included in a third report, *Unequal Treatment*,³ drew attention to disparities in the care rendered to racial and ethnic populations, low-income populations, and other vulnerable groups.

Since the report's inception as the *National Healthcare Quality Report* (NHQR) and *National Healthcare Disparities Report* (NHDR) in 2003, AHRQ has worked over time to enhance and refine the NHQDR measure set and methodology. These enhancements include introducing core measures and composite measures and refining the methods of analysis. In addition, the area of patient safety was expanded to include sections on healthcare-associated infections and patient safety culture. The NHQDR team also added sections on lifestyle modification and care coordination.

In response to IOM recommendations, the NHQDR team produced a single Highlights chapter that integrated findings from the NHQR and NHDR. In addition, we introduced measure-specific benchmarks that reflect the high level achieved by the best performing states. To address the three quality improvement aims of better care, healthy people, and affordable care (also known as the Triple Aimⁱⁱ), we organized the reports into six priority areas (e.g., Patient Safety, Healthy Living) that could help achieve the three aims.

In 2014, the NHQR and NHDR were combined to provide a more complete and integrated assessment of access to and quality of healthcare, as well as disparities. The new NHQDR also included measures related to other key populations, including women, children, older adults, people with disabilities and at the end of life, and residents of rural areas and inner cities.

This section covers major changes to the report and summarizes data updates in reverse chronological order, beginning with most recent.

2021 Report

New Features

Trend analyses and changes in disparities results are not summarized by priority area and by subgroup because about 26% of the 233 core measures do not have at least 4 years of data for trending. A total of 41 core measures from the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) data are excluded from trending. Due to the transition from International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) to Tenth Revision (ICD-10) coding standards, 6 HCUP measures were terminated, and the 41 measures only have 2016-2018 data for the 2021 report. Only two measures have sufficient data for trending.

ⁱⁱ More information on the Triple Aim is available from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement at <http://www.ihp.org/Engage/Initiatives/TripleAim/Pages/default.aspx>.

Eighteen measures from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) data are excluded because of the 2018 MEPS redesign. Eight National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) measures are excluded from trending because of the 2019 NHIS redesign. More details can be found below in the “Analysis Limitations” section.

Bar charts showing disparities between populations will also include data of all subgroups within the same population category, even when the data for a subgroup do not show statistically significant differences compared with the reference population.

The “Disparities in Healthcare” sections feature the three measures where subgroups had the largest disparities compared with the reference population. The results of these disparities analyses are presented in bar charts that display the rates for both the comparison and reference groups.

In prior reports, the bar chart showing the largest disparities only included the total, the subgroup with the largest disparities, and the reference population. The bar charts displayed in the current report, however, display all populations within that group. For example, for the measure HIV infection deaths per 100,000 population, Blacks experienced the largest disparities compared with Whites. The current report not only features data for Blacks and Whites but also American Indians and Alaska Natives and Asians. If data for a subgroup are not statistically reliable, a note is added to the figure.

Changes to Past Reports

New Features in 2019

The 2019 NHQDR had several new features that strengthen the reader’s understanding of access to care, the healthcare workforce, and the NHQDR measure set.

In the Overview section of the report, readers gained an understanding of the healthcare landscape and utilization. Of note was a new subsection that examined racial and ethnic disparities among the U.S. healthcare workforce. Multiple roles within the healthcare system, including nurses, physicians, therapists, and psychologists, are discussed and compared with the U.S. population.

The Access section featured measures and data examining dental care accessibility, Medicare Advantage patients, and dual-eligible beneficiaries. People with Medicare Advantage and those who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid have unique accessibility concerns. The end of the Access section contains tables listing the trend performance (improving, not changing, or worsening over time) of each core measure.

The Quality section of the report highlights the best and worst performing trends across each of the six quality domains featured in the NHQDR. In 2018, the authors reintroduced the Affordable Care section, which includes two measures that show improving trends over time. The report features more than 250 measures based on data availability in the 2019 NHQDR. The end of each Quality subsection contains tables listing the trend performance (improving, not changing, or worsening over time) of each core measure.

Based on the quality domain, measures are categorized by sub-area or healthcare setting to help readers identify them. All figures in this year's report have been embedded in the report and are no longer featured in an appendix. In addition, notes below each figure assist with their interpretation.

The Disparities section highlights differences in care experienced by priority populations. This year's report uses the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities [research framework](#) to better address the complexity of health disparities. Additional information about disparities experienced by residents of rural areas is also highlighted. Measures with the largest disparities by residence location are organized by priority area and care setting.

Updates in Data Source Availability in 2019

- Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) state data and trend data remained unavailable for the 2019 report due to the change from ICD-9 diagnosis codes to ICD-10 codes and changes to the AHRQ Quality Indicators (same as the 2018 report).
- Unlike the 2018 report, the 2019 report includes HCUP risk-adjusted benchmarks for some of the Quality Indicators.
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data became available for the 2019 report and are included in all analyses.
- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) activity limitation data were not available for the 2019 report. This variable has been replaced with disability status.
- The NHQDR dataset included data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Minimum Data Set.

New Features in 2018

The 2018 NHQDR included a New Measures section that introduced new measures in four areas that aligned with HHS priority areas and addressed gaps in the care continuum. These included new measures for dementia, opioid prescribing, opioid-related deaths, maternal morbidity and mortality, and cancer treatment.

Updates in Data Source Availability in 2018

- The "Opioids" section was new for the 2018 report. The 2018 report has eight opioid measures; two are core measures and five are supplemental measures. These measures come from multiple data sources (HCUP, MEPS, National Vital Statistics System, and National Survey on Drug Use and Health).
- The NHQDR dataset now includes data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Outcome and Assessment Information Set.

Data Limitations and Changes

- Before 2018, the NHQDR had about 50 core measures using HCUP data. However, the HCUP state data and trend data were not available for the 2018 report due to the change from ICD-9 diagnosis codes to ICD-10 codes and changes to the AHRQ Quality Indicators.
- Data for about 20 nursing home care measures and 30 home health care measures were not available for the 2016 and 2017 reports. For the 2018 report, 2013-2016 data were available and were included in the comparisons and trend analyses.

- Since 2016, the NHQDR team has been working to make the analysis methods and results consistent between the NHQDR website and the reports. However, inconsistencies still exist. For 2018, nursing home data became available after the report was prepared, so they were not included there but were included in the website data analysis. In addition, because the opioid crisis is an HHS priority, we included all data for the opioid supplemental measures in the website data analysis even though only two measures were included in the report.
- The benchmark year for the 2018 report did not move forward by 1 year. In previous years, the benchmark year usually moved forward. The benchmark year was 2014 for the 2016 report and 2015 for the 2017 report. For 2018, the benchmark year was still 2015. Therefore, there were more measures, states, and subgroups that reached the benchmark in the 2018 report than in previous years.

Organization of the 2021 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report

The 2021 report and chartbooks are organized around the concept of access to care, quality of care, disparities in care, and six priority areas, including person-centered care, patient safety, care coordination, affordable care, effective treatment, and healthy living. The report includes summaries of the status of access, quality, and disparities. Details for individual measures are provided in the appendixes.

The report presents information on trends, disparities, and changes in disparities over time, as well as federal initiatives to improve quality and reduce disparities. It includes the following:

- **Overview of U.S. Healthcare System Landscape** describes the healthcare system, encounters, and workers; disease burden; and healthcare costs.
- **Access to Healthcare and Disparities in Access** tracks progress on making healthcare available to all Americans.
- **Trends in Quality of Healthcare** tracks progress on ensuring that all Americans receive appropriate services.
- **Disparities in Healthcare** tracks progress in closing the gap between minority racial and ethnic groups and Whites, as well as income and geographic location gaps (e.g., rural/suburban disparities).
- **Looking Forward** summarizes future directions and research opportunities for healthcare quality and measurement initiatives.

Additional information on each measure can be found in the Data Query section of the NHQDR website (<https://datatools.ahrq.gov/nhqdr>). Below each table generated are links to:

- **Data Source**, which provides information about each database analyzed for the report, including data type, sample design, and primary content. The list of data sources is available in [Appendix A](#).

- **Measure Specifications**, which provide information about how measures are generated and analyzed for the report. Measures highlighted in the report are described, as well as other measures that were examined but not included in the text of the report. The measure specifications are also available on the [NHQDR web page](#).

Methods of the National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report and Related Chartbooks

Measures

Access to Healthcare

- **Purpose.** Assess access to care for the overall U.S. population and priority populations; identify racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities; track changes in access to care over time; and identify aspects of access to care that are improving and aspects that are not improving.
- **Approach.** Factors that facilitate accessing healthcare, including having health insurance and a usual source of care, have been tracked since the first reports. Measures of timeliness of care and infrastructure to provide healthcare to minority and low-income populations were added to the access measure set.
- **Summaries of Access.** At times, the report will present summary information across a panel of access measures, including measures widely considered important for accessing healthcare, such as getting care in a timely manner.

The access measures panel excludes measures with less clear interpretation. For example, increases in the percentage of people under age 65 with any period of public insurance during the year may indicate people lost their private insurance, which is undesirable. On the other hand, they obtained public insurance coverage, which indicates access to some form of health insurance is improving.

Similarly, use of emergency departments as a usual source of care is not included in the access measures panel, because rising rates have multiple interpretations. They could reflect meeting a previously unmet community need, which would be desirable, or problems getting care in provider offices, which would be undesirable. Researchers, policymakers, and other users should explore these data further to understand the underlying causes.

Quality of Healthcare

- **Purpose.** Assess quality of care for the overall U.S. population and priority populations; identify disparities among racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups; track changes in quality of care over time; and identify aspects of quality of care that are improving and aspects that are not improving.
- **Initial Approach.** The selection of quality measures to include in the first reports involved several steps:
 - IOM provided criteria for the selection of quality measures in 2001: overall importance of the aspects of quality being measured, scientific soundness of the measures, and feasibility of the measures. It also provided criteria for the measure set as a whole: balance, comprehensiveness, and robustness.

- IOM and AHRQ issued calls for measures that yielded hundreds of measures submitted by private and governmental organizations.
 - A Federal Measures Workgroup was convened to apply the IOM criteria to the measures submitted for consideration.
 - A preliminary measure set was published in the *Federal Register* for public comment; additional comments were obtained through a hearing organized by the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics.
 - In 2003, this process yielded an initial measure set that included 147 measures from two dozen data sources.
- **Types of Quality Measures.** Most measures tracked in the report reflect processes of care, outcomes of care, and patient perceptions of care:
 - **Processes of Care.** These measures generally represent percentages of people receiving care that they need or percentages of people receiving care that they should not receive. Measures are specified so that everyone in the denominator needs the service and optimal care equals 100%. These measures are generally not adjusted for age and sex since need is captured in the specification of the denominator.
 - **Outcomes of Care.** These measures generally represent rates of adverse events or deaths. Because death rates often reflect factors other than healthcare, only death rates with moderate ties to processes of care are tracked. For example, colorectal cancer death rates are tracked because they are related to rates of colorectal cancer screening.
 - **Patient Perceptions of Care.** These measures generally represent percentages of people who perceived problems with aspects of their care.
 - **Refinement of the Measure Set.** Since the first reports in 2003, the measure set has been reviewed each year and changes made as needed. All changes are approved by the HHS IWG that supports the NHQDR.
 - **Additions** have been made to the measure set as new domains of quality, data, and measures have become available. For example, Care Coordination and Affordable Care were not recognized quality domains when the reports started, and measures of these domains were identified and added after they were recognized.
 - **Deletions** have been made when data collection for measures ceased or when new scientific information indicated that a measure did not represent high-quality care. In addition, process measures that achieve overall performance levels exceeding 95% are not tracked in the report. The success of these measures limits their utility for tracking improvement over time. Because these measures cannot improve to a significant degree, including them in the measure set creates a ceiling effect that may dampen quantification of rates of change over time. Data on retired measures continue to be collected and these measures will be added back to the report if their performance falls below 95%.
 - **Modifications** have been made when clinical recommendations have changed. For example, clinical recommendations often set new target levels or recommended frequencies for specific services.

- **Summaries of Quality.** At times, the report will present summary information across a panel of quality measures. This panel includes measures that are widely considered important for healthcare quality, such as measures of processes, outcomes, and patient perceptions, as noted above. The panel excludes measures with less clear interpretation, typically measures of infrastructure and costs.

Data Sources

Overview of Data

The data included in the report were determined by the measures chosen for tracking by the IWG and the NHQDR team. The report is based on dozens of data sources to provide a comprehensive assessment of access to healthcare and quality and disparities of healthcare in the United States. Most are nationally representative or cover the entire U.S. population.

Different types of data are used to provide complementary perspectives of healthcare and include patient and population surveys, provider surveys, administrative data from facilities, medical records, registries, surveillance systems, and vital statistics. Settings of care covered include ambulatory care, health centers, emergency departments, hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and home health.

Data experts from contributing agencies or organizations generate descriptive summary statistics from the micro data for the NHQDR measures and population groups of interest. For particular measures, the NHQDR team downloads summary statistics directly from trusted websites.

All survey design features are taken into account. The percentages or rates are weighted to represent the targeted population. Statistics with a sample size of fewer than 30 individuals or relative standard errors larger than 30% are suppressed for statistical reliability, data quality, or confidentiality. The suppression criteria are different by data source and mostly are decided by the NHQDR contributing agencies. If the contributing agencies did not suppress any data, the NHQDR coded the data to “DSU” (data statistically unreliable) if the sample size was <30 or the relative standard error was >30%.

The NHQDR team has maintained and accumulated the data since 2003, the first year of the reports. Some survey designs, questionnaires, data collection methods, definitions, and data calculation methods have changed over the years. The team and the agencies contributing data worked together to address the changes and to ensure that data over the years were comparable for trend analysis.

Some contributing agencies updated all of the back years’ data if possible, such as Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) data, or removed all back years’ data, such as Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) data. Some contributing agencies informed the team about the changes, provided recommendations, and adjusted the measures, or removed the noncomparable data from the database. Data are kept if the changes are considered minor and do not significantly affect the estimates.

Only data sources that are regularly included in the report are listed below. Not included on the list are sources that do not collect data on a regular basis; such data are presented intermittently in the report when they address topics or populations not well covered by regular data collections.

Federal Sources of Data

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

- Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP)
- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)
- CAHPS® Database – CAHPS® Health Plan Survey Database

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)
- HIV/AIDS Surveillance System (HIVAIDSSS)
- National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey (NAMCS)
- National Electronic Health Records Survey (NEHRS)
- National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)
- National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
- National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey (NHAMCS)
- National Immunization Survey (NIS)
- National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR)
- National Tuberculosis Surveillance System (NTSS)
- National Vital Statistics System—Linked Birth and Infant Death Data (NVSS-L)
- National Vital Statistics System—Mortality (NVSS-M)
- National Vital Statistics System—Nativity (NVSS-N)

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

- Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) Hospital Survey (HCAHPS)
- CAHPS® Home Health Care Survey (HCAHPS)
- CAHPS® Hospice Survey
- Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (HIQR) Program
- Hospital Outpatient Quality Reporting (HOQR) Program
- Minimum Data Set (MDS)
- Outcome and Assessment Information Set (OASIS)

Health Resources and Services Administration

- HIV/AIDS Bureau - Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (HAB – RWHAP)
- Uniform Data System (UDS)

Indian Health Service

- Indian Health Service (IHS) National Data Warehouse (NDW)

National Institutes of Health

- United States Renal Data System (USRDS)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)
- Substance Use Disorder Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS)

Multiagency Data Sources

- Medicare Patient Safety Monitoring System (MPSMS)

Academic Institutions

- University of Michigan Kidney Epidemiology and Cost Center (UM-KECC)

Professional Organizations and Associations

- American Hospital Association Annual Survey Information Technology Supplement

Commission on Cancer and American Cancer Society

- National Cancer Data Base (NCDB)

United States Census Bureau

- American Community Survey (ACS)

Populations

Overall U.S. Population

- **Purpose.** A key function of the NHQDR and related chartbooks is to assess access to healthcare and quality of health for the overall U.S. population.
- **Approach.** National data are used as collected without additional exclusions. Common population limitations include the following:
 - Most federal health surveys are limited to the civilian noninstitutionalized population and do not include people on active duty in the military or who reside in nursing homes or penal or mental institutions.
 - Many facility data collections do not include federal facilities run by the Departments of Defense or Veterans Affairs or by IHS.

Priority Populations

- **Purpose.** Another key function of the NHQDR and related chartbooks is to assess access to healthcare and quality of health for select populations defined by age, sex, race, ethnicity, income, education, health insurance, and geographic location.
- **Approach.** To the extent supported by data collection, definitions of priority populations are standardized across different data sources. The NHQDR also includes categories beyond those specified by the statute identifying priority populations. While the statute includes low-income groups, it does not mention other social determinants of health, such as insurance

status and education. The NHQDR includes these categories in addition to income, as analyses of disparities in these areas demonstrate the impact of socioeconomic factors on quality of and access to healthcare.

- Typical definitions for the population categories in the NHQDR that are available in multiple databases include:
 - Age: 0-17, 18-44, 45-64, and 65 and over.
 - Sex: Male and female.
 - Race: White, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and more than one race.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Ethnicity: Hispanic, non-Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic White.^{iv}
 - Income: Poor, low income, middle income, and high income.^v
 - Education: People with less than a high school education,^{vi} high school graduates, and people with any college.
 - Health insurance, ages 0-64: Any private insurance, public insurance^{vii} only, and no insurance.
 - Health insurance, age 65 and over: Medicare and any private insurance, Medicare and other public insurance, and Medicare only.
 - Disabilities: Disability status is defined based on the methodology of the American Community Survey, which is different from the Activity Limitation used in the 2007-2018 NHQDR.

Adults age 18 and over are defined as with disability if they reported serious difficulty in hearing, serious difficulty in vision, serious cognitive difficulty, serious difficulty in walking or climbing stairs, difficulty in dressing or bathing, and difficulty in doing errands.

- Children with special health care needs (CSHCN): Children ages 0-17 with activity limitations or need or use of more healthcare or other services than is usual for most children of the same age. Question sequences^{viii} are asked about the following five health

ⁱⁱⁱ Asian includes the former category of Asian or Pacific Islander prior to 1997 Office of Management and Budget guidelines, when information was not collected separately by group. More information is available at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/FR-1997-10-30/97-28653>.

^{iv} Not all data sources collect information by race and ethnicity separately. In such cases, comparisons are made by combining racial/ethnic group categories (e.g., comparing non-Hispanic Black people and Hispanic people with non-Hispanic White people).

^v Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this report, poor is defined as having family income less than 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL); low income refers to income of 100% to 199% of the FPL; middle income refers to income of 200% to 399% of the FPL; and high income refers to income of 400% of the FPL and above. These are based on U.S. census poverty thresholds for each data year, which are used for statistical purposes.

^{vi} Less than a high school education refers to people who did not complete high school.

^{vii} Public insurance includes Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, state-sponsored or other government-sponsored health plans, Medicare, and military plans.

^{viii} A CSHCN Screener instrument was developed through a national collaborative process as part of the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative coordinated by the Foundation for Accountability. For more information, refer to Bethell CD, Read D, Stein REK, Blumberg SJ, Wells N, Newacheck PW. Identifying children with special health care needs: development and evaluation of a short screening instrument. *Ambul Pediatr* 2002 Feb;2(1):38-48. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11888437/>. Accessed May 23, 2019.

consequences: the need or use of medicines prescribed by a doctor; the need or use of more medical care, mental health care, or education services than is usual for most children; limitations or inability to do things most children can do; the need or use of special therapy, such as physical, occupational, or speech therapy; and the need or use of treatment or counseling for emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems. Children with responses to at least one of the five health consequences were identified as having a special health care need.

- Geographic location: Large central metropolitan, large fringe metropolitan, medium metropolitan, small metropolitan, micropolitan, and noncore areas based on the 2013 National Center for Health Statistics Urban-Rural Classification Scheme (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/urban_rural.htm). The 2013 scheme includes six urbanization categories, including:

- ◆ Four metropolitan county designations:

- Large Central Metropolitan: Large central metropolitan counties in a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) of 1 million or more population:
 1. That contain the entire population of the largest principal city of the MSA, or
 2. Whose entire population is contained within the largest principal city of the MSA, or
 3. That contain at least 250,000 residents of any principal city in the MSA.
- Large Fringe Metropolitan: Counties in MSAs of 1 million or more population that do not qualify as large central. Large Fringe Metropolitan areas are also described as suburban areas. This category is the reference group that all other residence locations are compared with in this report.
- Medium Metropolitan: Counties in MSAs of 250,000 to 999,999 population.
- Small Metropolitan: Counties in MSAs of less than 250,000 population.

- ◆ Two nonmetropolitan county designations:

- Micropolitan: Counties in a micropolitan statistical area.
- Noncore: Nonmetropolitan counties that are not in a micropolitan statistical area.

- **Special Analyses.** Other important groups have been more difficult to identify in healthcare data:

- Beginning with the 2012 reports, contrasts by granular racial/ethnic subgroups have been included when available. The NHQDR team has not yet found a healthcare data source that includes all the subgroups of interest, because sample sizes have been too small to yield statistically reliable data. Thus, limited data have been presented for Hispanic subgroups (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, other Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin), Asian subgroups (Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, other Asian), and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander subgroups (Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, and other Pacific Islanders).

- Beginning with the 2013 reports, analyses by number of multiple chronic conditions have been included, but data sources differ in the chronic conditions that can be identified. Improving measurement and data for these groups is critical to understand the reasons people with multiple chronic conditions cannot access high-quality healthcare and to develop effective interventions to help them overcome these barriers. Due to the change from ICD-9-CM to ICD-10-CM codes, the chronic condition data are not available in the 2021 NHQDR.

Analyses

All NHQDR analyses mainly include size of disparities, trend, trend in disparities, and benchmark. The summary results of the analysis are summarized in charts, tables, and maps and are also posted on the NHQDR website. The source data for all these analyses are the summary statistics, either percentages or rates, at the national, subgroup, or state level, instead of micro data. Some figures use two-dimensional data, such as ethnicity by income.

Data Preparation

For all analyses, estimates are aligned to the negative direction. For measures where higher estimates are desirable, the estimates are usually reported as percentages instead of rates. The percentages are flipped (negatively aligned) by deducting the percentage from 100%. An example of negative alignment would be changing “Adults who had an influenza vaccine” to “Adults who did not have an influenza vaccine.”

The flipped or negatively aligned estimate will be referred to as the aligned rate in the text below. For measures where lower estimates are desirable, the estimates are not flipped. The result is interpreted based on the direction of the measures, although the rates are aligned to the negative direction for positive measures.

The NHQDR applies these methods to measure changes in trend analyses and to assess disparities. This approach is used uniformly across all measures from different data sources in order to determine whether the differences between comparison groups and reference groups are statistically significant (not due to chance) and are more likely to be real differences. These methods improve uniformity for comparability and ease of understanding of the findings and increase the sensitivity (i.e., the likelihood of a difference being considered statistically significant) but have some limitations. (Refer to “Analysis Limitations” later in this document.)

For analyses of disparities in the current year and change in disparities over time, comparisons are typically made between a priority population or comparison group and a reference group. The largest subgroup or the subgroup that often received the best healthcare is used as the reference group. Table 1 provides examples of specific reference groups.

Table 1. Reference groups

Variable Category	Reference Group
Sex	Males
Age	18-44 years
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic White
Race	White
Income	High income
Education	Any college education
Disability status	Adults without any disability
Residence location	Large fringe metropolitan (suburb)
Insurance	Private insurance

For comparisons among racial groups, if a measure had data for separate racial categories, racial data were used. If a measure only had a combined race/ethnicity category, non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic were used.

For comparisons between ethnic groups, Hispanics, non-Hispanic Asians, and non-Hispanic Blacks were compared with non-Hispanic Whites. Data from ethnicity categories are used. Data from race categories were not used because the race categories may include Hispanic.

Trends in Quality

- **Purpose.** To assess change over time considering both magnitude of change and statistical significance. Magnitude of change was considered important because large databases could have trends that were statistically significant but not large enough to be clinically meaningful.
 - **Data requirement.** Estimates for at least four time points between 2000 and the most recent year; fewer than four time points were deemed insufficient to calculate slopes of regression lines.
 - **Approach.** Data preparation is applied as discussed above. Average annual percentage change (AAPC) was estimated using unweighted log-linear regression. In previous years, weighted regression was used with weight = (M^2/v) , where M^2 is the square of the measure value and v is the variance. We recently changed to unweighted regression to be more consistent with methods used in the CMS National Impact Assessments and because analyses demonstrated few differences between weighted and unweighted regressions.
- **Model.** $\ln(M) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y$, where $\ln(M)$ is the natural logarithm of the aligned rate, β_0 is the intercept or constant, and β_1 is the coefficient corresponding to year Y (e.g., the average annual percentage change = $100 \times (\exp(\beta)-1)$).

- **Interpretation:**
 - **Improving** = Average annual percentage change $\geq 1\%$ per year in a favorable direction and $p < 0.10$.^{ix}
 - **Not Changing** = Average annual percentage change $< 1\%$ per year or $p \geq 0.10$.
 - **Worsening** = Average annual percentage change $\geq 1\%$ per year in an unfavorable direction and $p < 0.10$.

Since the rates were aligned to the negative direction, if the p-value is less than 0.10, AAPC less than -1% indicates improving and more than 1% indicates worsening.

The rates are assumed to change at a constant percentage of the rate of the previous year. For example, if the rate is 50/1,000 in 2000 and the average annual percentage change is 10%, then the expected rate is $50/1,000 + (50 \times 10\%) = 50.5/1,000$ in 2001, instead of $50/1,000 + 10 = 60/1,000$.

- **Summaries of Trends.** Trends across panels of measures can be summarized in a variety of ways. The trend results are summarized by priority area and by subgroups and are presented as stacked bar charts showing the percentage of measures that are Improving, Not Changing, or Worsening.
- **Measures With Extreme Trends.** To help identify measures that are changing most quickly, measures are sorted by average annual percentage change.
 - **Improving Quickly** = Average annual percentage change $> 10\%$ per year in a favorable direction and $p < 0.10$.

Achievable Benchmarks

- **Purpose.** To define a high level of performance that has been attained to help readers understand national and state performance and to serve as an achievable quality improvement goal.
- **Approach.** Data preparation is applied as discussed above. Average of the top 10% best performing states:
 - **Data Requirement.** Estimates for 2015, 2016, or 2017 are required for at least 30 states. About 70 NHQDR measures meet this requirement.
 - **Calculation.** Average of estimates from the top 10% of states (e.g., average of top five states if estimates are available on all 50 states and DC). Territories are included in the calculation of the number of states in the top 10% (e.g., top 5 of 50) but are excluded from the top 10% of states for the benchmark calculation because the estimates usually are associated with larger variance.

^{ix} A probability of 0.10 was selected as the significance level because the magnitude of the standard errors varied considerably by type of data. Favorable direction is defined as negative average annual percentage change for positive measures and positive average annual percentage change for negative measures.

- **Updates.** Data from 2015 are preferred for the benchmark calculation to use more recent data. If a measure does not have 2015 data, 2016 data or 2017 data are used. A benchmark is not calculated if a measure’s latest data year is 2013 or earlier, except for the measure “Patients with treated chronic kidney failure who received a transplant within 3 years of date of renal failure measure.” The overall state-level benchmark calculated above is used for all comparisons. A benchmark for each priority population group is not calculated.
- **Interpretation:**
 - **Figures.** When available, benchmarks are shown as dashed red lines on figures.
 - ◆ **Time to Benchmark.** When a subpopulation group has at least 4 years of data, time to reach the benchmark is estimated based on the distance between the benchmark and current year’s rate and the average annual change. The average annual change is calculated using unweighted linear regression.
 - ◆ **Model.** $M = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y$, where M is the aligned rate of a subgroup, β_0 is the intercept or constant, and β_1 is the coefficient corresponding to year Y . The average annual change is used to extrapolate forward to the time when the benchmark will be achieved. Year to reach benchmark is calculated using the formula below:
 - Year to reach benchmark = (Benchmark – Current year’s rate)/average annual change

The result is classified into five exclusive categories that tell us about the direction of the measure compared with the benchmark:

1. Better than benchmark: rate in the most recent year is better than the benchmark and is changing in the desirable direction.
2. Approaching the benchmark: a rate calculated for cases where the trend shows improvement toward the benchmark. The estimated number of years to reach the benchmark is calculated using the method mentioned above.
3. Insignificant change: the average annual change is not statistically significant (p is 0.05 or higher) or the average annual change is zero.
4. No progress toward benchmark: rate in the most recent year is worse than the benchmark and is changing in the undesirable direction.
5. Better than benchmark and going away from benchmark: rate in the most recent year is better than the benchmark, but the trend showed worsening.

Size of Disparities Between Two Subpopulations

- **Purpose.** To assess whether access or quality differs between two subpopulations for the most recent data year. Comparisons are typically made between a priority population group and a reference group within a population characteristic (e.g., Black people vs. White people within the race characteristic). The best performing subgroup is typically used as the reference group.

Measures are excluded from the analysis if the most recent available data are too old. Before the 2016 report, the latest available data were used for the current year disparities analysis. Beginning with the 2016 report, we excluded measures from the disparities analysis if the most recent data were 3 years older than the report year. For the 2021 report, production began in 2020, so 2017 is the earliest data included.^x An exception is applied to the measure “Patients with treated chronic kidney failure who received a transplant within 3 years of date of renal failure.” An additional 2 years of data were used for this measure because the measure includes a 3-year waiting period.

- **Approach.** Data preparation is applied as discussed above. Two criteria are applied to determine whether the difference between two groups is meaningful:
 - The absolute difference between the priority population group and the reference group must be statistically significant with $p < 0.05$ on a two-tailed test.
 - The relative difference between the priority population group and the reference group must be at least 10% when framed positively or negatively ($[p1 - p2]/p2 > 0.1$), where $p1$ is priority group’s aligned rate and $p2$ is reference group’s aligned rate.
- **Interpretation:**
 - **Better** = Priority population estimate more favorable than reference group estimate by at least 10% and with $p < 0.05$.
 - **Same** = Priority population and reference group estimates differ by less than 10% or $p \geq 0.05$.
 - **Worse** = Priority population estimate less favorable than reference group estimate by at least 10% and with $p < 0.05$.
- **Summaries of Disparities.** Disparities across panels of measures are usually summarized as stacked bar charts showing the percentage of measures that are Better, Same, or Worse for priority populations compared with a reference group.

Trends in Disparities Between Two Subpopulations

- **Purpose.** To observe whether the difference in access or quality between two subpopulations has changed over time. Comparisons are typically made between a priority population group and a reference group within a population characteristic (e.g., Black people vs. White people within the race characteristic).
- **Approach.** Data preparation is applied as discussed above, and analyses use unweighted linear regression. Before 2015, weighted regressions were used with $\text{weight} = (1/v)$, where v is the variance. With the 2015 report, we changed to unweighted regression on the indexed rate to be more consistent with methods used in the CMS National Impact Assessments and because analyses demonstrated few differences between weighted and unweighted regressions.

^x In an effort to align the report year with the publication year, the NHQDR skipped 2020 in the numbering sequence. The 2020 report is being published in 2021 and thus has a date of 2021. For data purposes, the 3-year timeframe starts in 2020 and extends back 3 years to 2017.

To calculate the index, we divided estimates by the earliest estimate of the reference group so that the earliest indexed estimate equaled one and subsequent indexed estimates were relative to the earliest estimate. Starting with the 2016 report, we changed to unweighted regression on the aligned rate without taking the index.

- **Data Requirement.** Estimates for at least four time points between 2000 and the most recent data year for both the priority population and reference group; fewer than four time points were deemed insufficient to calculate slopes of regression lines.
- **Model.** $M = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y$, where M is the aligned rate of a subgroup, β_0 is the intercept or constant, and β_1 is the coefficient corresponding to year Y .

- ◆ The coefficient is the average annual change (AAC). For example, if the average annual change is -1 , and the mean rate is 50 per 1,000 in 2000, then the expected mean rate is $50 + (-1) = 49$ in 2001 and $49 + (-1) = 48$ in 2002. It means the mean rate decreased by 1 unit per year.
- ◆ We calculate the difference in the AAC between the priority population group and the reference group and the standard error:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Difference in AAC} &= \text{AAC (priority population group)} - \text{AAC (reference group)} \\ \text{Standard error} &= \text{square root of } [STDErr(PPG)^2 + STDErr(\text{Ref Group})^2] \end{aligned}$$

- ◆ We use standard errors from the regression coefficients to calculate the standard error of the absolute difference.

- **Interpretation:**

- Improving = The difference in the AAC of the priority population and reference group is < -1 (in a favorable direction) and $p < 0.10$ for testing that regression coefficients are the same.
- Not Changing = Absolute value of the difference in the AAC of the priority population and reference group is < 1 or the absolute value of the difference in the AAC of the priority population and reference group is > 1 and $p \geq 0.10$ for testing that regression coefficients are the same.
- Worsening = The difference in the AAC of the priority population and reference group is > 1 (in an unfavorable direction) and $p < 0.10$ for testing that regression coefficients are the same.
- Example: Because the rates are aligned to the negative direction, a negative AAC value indicates a measure/subgroup's mean has been decreasing (improving) over the years, and a positive value indicates the subgroup's mean has been increasing (worsening) over the years. Taking the "hospital admissions for uncontrolled diabetes without complications per 100,000 population" measure as an example, if the AAC of Black is -2.9 and the AAC of White is -0.4 , the difference is $(-2.9) - (-0.4) = -2.5$. This difference indicates that the Black mean rate has been improving (decreasing) faster than the White mean rate or the disparity between Black people and White people is improving (i.e., narrowing).

- **Summaries of Trends in Disparities.** Trends in disparities across panels of measures are usually summarized as stacked bar charts showing the percentage of measures for which the gap is Improving (narrowing), Not Changing, or Worsening (widening) for priority populations compared with a reference group. The number of measures on the summary charts only include measures with disparities in the baseline year, which is the earliest year from 2000 and before 2015 for the 2021 report.
- **Measures With Extreme Trends in Disparities.** To help identify measures with disparities that are changing the most quickly for each priority population, we sort measures by the difference in AAC between the priority population and reference group.
 - **Disparities Eliminated** = Disparity improving and priority population estimates reached or surpassed reference group estimate.

State Maps

- **Purpose:** To show differences in quality and disparities between states.
- **Approach:** Same as for other analyses, rates were aligned to the negative direction for the calculation of the performance score.
- The quality map featured in the Overview section of the 2021 NHQDR (Figure 31) shows each state's performance in quartiles based on the state's performance score. The performance score for individual measures is assigned as follows:
 - -1 point for each measure that was better than the national average.
 - 0 point for each measure that was the same as the national average.
 - 1 point for each measure that was worse than the national average.

The state's performance score is calculated by summing the individual scores over all measures and then dividing by the total number of measures.

$$\text{Performance score} = (-1 * \text{Number of Better measures} + \text{Number of Worse measures}) / \text{Total number of measures}$$

Then the state's performance scores are ranked into four groups as quartiles for the map.

- **Interpretation:** The first quartile (best quality) of the map indicates that the states performed better on more measures and performed worse on fewer measures than the national average. The fourth quartile (worst quality) indicates that the states performed better on fewer measures and performed worse on more measures than the national average.
- The disparities map featured in the Overview section of the 2021 NHQDR (Figure 32) shows the average differences in quality of care for Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander (NHPI), American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN), and multiracial people compared with the reference group, non-Hispanic White people or White people.

All core measures in this report that had state-level data to assess racial/ethnic disparities were used. For measures with ethnicity data, Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic Asian people were compared with non-Hispanic White people. For measures without ethnicity data,

Black, Asian, NHPI, AI/AN, and multiracial people were compared with White people. The comparison method is the same as the current year disparities analysis.

- The performance score for individual measures is assigned as follows:
 - -1 point for a subgroup that was better than the reference group.
 - 0 point for a subgroup that was the same as the reference group.
 - 1 point for a subgroup that was worse than the reference group.

The state's Disparities score is calculated by summing the individual scores over all measures and over all subgroups and then dividing by the sum of the number of measures and multiplying by the number of subgroups.

$$\text{Disparities score} = (-1 * \text{Number of Better measures} * \text{number of subgroups} + \text{Number of Worse measures} * \text{number of subgroups}) / (\text{Total number of measures} * \text{number of subgroups})$$

Then the state's disparities scores are ranked into four groups as quartiles for the map. States with fewer than 50 measures by subgroup combination are excluded from the quartile analysis. States with lower disparities scores indicate fewer disparities, regardless of overall quality among states.

Analysis Limitations

As noted earlier, the methods used in the NHQDR improve uniformity for comparability and ease of understanding of the findings and increase the sensitivity (i.e., the likelihood of a difference being considered statistically significant) but have some limitations.

To analyze all measures across the measure set in the same way for assessing disparities, some measures are flipped so that all measures are aligned in the negative direction (e.g., "Adults who had an influenza vaccine" is changed to "Adults who did not have an influenza vaccine"). The alignment of all the measures in the same direction provides a standard way to analyze the data. However, this effect is most reliable when the original rates are well above 50%. The effect is greatly diminished if the rates are near 50% and can have the opposite effect if the original rates are well below 50%.

The z-score of absolute difference is an additional criterion for statistical reliability. It takes into account the standard errors of the point estimates. That is, if the standard errors are comparatively large, then z-scores provide an additional check on the meaningfulness of the difference and reduce the possibility of labeling the differences as worse or better when those differences are not statistically valid. Therefore, the findings in the NHQDR may be different from other studies that look at the same measures and data due to the increased sensitivity of our methodology.

In some cases, changes in the measures or how to interpret the measures may have an impact on the effectiveness of the methodology used for this report. AHRQ is continually reviewing all aspects of its methodology for determining and reporting disparities and maintaining consistency.

Limitations With Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project Data

In the 2017 NHQDR, all available HCUP measures included in the report and NHQDR database had trend data. Those same measures are not represented in this report due to the limited availability of HCUP data. HCUP converted all measures from International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) to Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes, thus changing the outcomes of these measures. Therefore, we cannot trend the data at this time. HCUP trend data are available for opioid measures that use ICD-9 codes prior to October 1, 2015, and ICD-10 codes starting from October 1, 2015.

Historically, the NHQDR and derivative products such as the State Snapshots have included state-specific estimates for selected AHRQ Quality Indicators (QIs) based on HCUP data. The 2017-2019 NHQDRs do not include state-specific QI estimates based on 2016-2017 HCUP data. This decision was made in part because the ICD-10 version of the QI software used in the 2017-2019 reports did not include risk adjustment.

The 2016-2018 risk-adjusted state estimates became available for the 2021 NHQDR and are included in all analyses in the report and on the website, except trending.

Limitations With the MEPS Data

In total, 18 measures derived from MEPS are excluded from the 2021 NHQDR trend analysis. MEPS was redesigned in 2018, potentially affecting all 54 core measures. Although the Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends (CFACT) recommends caution when comparing MEPS 2018 data with data from earlier years, the NHQDR team decided to exclude only 18 measures from trend analysis and to keep 36 measures, because the trend results remained the same with and without the 2018 data.

Table 2 lists the measures that are excluded from trend analysis in the 2021 NHQDR, as well as the reasons for excluding them. The last four measures in this table are excluded from the 2021 trend analysis, because trend results changed after including data from the 2018 survey.

Table 2. MEPS core measures excluded from 2021 trend analysis

Reason	Measures
Dropped the measures because questions were dropped from 2018 MEPS survey	People with a usual primary care provider
	People who were unable to get or delayed in getting needed medical care in the last 12 months
	People who were unable to get or delayed in getting needed dental care in the last 12 months
	People who were unable to get or delayed in getting needed prescription medicines in the last 12 months
Dropped and replaced with supplemental measure due to survey question changes	People unable to get or delayed in getting needed medical care due to financial or insurance reasons
	People unable to get or delayed in getting needed dental care due to financial or insurance reasons
	People unable to get or delayed in getting needed prescription medicines due to financial or insurance reasons

Reason	Measures
Converted to noncore; will drop the measures in 2022 if 2017-2019 data are not available	Adults who had a doctor's office or clinic visit in the last 12 months and needed care, tests, or treatment who sometimes or never found it easy to get the care, tests, or treatment
	Children who had a doctor's office or clinic visit in the last 12 months and needed care, tests, or treatment who sometimes or never found it easy to get the care, tests, or treatment
	Adults with obesity who ever received advice from a health professional to exercise more
	Adults with obesity who ever received advice from a health professional about eating fewer high-fat or high-cholesterol foods
Dropped 2002-2017 data due to survey question changes	Adults with limited English proficiency and usual source of care (USC) whose USC had language assistance
	Adults with limited English proficiency who had usual source of care (USC)
	People with current asthma who are now taking preventive medicine daily or almost daily (either oral or inhaler)
Excluded from trending because the trend results are different by including 2018 data	Adults age 40 and over with diagnosed diabetes who had their feet checked for sores or irritation in the calendar year
	People with a usual source of care who sometimes or never asked person to help make decisions when there was a choice between treatments
	Children 0-40 lb for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about using a child safety seat while riding in the car
	Children over 80 lb for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about using lap or shoulder belts when riding in a car

Of the 36 measures retained for trend analysis in the 2021 NHQDR, 14 measures do not have 2018 data and will have 2019 data. Two of the measures are derived from the Child Preventive Health (CS) Section and 12 are derived from the Sample Adults Questionnaire (SAQ). These survey items are administered every other year and 2018 is one of the years when the items were not administered. As 2018 data are not available, data from the 2002 to 2017 surveys are used for trend analysis in the 2021 NHQDR and the 2017 data are used for current disparities analysis.

Seven of the 36 measures retained for trend analysis have large differences in estimates between 2017 and 2018 (Table 3). These measures are included in the 2021 trend analysis because the 2018 data did not affect the trend result. The team will revisit the MEPS measures again when the 2019 data become available for the 2022 report.

Table 3. Seven MEPS measures included in the 2021 trend analysis despite lower than expected values, 2018

Measures	Percent 2017	Percent 2018	Difference, 2017-2018	Trend Result
People with a usual source of care, excluding hospital emergency rooms, who has office hours at night or on weekends	43.9	38.3	5.6	No change
Children ages 2-17 for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about the amount and kind of exercise, sports, or physically active hobbies they should have	49.1	38.4	10.7	Improving
Children ages 2-17 for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about healthy eating	65.6	52.0	13.6	Improving
Children who had their height and weight measured by a health provider within the past 2 years	94.3	89.9	4.4	Improving
Children for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about how smoking in the house can be bad for a child	48.2	40.9	7.3	No change
Children 41-80 lb for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about using a booster seat when riding in the car	46.4	38.0	8.4	No change
Children ages 2-17 for whom a health provider gave advice within the past 2 years about using a helmet when riding a bicycle or motorcycle	40	34.4	5.6	No change

Limitations With the NHIS Data

Ten measures with 2019 NHIS data are excluded from trend analysis and 7 measures with 2000-2018 data are included in the trend analysis. The NHIS was redesigned for 2019. NCHS recommended not comparing the 2019 data with data from earlier years as NCHS has not yet evaluated the impact of the 2019 redesign on estimates. The NHQDR team decided to follow NCHS's recommendation. The 2019 statistics are available for 10 core measures and are excluded from the trend and change in disparities analysis. The 2019 data are used for current disparities analysis.

The 10 excluded measures are:

- People under age 65 with health insurance.
- People under age 65 with any private health insurance.
- Adults age 65 and over with any private health insurance.
- People with a specific source of ongoing care.
- People in fair or poor health with a specific source of ongoing care.
- Women ages 50-74 who received a mammogram in the last 2 years.
- Women ages 21-65 who received a Pap smear in the last 3 years.
- Adults without hypertension who had their blood pressure measured in the past 2 years.

- Adults who received a blood cholesterol measurement in the last 5 years.
- Children ages 0-17 with a wellness checkup in the past 12 months.

Due to the changes in questionnaires and skip patterns, the 2019 data are not available for 8 core measures:

- Adults with chronic joint symptoms who have ever seen a doctor or other health professional for joint symptoms.
- People with current asthma who received written asthma management plans from their healthcare provider.
- Adults ages 18-64 at high risk (e.g., COPD) who received an influenza vaccination in the last flu season.
- Adults ages 18 and over who received an influenza vaccination in the last flu season.
- Adults age 65 and over who received an influenza vaccination in the last flu season.
- Children ages 6 months to 17 years who received an influenza vaccination in the last flu season.
- People with current asthma who were advised to change things to reduce exposure to irritants.
- People with current asthma who received education about appropriate response to an asthma episode.

For measures without the 2019 data, data from 2000 to 2018 are included for all NHQDR data analysis. The 2000-2018 data will be replaced with data from 2020 or later years and excluded from trend analysis until 4 years of data become available.

An exception is for “people with current asthma who received written asthma management plans from their healthcare provider” measure, which is not included in the trend analysis because only 3 years’ data are available due to the changes to the skip pattern.

“Women ages 21-65 who received a Pap smear in the last 3 years” is modified as “Women ages 21-65 who received a Pap smear in the last 3 years or human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines in the last 5 years” based on U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendations.

Mainly because of the changes with HCUP, MEPS, and NHIS data, the total number of measures in the 2021 trend analysis dropped from 200 in 2017 to 170 in 2021 in all priority areas (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of core measures available in the 2017 and 2021 trend analysis by priority areas

Priority Areas	Measures in 2017 Trend	Measures in 2021 Trend	Percent Change From 2017 to 2021
Care Coordination	28	9	-68%
Affordable Care	5	2	-60%
Patient Safety	36	26	-28%
Healthy Living	54	63	+17%*
Effective Treatment	40	35	-13%
Person-Centered Care	16	26	+63%**
Access to Care Measures	21	9	-57%
Total	200	170	-15%

* The 2021 Healthy Living section includes 11 MDS measures and 11 OASIS measures while the data were not available in 2017.

** The 2021 Person-Centered Care section included 8 hospice CAHPS measures while the data were not available in 2017 and 3 new MEPS health literacy measures.

The composition of the measure sets may affect the NHQDR conclusions as the trend results are further summarized by priority areas and by subgroups, and the results are presented in the Executive Summary. The trend result may be associated with the data source. For example, 64% of the 50 HCUP measures in the 2017 trend analysis were improving and about 80% of the HCUP measures are in the Care Coordination (24) and Patient Safety (16) areas. Without the HCUP data, the percentage of improving measures may decrease in these two areas.

Limitations With the Medicare Patient Safety Monitoring System Data

For these measures, “hospital patients” refers to a population consisting of a sample of acute myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure, pneumonia, and major surgery patients. The sample sizes have been decreasing over the years because the number of hospital-acquired conditions decreased 13% from 2014 to 2017. The 2018 and 2019 samples were combined for the 2021 NHQDR. More information on the 2014–2017 sample can be found in the AHRQ National Scorecard on Hospital Conditions report (<https://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/professionals/quality-patient-safety/pfp/UpdatedhacreportFInal2017data.pdf>).

The findings for these measures differ from the AHRQ National Scorecard due to different trending methods. For more information on the AHRQ National Scorecard on Hospital-Acquired Conditions, visit <https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/pfp/index.html>.

As MEPS and NHIS do not provide state-level data, changes to these data sources have no impact on state data analysis.

General Limitations

Some common limitations affect analyses of multiple data sources. For example, data may be unavailable or statistically unreliable, or they may not meet confidentiality criteria for relatively small subpopulations, such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people, some rural communities, and some states. A total of 182 measures are included in the 2021 state data analysis. California had data for 179 measures while Wyoming only had data for 113 measures. Estimates are suppressed if the sample size is small or the relative standard error is larger than 30%.

For some outcome measures, small sample size may indicate the subgroup or state is doing better than others because they have fewer people in the denominator. These include measures such as HIV/AIDS care (people age 13 and over living with diagnosed HIV whose most recent viral load in the last 12 months was under 200 copies/mL) and emergency department visit or hospital admission involving opioid-related diagnoses per 100,000 population.

In addition, while most national surveys conduct data collections annually, not all modules are completed each year. Thus, data are missing for some measures included in the report.

Timeliness of national data for national surveys and data systems are also an issue since it takes time to process and ensure data quality for reporting, resulting in about a 2-year lag between the year the data are collected and the year they can be used.

Finally, for various reasons (e.g., data collection was discontinued), data for all years for all measures are not available. We exclude measures for which data will not be available in the future. Lack of data for some measures affects the measure numbers in the summary figures, such as trends in quality.

Reporting Conventions

For ease of reporting, some shorthand is used in presenting results. Unless otherwise specified:

- State maps are usually grouped in quartiles. Data are excluded from territories with a large variation or that looked like outliers.
- Results presented in text or bullets meet our criteria for magnitude and statistical significance.
- Children are ages 0-17, adults are age 18 and over, and older adults are age 65 and over.
- “Black” indicates individuals who identify their race as Black or African American.
- “Hispanic” indicates individuals who identify their ethnicity as Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin and includes all races. The race categories for Hispanic individuals are not specified in the report.
- “Measure improved” indicates performance on the measure improved; “measure got worse” indicates performance on the measure showed worsening.
- “Disparities improved” indicates the disparity narrowed. “Disparities worsened” indicates the disparity widened.

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