

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation: National Nursing Assistant Survey

Our nation is facing a major shortage of health care workers who provide for the long term care needs of residents in nursing homes and other places. The National Nursing Assistant Survey is the first nationally representative study of nursing assistants working in U.S. nursing homes. This new survey provides information that can inform state and federal initiatives to recruit, retain, and expand the workforce, and could be used to examine the important role of workers in providing care to a growing elderly and chronically ill population.

Lead Agency:

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Agency Mission:

The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation advises the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on policy development in health, disability and aging, human services, and science and data policy, and provides advice and analysis on economic policy. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (OASPE) leads special initiatives, coordinates the Department's evaluation, research and demonstration activities, and manages cross-Department planning activities such as strategic planning, legislative planning and review of regulations. Integral to this role, OASPE conducts research and evaluation studies, develops policy analyses, and estimates the cost and benefits of policy alternatives under consideration by the Department or Congress.

Principal Investigator:

Marie R. Squillace, Ph.D.
Social Science Analyst
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
Hubert H. Humphrey Building, Room 424E.20
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Partner Agency:

National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
Westat, Inc.

General Description:

National Nursing Assistant Survey

Our nation is facing a major shortage of health care workers who provide for the long-term care needs of residents in nursing homes and other places. Many direct care workers are leaving the field and too few are entering. Projections of a substantial health care workforce imbalance have motivated policymakers, providers, private foundations, and others to seek immediate and sustainable solutions to stabilize the health care workforce. Current demographic, economic and policy trends suggest that without serious intervention, the supply of health care workers could significantly worsen in the coming decades.

The National Nursing Assistant Survey is the first nationally representative survey of nursing assistants working in U.S. nursing homes. This new survey provides information that will inform state and federal initiatives to recruit, retain, and expand the long-term care workforce. It also provides important information about the role of workers in caring for a growing elderly and chronically ill population. The survey collected information on whether workers plan to continue working in their present positions and what factors affect their decisions, including job satisfaction, nature of the work environment, training, advancement opportunities, benefits, working conditions, and personal or family demands. By identifying the priorities of nursing assistants, the survey can help identify ways to meet those priorities and how to prevent staffing shortages in the future.

The survey design and implementation were made possible through collaborations with two independent research organizations, a national advisory group, and a sustained partnership with the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

The National Nursing Assistant Survey represents a major advance in the data available about health care workers in U.S. nursing homes and provides a rich resource for evidence-based policy, practice and applied research initiatives. This survey can be linked to other existing data sets thereby expanding the usefulness of the data by enabling researchers to examine more comprehensive and complex relationships between worker, facility, resident, and community characteristics.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

The care of 1.5 million elderly and chronically ill persons in the United States is largely in the hands of nursing assistants—the individuals who provide eight out of every ten hours of care residents receive in nursing homes. Turnover of these direct care workers is high which profoundly decreases the quality of life and care of the residents. This research provides industry and policy leaders with information that is useful for improving the attractiveness of caregiving jobs and for reducing worker turnover.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

As at least 36 states currently consider workforce vacancies to be a serious issue, results from this research will provide an invaluable resource in federal and state labor, welfare and health policy discussions on expanding the pool of workers, and on reimbursement, regulation and program design. Ultimately, this will result in improvements in the quality of life and care of older Americans in U.S. nursing homes.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

The major advance of this survey over other studies is its use of a nationally representative sample of certified nursing assistants within a nationally representative sample of nursing homes. Previous studies have been of local or regional samples that were not representative of the country as a whole.