



National Survey of Children's Health – Essential Data for Healthier Futures

Guide to Key Maternal and Child Health Investments

Introduction

The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) is an annual household survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of and funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). It provides national and state-level data on key indicators of child health and well-being. NSCH covers multiple, intersecting aspects of childhood, including physical and mental health; access to and quality of health care; and the family, neighborhood, school, and social environments.

Since its redesign in 2016, NSCH has been administered annually via mail and web-based formats, producing timely and high-quality data that support informed decision-making. The NSCH offers estimates for over 300 Child and Family Health Measures across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These data inform policy development, program implementation, and public health strategies.

NSCH supports public health action by:

- Monitoring trends in children's physical, mental, and behavioral health.
- Informing resource allocation at the federal and state levels.
- Supporting needs assessments for maternal and child health programs.
- Enabling targeted responses to emerging health issues like youth mental health and developmental screening gaps.

NSCH provides the only nationally representative, state-level survey focused specifically on child and family health. The investment enables robust data collection and dissemination that would be cost-prohibitive for individual states to replicate independently. States benefit from federal investment through access to state-level, representative data that guide public health priorities and strategic planning. These insights are not duplicated elsewhere, making NSCH a unique and indispensable data source.

Alignment with the Title V MCH Services Block Grant

NSCH data are foundational to Title V MCH Services Block Grant reporting and planning. The survey supports reporting on 29 Title V national outcome and performance measures that track the health and well-being of children. NSCH provides states with the capability to:

- Benchmark state performance against national data.
- Identify differences in health outcomes across geography or income.
- Track improvements in child and family health over time.
- Prioritize programming and funding aligned with state-specific needs.



Reliable data are essential for Title V MCH programs to assess needs, plan services, and evaluate progress. NSCH provides unique, state-level data that Title V programs rely on to track key child health indicators, including:

- Developmental screening and diagnosis.
- Children’s access to preventive medical and dental care.
- Family resilience and neighborhood support.
- Mental health status and treatment among adolescents.

Impact and Reach

NSCH data informs interventions that save lives and improve family outcomes. For example:

- NSCH data on behavioral health have been used to expand trauma-informed care initiatives, including training healthcare providers and educators and establishing community-based support systems.
- States use NSCH data to implement Shared Plans of Care (SPoC) to enhance care coordination for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN).
- NSCH data on preventive medical and dental visits among adolescents were used to inform outreach strategies and enhance delivery of adolescent well-care visits.

Each year, the NSCH collects data representing over 70 million U.S. children, helping decision-makers address both common and emerging health challenges

What’s at Stake?

The NSCH plays a vital role in guiding child health programs across the country. If funding for the NSCH is reduced or eliminated, states would lose access to essential data needed to:

- Track key child health indicators such as preventive care access, mental health status, and medical home access.
- Fulfill federal reporting requirements for the Title V MCH Block Grant.
- Design and implement effective public health programs tailored to state-specific needs for children, including those with special health care needs.
- Measure differences in child health outcomes and assess the impact of programs.

Without NSCH, states would be forced to rely on fragmented or outdated data, hindering their ability to improve child health outcomes and make data-driven decisions.

About AMCHP

The Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) is a national resource, partner, and advocate for state public health leaders and others working to improve the health of women, children, youth, families, and communities.

AMCHP’s members come from the highest levels of state government and include directors of maternal and child health programs, directors of programs for children with special health care needs, and other public health leaders who work with and support state maternal and child health programs.

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