

Medicare and Medicaid

Medicare and Medicaid, along with other federal health insurance programs like the Children’s Health Insurance Program, account for more than 20 percent of the federal budget. Ensuring the quality, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness of care is paramount to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and other agencies involved in administering these programs, as well as to providers and patients.

NORC’s long partnership with CMS spans a wide variety of projects including surveys, technical assistance, and evaluation research.

Among these projects, NORC supports a CMS initiative to test new administrative, service, and payment models for those enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid. NORC also conducts the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey for CMS, which provides critical information on health care access, use, living arrangements, and spending by Medicare enrollees, and informs program policymaking.

Patient Satisfaction and Experience

One of the many components of the Affordable Care Act is an emphasis on collecting health care quality data and making it accessible to the public. At the same time, health insurers and employers are exploring new benefits designs that incentivize patients to choose providers and hospitals that offer the highest quality care. Both initiatives assume that patients can understand health care quality reports and benefit options and apply them to their health care decision-making. NORC has been at the forefront of examining how patients evaluate quality of care and make decisions based on those perceptions. Additionally, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research completed a groundbreaking study that measured Americans’ satisfaction with private insurance and the impacts of health care costs on their lives.

Start a conversation.  
Contact us.

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Prevention, Health Promotion, and Lifestyle

Healthy lifestyle choices and effective prevention influence both individual health outcomes and system-wide health care costs. NORC has played an important national and international role in identifying, evaluating, and promoting sound policies and best practices in disease prevention and health promotion.

Our experts staff advisory committees, deliver research presentations, lead public outreach campaigns, and provide other forms of support to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion’s Healthy People 2020 project. In the U.S., NORC helps the District of Columbia implement and evaluate a program to integrate behavioral health treatment and primary care, and conducts the nation’s largest survey of immunization rates. Overseas, NORC assesses the impact of Millennium Challenge funded clinics and water treatment projects in Lesotho, Africa.

Public Health Systems

NORC is a trusted and valued partner to policymakers, private and nonprofit organizations, and public health agencies at the state, local, tribal, and federal levels. NORC’s multidisciplinary team of public health researchers informs public health policies and initiatives through program evaluations, data collection, and technical support.

Among its many public health system projects, NORC conducts evaluations of the emerging national public health agency accreditation program, analyzes the impacts of the Affordable Care Act on state and local public health systems, and conducts studies to assess the usefulness of a newly developed public health workforce taxonomy.

Rural Health

Through the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis, NORC employs a team of talented researchers and analysts with special expertise in assessing the needs of rural residents, health care providers, health departments, and other entities committed to improving the health of rural Americans. Among its many initiatives, the Walsh Center researches the implications of health reform on rural providers, communities, and residents; helps the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services identify options to address care in frontier counties; examines mortality and morbidity disparities in rural communities; partners with the National Rural Health Association to analyze jurisdictions that lacked public health services; and assesses disparities in substance abuse and mental health treatment in Appalachian communities.

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.



Insights in Health and Well-Being

Now is a time of transformation for health care and public health in America. The federal government, states, insurers, providers, policymakers, and consumers need sound data and insightful analysis to adapt to the Affordable Care Act, care for an aging and diverse population with a range of health needs, and make decisions that increase individual and community well-being. To meet that need, NORC experts explore, evaluate, and assess many facets of health and health care—from new payment and delivery methods, quality measurement, the needs of special populations, and access to care, to the socioeconomic, policy, and environmental factors that influence health outcomes. NORC’s rigorous examination of these and other issues informs decision-making in the United States and around the world.

Access and Affordability

Access to affordable care influences the health of individuals and families. Access to care varies by geography, income, and other social, economic, and environmental factors. This variation may in turn influence where people choose to work and live, and how they choose to care for family members. The impact of the cost and availability of health care extends beyond consumers, affecting employers’ hiring decisions, the benefits they choose to offer workers, and where they open offices and factories.

NORC researchers have a record of helping clients measure health care access and affordability across a variety of geographic locations and populations, and understand the far-reaching implications of disparate access, from public health to economic development.

Aging and the Life Course

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, there are now more people over the age of 65 than at any point in U.S. history. As older Americans account for a larger share of our population, it will be increasingly important to understand the health-related needs and expectations of these individuals. NORC’s program on the study of aging is integral to that understanding.



Among NORC’s most expansive and influential studies is the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, the first nationally representative survey on the impact of social and intimate relationships on older individuals’ health and longevity. Coupled with NORC’s work on early childhood development and the environmental factors that influence long-term health, NORC data provide a comprehensive view of health across the life course.

Behavioral Health

NORC has substantial and growing expertise in almost every facet of behavioral health research. This includes the integration of primary and behavioral health services, innovations in financing and reimbursement of behavioral health treatment, military behavioral health, performance metrics, value-based purchasing, and policies and practices around patient privacy and confidentiality.

NORC has been especially active in substance use research, with an emphasis on research and training concerning Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). To help combat risky behavior in the military, NORC and its partners are integrating SBIRT into the Army Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention System.

Care Coordination and Quality

Driven by the needs of an aging population, the opportunities afforded by big data, and the mandates of the Affordable Care Act, health care in the United States is undergoing a series of profound changes. Those changes are causing insurers, providers, policy makers, and consumers to ask how we can make health care more cost effective while improving quality of care and patient outcomes.

Our researchers survey Medicare and Medicaid enrollees about their experiences and satisfaction with care, help states and insurers implement and evaluate new payment and delivery models, assess the effectiveness of education and marketing campaigns, and examine how health care workers are trained and credentialed. NORC also uses optical scanners and natural language processing to digitize and catalog transcribed doctors’ notes, and develops ways to anonymize records so that data can be shared by researchers without compromising patient privacy.

Children’s Health

The quality of children’s physical and emotional health, particularly during the earliest stages of development, can have a profound impact on their social and academic achievement, and on their health as adults and seniors.

NORC researchers are shedding new light on this interplay, examining the influence of maternal substance abuse on early development, using advanced sensor technology to evaluate the environmental quality of children’s homes and neighborhoods, conducting the first National Survey of Early Care and Education, and running the largest continuous survey of immunization rates. NORC is also leading an evaluation of Project LAUNCH, which aims to promote the wellness of young children to ensure that they enter school ready to learn and able to succeed.

Health Communication

From encouraging healthy behaviors to informing consumer decision-making on health care services and coverage, health communication is critical to advancing solutions in health care and public health. NORC enhances such efforts by using research to design and evaluate communication campaigns, programs, materials, and digital tools, and through strategic planning and message development.

Our communication experts have developed effective strategies to prevent obesity and reduce mental health stigma, sparked powerful conversations about U.S. health disparities, and supported the development of transparency tools to provide information on the price and quality of health care services. Among other projects, NORC supports the implementation of quality ratings for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Compare websites and the Health Insurance Marketplace, marketing plans for Covered California, and communication efforts for the CMS Office of Minority Health.

Health Disparities

Different segments of the population have different health needs and outcomes. Incidence of diseases and even responses to treatments vary by gender, age, race, ethnicity, geography, and environment. Understanding these differences is essential to making sound policy and clinical decisions, and informed personal choices.

NORC is adept at surveying disparate and often difficult-to-reach populations. Our researchers have successfully worked through cultural, language, and economic barriers to gather reliable data on a variety of health issues including access to care, environmental factors that influence health, and attitudes about the health care system. Additionally, NORC has helped the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Minority Health manage and evaluate the performance of their program activities.

Health Economics

Understanding the individual and institutional costs of care and insurance can inform sound policy and personal decisions. On a societal level, it is also critical to consider the cost of poor health itself, from an individual’s lost income and delayed career development to an employer’s lost productivity and competitiveness.

NORC has deep expertise in researching and quantifying these dynamics. Whether assessing the economic impact of conditions as diverse as obesity and blindness, determining the clinical and cost-effectiveness of various kinds of health screening regimens and treatment protocols, or comparing the price of care across different delivery models, NORC produces data that allow policymakers, insurers, caregivers, and patients to make informed decisions.

Health Informatics

Technology is revolutionizing how health care works and the way health is measured. Health care informatics draws on the fields of engineering, computer science, communications, and organizational theory to integrate and streamline health care. New sensor technology transforms how caregivers monitor patients, and patients monitor themselves. Electronic health records give us powerful new tools to document information from clinical encounters, share it with other providers, and use it to improve care. Advanced scanning and software tools allow handwritten records to be digitized and used for a wide variety of clinical and research purposes.

NORC partners with state and federal agencies, insurance companies, and others to conduct program evaluations, provide technical assistance, and facilitate strategic planning in health informatics. NORC also develops and tests new tools and techniques for gathering, interpreting, visualizing, and sharing health care data—clinical, financial, and administrative—while protecting patient privacy and confidentiality.

Infectious Diseases

As witnessed by the outbreaks of Ebola globally and the measles nationally, as well as the rise of drug-resistant pathogens, there is a critical need among policymakers, the scientific community, and the general public for clear, reliable data on infectious diseases.

NORC conducts a range of research, surveillance, and program evaluation to help monitor and reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Since 2005, NORC has administered the National Immunization Survey for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, providing essential information on immunization rates. Our research scientists also streamline data and harmonize strategies for HIV prevention and treatment, and conduct several studies on infectious disease as it relates to both rural health and immigrant and refugee issues.

Engage our experts.  
NORC is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research institution with 75 years of experience helping clients identify and exceed their research goals. Our experts in health and well-being span public health, health science, and health care. They draw on institutional strengths in economics, international development, and other disciplines.

