

2021 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey Early Look

In advance of the 2021 MCBS Survey File release, this Early Look presents key preliminary estimates for beneficiaries living in the community and enrolled in Medicare in 2021.

INTRODUCTION

Using preliminary data from the 2021 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) Survey File, the Early Look presents a demographic portrait of the Medicare population living in the community. It also provides preliminary estimates pertaining to selected health status and functioning, access to care, and satisfaction with care measures.

The majority of Medicare beneficiaries living in the community are White non-Hispanic, between 65 and 84 years of age, and live in English-speaking households.

HIGHLIGHTS

Preliminary Estimates from the 2021 MCBS Survey File



80% of Medicare beneficiaries report good, very good, or excellent health.



45% of Medicare beneficiaries report having one or more disabilities.



Most Medicare beneficiaries are satisfied with health care quality, ease of access, and cost.

Table 1. Selected demographic characteristics of Medicare beneficiaries living in the community, 2021ⁱⁱ

Demographic Characteristic	Response	Weighted % (SE)
Age	< 65 years	12.8 (0.3)
	65-74 years	50.4 (0.5)
	75-84 years	27.5 (0.4)
	85+ years	9.3 (0.2)
Sex	Female	54.5 (0.5)
	Male	45.5 (0.5)
Race/Ethnicity	White non-Hispanic	74.9 (0.8)
	Black non-Hispanic	10.2 (0.4)
	Hispanic	8.5 (0.6)
	Other Race/Ethnicity ⁱⁱⁱ	5.6 (0.4)
Language Spoken at Home	English	88.1 (0.6)
	Language other than English	11.8 (0.6)
Educational Attainment	Less than a high school diploma	11.9 (0.5)
	High school graduate	24.5 (0.6)
	Some college/vocational school	29.6 (0.6)
	Bachelor's degree	18.2 (0.5)
	Graduate or professional degree	15.3 (0.7)
Veteran	Yes	17.1 (0.6)
	No	82.8 (0.6)

SOURCE: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey, Preliminary Data from the Survey File, 2021.

ⁱ These preliminary estimates are produced prior to final data editing and final weighting to provide early access to the most recent information from the MCBS.

ⁱⁱ Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding and/or missingness. Missing values (such as "Don't Know" and "Refused") are included in the denominator to ensure that the full universe of respondents eligible for the item is represented in preliminary estimates. These estimates are based on preliminary data and subject to change in final estimate generation.

ⁱⁱⁱ The "Other Race/Ethnicity" category includes other single races not of Hispanic origin or Two or More Races. See the Definitions entry for race/ethnicity for more information.

Approximately eighty percent of Medicare beneficiaries living in the community report good, very good, or excellent health. Approximately eighty-three percent report the same or better health compared to one year ago.

Table 2. Self-reported health status of Medicare beneficiaries living in the community by age, 2021ⁱⁱ

		Total	< 65 years ^{iv}	≥ 65 years
		Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)
Current Overall Health Status	Excellent	17.5 (0.4)	5.5 (0.5)	19.3 (0.5)
	Very good	32.0 (0.5)	13.8 (0.8)	34.7 (0.6)
	Good	30.2 (0.5)	31.5 (1.2)	30.0 (0.6)
	Fair	14.9 (0.3)	33.5 (1.2)	12.2 (0.4)
	Poor	4.8 (0.2)	14.5 (1.0)	3.4 (0.2)
Overall Health Status Compared to 1 Year Ago	Much better	5.2 (0.2)	5.9 (0.6)	5.1 (0.3)
	Somewhat better	10.2 (0.3)	12.3 (0.8)	9.9 (0.3)
	About the same	67.1 (0.5)	56.8 (1.4)	68.6 (0.6)
	Somewhat worse	14.8 (0.4)	19.8 (1.1)	14.1 (0.4)
	Much worse	2.2 (0.2)	4.9 (0.7)	1.8 (0.2)

SOURCE: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey, Preliminary Data from the Survey File, 2021.

Forty-five percent of Medicare beneficiaries living in the community report at least one disability. Slightly over one-quarter report difficulties with walking or climbing stairs.

Table 3. Disabilities among Medicare beneficiaries living in the community by age, 2021ⁱⁱ

		Total	< 65 years ^{iv}	≥ 65 years
		Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)
Serious Difficulty Reported with...	<i>Walking or Climbing Stairs</i>	26.3 (0.4)	48.1 (1.4)	23.1 (0.5)
	<i>Concentrating, Remembering, or Making Decisions</i>	14.7 (0.4)	41.2 (1.3)	10.9 (0.4)
	<i>Dressing or Bathing</i>	9.6 (0.3)	24.1 (1.2)	7.5 (0.3)
	<i>Doing Errands</i>	15.7 (0.4)	37.3 (1.4)	12.6 (0.4)
	<i>Hearing</i>	16.2 (0.5)	10.1 (0.9)	17.1 (0.6)
	<i>Seeing</i>	6.9 (0.3)	13.5 (0.9)	5.9 (0.3)
Disability Status	<i>Two or More Disabilities</i>	23.5 (0.4)	51.4 (1.3)	19.4 (0.5)
	<i>One Disability</i>	21.5 (0.4)	25.2 (1.1)	21.0 (0.5)
	<i>No Disability</i>	54.8 (0.6)	23.2 (1.1)	59.4 (0.7)

SOURCE: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey, Preliminary Data from the Survey File, 2021.

Most Medicare beneficiaries living in the community report no trouble or delays in accessing health care and are satisfied with health care quality, ease of access, and cost.

Table 4. Selected access to and satisfaction with care measures for Medicare beneficiaries living in the community by age, 2021ⁱⁱ

		Total	< 65 years ^{iv}	≥ 65 years
		Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)	Weighted % (SE)
Trouble Getting Care	Yes	7.2 (0.3)	14.0 (1.0)	6.2 (0.3)
	No	92.5 (0.3)	85.6 (1.0)	93.5 (0.3)
Delayed Care Due to Cost	Yes	6.4 (0.2)	16.4 (0.8)	4.9 (0.2)
	No	93.4 (0.2)	83.3 (0.8)	94.9 (0.2)
Satisfaction with General Care^v	Satisfied	94.3 (0.3)	90.1 (0.9)	94.9 (0.3)
	Dissatisfied	5.2 (0.2)	9.2 (0.8)	4.7 (0.2)
Satisfaction with Ease of Access to Doctor^v	Satisfied	95.3 (0.3)	90.6 (0.9)	96.0 (0.3)
	Dissatisfied	4.2 (0.3)	8.7 (0.9)	3.6 (0.3)
Satisfaction with Cost^v	Satisfied	86.9 (0.5)	79.7 (1.0)	87.9 (0.5)
	Dissatisfied	12.3 (0.5)	19.4 (1.0)	11.3 (0.5)

SOURCE: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey, Preliminary Data from the Survey File, 2021.

^{iv} Eligible for Medicare due to certain disabling conditions or End-Stage Renal Disease.

^v Responses of "Not Applicable" (indicating the beneficiary did not receive the type of health care over the past year) are excluded from the denominator of these estimates.

WHAT'S NEW

The 2021 Early Look features additional categories for beneficiary educational attainment in Table 1. Responses of “Bachelor’s degree or beyond” have been recategorized as “Bachelor’s degree” or “Graduate or professional degree” as appropriate.

While not featured in this Early Look, the 2021 MCBS Survey File release will include two new segments for COVID-19 vaccine history data, one for beneficiaries living in the community and one for beneficiaries living in a facility. The 2021 MCBS Survey File release will also include a new segment containing information on beneficiaries' use of telemedicine services for those living in the community.

DEFINITIONS

In addition to providing definitions of key terms, this section describes the construction of the analytic variables used to create the Early Look preliminary estimates.

Beneficiary: Beneficiary refers to a person receiving Medicare services who may or may not be participating in the MCBS. Beneficiary may also refer to an individual selected from the MCBS sample about whom the MCBS collects information.^{vi}

Community interview: Survey administered for beneficiaries living in the community (i.e., not in a long-term care facility such as a nursing home) during the reference period covered by the MCBS interview. An interview may be conducted with the beneficiary or a proxy.

Delayed care due to cost: Respondents were asked whether the beneficiary had delayed medical care due to costs. The reference period for this question is “since last year”.

Disabilities: Serious difficulty with walking or climbing stairs; concentrating, remembering, or making decisions due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition; dressing and bathing; doing errands; hearing; and seeing. Beneficiaries who had no serious difficulties with these activities were included in the category “No disability.” Beneficiaries who had a serious difficulty in one area were categorized as having “One disability” and those who had a serious difficulty in more than one area were categorized as having “Two or more disabilities.”

Education: Education refers to the highest level of education that a beneficiary has completed, as reported by the respondent. Beneficiaries were categorized as “Less than a high school diploma,” “High school graduate,” “Some college/vocational school,” “Bachelor’s degree” (e.g., BA, BS), or “Graduate or professional degree” (e.g., MA, MS, MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD, PhD).

Health status: Self-rated general health compared to 1) other people of the same age and 2) his or her general health from one year prior.

Proxy: A proxy is a person, generally designated by the beneficiary, who is sufficiently familiar with the beneficiary’s health care events and costs and responds on behalf of the beneficiary. In addition, a proxy completes a Community component when a beneficiary is no longer able to participate, including when a beneficiary died since the date of the last interview, or has entered a Facility setting.

Race/ethnicity: Hispanic origin and race are two separate and distinct categories. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race or combination of races. Hispanic origin includes persons of

^{vi} <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-General-Information/MedicareGenInfo/index.html>.

Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, or Spanish origin. For the MCBS, responses to beneficiary race and ethnicity questions are reported by the respondent. More than one race may be reported. For conciseness, the text, tables, and figures in this document use shorter versions of the terms for race and Hispanic or Latino origin specified in the Office of Management and Budget 1997 Standards for Data on Race and Ethnicity. Beneficiaries reported as White and not of Hispanic origin were coded as White non-Hispanic; beneficiaries reported as Black/African American and not of Hispanic origin were coded as Black non-Hispanic; beneficiaries reported as Hispanic, Latino/Latina, or of Spanish origin, regardless of their race, were coded as Hispanic. The “Other Race/Ethnicity” category includes other single races not of Hispanic origin (including American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander), or Two or More Races.

Respondent: Respondent refers to a person who answers questions for the MCBS; for Community interviews, this person can be the beneficiary or a proxy.

Satisfaction with care: The questions about satisfaction with care represent the respondent’s general opinion of all medical care received in the year preceding the interview.

- General care refers to the rating of the overall quality of medical care received by the beneficiary.
- Ease of access to doctor refers to the rating of the ease and convenience of getting to a doctor or other health professional from the beneficiary’s residence.
- Cost refers to the rating of the out-of-pocket costs the beneficiary paid for medical care.

The respondent rates satisfaction along a four-point satisfaction scale. “Very satisfied” and “Satisfied” are collapsed into a “Satisfied” response. “Dissatisfied” and “Very dissatisfied” are collapsed into “Dissatisfied.”

Trouble getting care: Respondents were asked if they had any trouble getting health care that they wanted or needed. The reference period for this question is “since last year”.

Veteran: A beneficiary reported as ever having served in the armed forces.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

These preliminary estimates are based on data from the 2021 MCBS, a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of Medicare beneficiaries sponsored by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and directed by the Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics (OEDA). The MCBS is the most comprehensive and complete survey available on the Medicare population and is essential in capturing data not otherwise collected through operations and administration of the Medicare program.

MCBS Limited Data Sets (LDS) are available to researchers with a data use agreement (DUA). Requests for the MCBS LDS files must be made through the CMS DUA tracking system known as the Enterprise Privacy Policy Engine (EPPE). Information on ordering MCBS files from CMS, including instructions for accessing and using EPPE to make a request, can be obtained through the CMS LDS website at <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Files-for-Order/Data-Disclosures-Data-Agreements/DUA - NewLDS>. MCBS Public Use Files (PUFs) are available to the public as free downloads and can be found through the CMS PUF website at <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Downloadable-Public-Use-Files/MCBS-Public-Use-File>.

For details about the MCBS sample design, survey operations, and data files, please see the most recent *MCBS Methodology Report* and *Data User's Guides* available on the CMS MCBS website at <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS>.

The universe for the 2021 MCBS Early Look included all Medicare beneficiaries living in the community who completed a Community interview in the fall 2021 round of data collection. The final dataset included 12,603 beneficiaries (weighted N=58,083,673). To account for the complex sample design, standard errors were generated using the balanced repeated replication method with a series of replicate weights.

The MCBS is authorized by section 1875 (42 USC 139511) of the Social Security Act and is conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The OMB Number for this survey is 0938-0568.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

This communication was produced, published, and disseminated at U.S. taxpayer expense. All material appearing in the Early Look is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission; citation as to source, however, is appreciated. The suggested citation for the 2021 MCBS Early Look is:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (2023). 2021 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey Early Look Estimates. Retrieved from <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS/Data-Briefs>.