

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

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The core of this CHARTBOOK is a series of chapters devoted to individual racial/ethnic subgroups. Each of these chapters compares a particular non-White racial/ethnic subgroup with the White, non-Hispanic/Latino subgroup.

The primary source of data for this CHARTBOOK is the responses to the Medicare Managed Care (MMC) Consumer Assessment of Health Plans (CAHPS) Surveys for 1997, 1998, and 1999. The MMC CAHPS Surveys were administered to a sample of enrollees in Medicare managed care plans. Other data sources were used to obtain information on comparison groups, such as the total U.S. population and the total Medicare population.

Medicare Managed Care

Medicare Managed Care is an alternative to Original Medicare for Medicare beneficiaries. Original Medicare started in 1966. It is essentially a single federal program that is modeled on private sector fee-for-service (FFS) plans. Beneficiaries receive a standard package of benefits from providers under contract with Medicare. They pay monthly premiums and are subject to deductibles and coinsurance. Providers are paid according to fee schedules and other formulas that are updated and revised periodically. Claims are processed through private insurance companies under contract with Medicare.

Under Medicare managed care, plans are operated by private-sector companies (usually insurance companies that also have commercial plans) that contract with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide a package of health care benefits to Medicare enrollees in exchange for some form of reimbursement. Therefore, Medicare managed care plans contract with Medicare on one side and contract with providers to provide services to beneficiaries they enroll on the other side. Plans can enter or leave the Medicare managed care program annually (including expanding or contracting their service areas). The vast majority of Medicare managed care plans are risk-HMOs. Under the Medicare+Choice program that began in 1998, other forms of managed care were allowed, such as Preferred Provider Organizations, Point-of-Service plans, and private sector fee-for-service plans. However, very few of these new forms of plans had been started by 2001.

The number of plans in existence during the period under study is in the several hundreds. For instance, there were 347 plans in 1998. Out of approximately 39 million Medicare beneficiaries in 1998, approximately 6 million, or 15%, were in Medicare managed care plans.

MMC CAHPS Surveys

Following is a brief description of how the samples were obtained for the MMC CAHPS Surveys. MMC plans were eligible if they had separate Medicare risk contracts in effect and had been in business for at least two years. Some plans had multiple contracts with CMS—formerly the Health Care Financing Administration. In such cases each contract unit was treated separately because each contract represents a separate business relationship with CMS. A sample of enrollees who had been enrolled for at least 12 months was drawn for each contract. A random

sample of 600 was drawn for most plans, except for a few plans with small enrollment for which all eligible enrollees were surveyed. Beneficiaries were excluded if they left the plan before completing the survey.

The surveys for 1997, 1998, and 1999 are generally comparable from year to year, so the three years of data were aggregated. Some adjustments were required, however. A few individuals were surveyed in more than one year. In such cases only records for the latest year were kept. Survey questions that differed across years were handled as described in the following section.

Question Comparability

The content and question wording for the 1997 MMC CAHPS Survey are different from that for the 1998 and 1999 surveys (which are identical) for some questions. Questions that did not appear in all surveys were retained in the analysis file but may not have been used in this study because of insufficient observations.

The wording of a few questions was modified after 1997. In an attempt retain as much year-to-year comparability as possible, these differences were addressed question by question—assisted by an examination of response statistics—and a determination was made as to whether or not the difference was material enough to constitute a new question. Exhibit II-1 provides a brief description for each case.

EXHIBIT 2-1. RESOLUTION OF QUESTION WORDING CHANGES IN THE MMC CAHPS SURVEYS

Question # on 1997 Survey	Question # on 1998 and 1999 Surveys	Topic	Problem/Resolution
12	16	Frequency of seeing a specialist	The answers to the 1997 question are qualitative (“Sometimes,” “Usually,” ...), whereas the answers to the 1998/1999 questions are quantitative (“1,” “2,” ...). The 1997 question was treated as a different question from its equivalent in 1998 and 1999.
19	23	Care for illness or injury	The 1997 question asks if the respondent <u>tried</u> to see a doctor right away to get care for an illness or injury and the one for 1998 and 1999 asks if the respondent <u>had</u> an illness or injury that needed care right away from a doctor. 1997 was treated as a different question from its equivalent in 1998 and 1999.
21	21	Making appointments for regular or routine care	The 1997 question asks if the respondent <u>tried</u> to make an appointment and the one for 1998 and 1999 asks if the respondent <u>made</u> an appointment. 1997 was treated as a different question from its equivalent in 1998 and 1999.
24	25	Times went to emergency room	Multiple-choice answers are different between surveys. The choices for all survey years were recoded to: “None” and “1 or more times.”
45	43	Prescriptions	The question in 1997 asks if the respondent <u>got</u> <u>any</u> prescription medicine and the one in 1998 and 1999 asks if the respondent got <u>any new</u> prescription or <u>refilled</u> a prescription. 1997 was treated as a different question from its equivalent in 1998 and 1999.
77	80	Times advised to quit smoking during specified period	The specified periods differed for the 1997 survey (12 months) and the 1998 and 1999 surveys (6 months). 1997 was treated as a different question from its equivalent in 1998 and 1999.

Source: MMC CAHPS Surveys for 1997, 1998, and 1999.

Race And Ethnicity

Responses to two multiple-choice questions were used to classify individuals by race and ethnicity. One question and its answer choices is:

What is your race? Please mark one or more.

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

(The 1997 survey also included “other” with a write-in box. The relatively few observations for which “other” was the only response for race were deleted for the purposes of this CHARTBOOK.)

Another question is:

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent?

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Not Hispanic or Latino

The responses to these two questions were used to arrange survey respondents into several racial/ethnic subgroups. They are described in Exhibit II-2, along with their simple descriptors that are used occasionally throughout this CHARTBOOK.

EXHIBIT 2-2. RACIAL/ETHNIC SUBGROUP DEFINITIONS

Subgroup Definition	Descriptor
White, non-Hispanic/Latino	White
Black or African-American, non-Hispanic/Latino	Black
Asian, non-Hispanic/Latino	Asian
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic/Latino	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic/Latino	American Indian/Alaska Native
Hispanic/Latino, any single race	Hispanic/Latino

Source: MMC CAHPS Surveys for 1997, 1998, and 1999.

Self-indicated Multiracial Individuals

A classification issue arises because the option allows the respondent to indicate more than one race. Approximately 98% of survey respondents checked only one box for race. However, 1% of respondents checked two boxes for race, and the remaining 1% checked three or more boxes. Exhibit II-3 shows how many non-Hispanic/Latino and Hispanic/Latino individuals self-indicated one or more boxes for race. Along the main diagonal, the top figure in each cell is the number of persons who indicated only one race; the lower number indicates how many indicated only that race as well as the number who indicated that race and one or more other races.¹ For example, 276,055 persons indicated White only and 279,787 indicated White and, possibly, one

or more other races. Cells above the main diagonal show how many respondents indicated just the two races associated with that particular row and column; e.g., 459 indicated White and Black but no additional races. (The cells below the main diagonal are duplicative of those above and so are left empty.) It is not obvious how to classify the relatively few self-indicated multiracial individuals so they are excluded from this CHARTBOOK. Those respondents who did not choose any race were also excluded.

EXHIBIT 2-3. NUMBER OF SELF-INDICATED SINGLE AND MULTIRACIAL MMC CAHPS RESPONDENTS

	White	Black	Asian	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native
White	276,055 279,787	459	148	145	2362
Black		21,089 22,534	37	9	358
Asian			5,786 6,519	83	9
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander				4,302 4,493	10
American Indian/ Alaska Native					1,289 4,621

Source: MMC CAHPS Surveys for 1997, 1998, and 1999.

Notes: Numbers for each race include non-Hispanic/Latino and Hispanic/Latino individuals as well as persons of unknown Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Along the main diagonal, the top figure in each cell is the number of persons who indicated *only* one race; the bottom figure is how many indicated the relevant race *and* zero to four other races. Cells above the main diagonal show how many respondents indicated just the two races associated with that particular row and column. The cells below the main diagonal are duplicative of those above the main diagonal.

Endnotes

¹ The numbers in each cell of Table II-3 include Hispanics/Latinos as well as non-Hispanics/Latinos. Therefore, the top number along the main diagonal for a given race is for non-Hispanic/Latino, single race persons and Hispanics/Latinos who indicated the relevant race. This is in contrast to Table I-1, in which the number for a given race excludes Hispanics/Latinos, who are presented in their own column.