

2. Operation

The National Center for Health Statistics operates as a Federal program conducted primarily in Washington, D.C. Statistical data are collected for the Center in three ways: (1) Direct purchases of microfilm copies of vital records, that is, birth, death, marriage, and divorce records from States; (2) contractual arrangements under which the Bureau of the Census acts as a collection agent for some types of statistical data, and (3) direct contact between Center representatives and respondents selected as part of a national sample. Data are then compiled, analyzed, and published by personnel of the National Center for Health Statistics.

A small number of contracts are let each year with nonprofit organizations for developmental work, such as design and testing of survey questionnaires for the collection of information on selected health topics.

3. History

The National Center for Health Statistics was established as an organizational unit in the Office of the Surgeon General in August 1960. The Center was created in response to recommendations submitted by the Study Group on Mission and Organization of the Public Health Service.

The program of the Center is based on the following objectives:

- (a) To bring together the major components of Public Health Service competence in the measurement of health status of the Nation and the identification of significant associations between characteristics of the population and health-related problems.
- (b) Stimulate optimal use of technical and methodologic innovations in the collection, processing and analysis of health statistics.
- (c) Create a resource for technical assistance in statistical data processing.
- (d) Associate closely the functions of collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination.
- (e) Permit expansion of health intelligence programs to correlate and interpret data from various sources.
- (f) Give better visibility to the national and international leadership of the Public Health Service in vital and health statistics.

With regard to subject matter the responsibilities of the Center cover those types of health statistics traditionally included in vital statistics—birth, death, fetal death, marriage, and divorce—and newer types of health statistics obtained from survey sources—morbidity data, incidence of accidents, disability, health insurance coverage, medical care costs, and many others.

The vital statistics function originated in 1904 when the Federal Government began a cooperative effort with the States aimed at the improvement of vital registration. After 61 years of Federal-States cooperation the U.S. vital statistics system has achieved a high state of technical development providing comprehensive and detailed national statistics which serve as the basic statistical reference resource for planning and evaluation of health programs and for use by research workers, including demographers, sociologists, and a myriad of other