

MEPS HC 248E: 2023 Emergency Room Visits

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A. Data Use Agreement

Individual identifiers have been removed from the micro-data contained in these files. Nevertheless, under Sections 308 (d) and 903 (c) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 242m and 42 U.S.C. 299 a-1), data collected by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and/or the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) may not be used for any purpose other than for the purpose for which they were supplied; any effort to determine the identity of any reported cases is prohibited by law.

Therefore in accordance with the above referenced Federal Statute, it is understood that:

1. No one is to use the data in this dataset in any way except for statistical reporting and analysis; and
2. If the identity of any person or establishment should be discovered inadvertently, then (a) no use will be made of this knowledge, (b) the Director Office of Management AHRQ will be advised of this incident, (c) the information that would identify any individual or establishment will be safeguarded or destroyed, as requested by AHRQ, and (d) no one else will be informed of the discovered identity; and
3. No one will attempt to link this dataset with individually identifiable records from any datasets other than the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey or the National Health Interview Survey. Furthermore, linkage of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey and the National Health Interview Survey may not occur outside the AHRQ Data Center, NCHS Research Data Center (RDC) or the U.S. Census RDC network.

By using these data you signify your agreement to comply with the above stated statutorily based requirements with the knowledge that deliberately making a false statement in any matter within the jurisdiction of any department or agency of the Federal Government violates Title 18 part 1 Chapter 47 Section 1001 and is punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000 or up to 5 years in prison.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality requests that users cite AHRQ and the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey as the data source in any publications or research based upon these data.

B. Background

1.0 Household Component

The Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) provides nationally representative estimates of health care use, expenditures, sources of payment, and health insurance coverage for the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. The MEPS Household Component (HC) also provides estimates of respondents' health status, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, employment, access to care, and satisfaction with care. Estimates can be produced for individuals, families, and selected population subgroups. The panel design of the survey includes five rounds of interviews covering 2 full calendar years. Information about each household member is collected through computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) technology, and the survey builds on this information from interview to interview. All data for a sampled household are reported by a single household respondent.

The MEPS HC was initiated in 1996. Each year, a new panel of sample households is selected. Because the data collected are comparable to those from earlier medical expenditure surveys conducted in 1977 and 1987, it is possible to analyze long-term trends. Historically, each annual MEPS HC sample consists of up to 15,000 households. Data can be analyzed at the person, the family, or the event level. Data must be weighted to produce national estimates.

The set of households selected for each panel of the MEPS HC is a subsample of households participating in the previous year's National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The NHIS sampling frame provides a nationally representative sample of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. In 2006, the NCHS implemented a new sample design for the NHIS, to include households with Asian persons in addition to households with Black and Hispanic persons in the oversampling of minority populations. In 2016, NCHS introduced another sample design that discontinued the oversampling of these minority groups.

2.0 Medical Provider Component

When the household CAPI interview is completed and permission is obtained from the sample members to contact their medical provider(s), a sample of these providers is contacted by telephone to obtain information that household respondents cannot accurately provide. This part of the MEPS is called the Medical Provider Component (MPC), and it collects information on dates of visits, diagnosis and procedure codes, and charges and payments. The Pharmacy Component (PC), a subcomponent of the MPC, does not collect data on charges or on diagnosis and procedure codes, but it does collect detailed information on drugs, including the National Drug Code (NDC) and medicine name, as well as amounts of payment. The MPC is not designed to yield national estimates. It is primarily used as an imputation source to supplement/replace household reported expenditure information.

3.0 Survey Management and Data Collection

MEPS HC and MPC data are collected under the authority of the Public Health Service Act. The MEPS HC data are collected under contract with Westat, Inc., and the MEPS MPC data are collected under contract with Research Triangle Institute. Datasets and summary statistics are edited and published in accordance with the confidentiality provisions of the Public Health Service Act and the Privacy Act. The NCHS provides consultation and technical assistance.

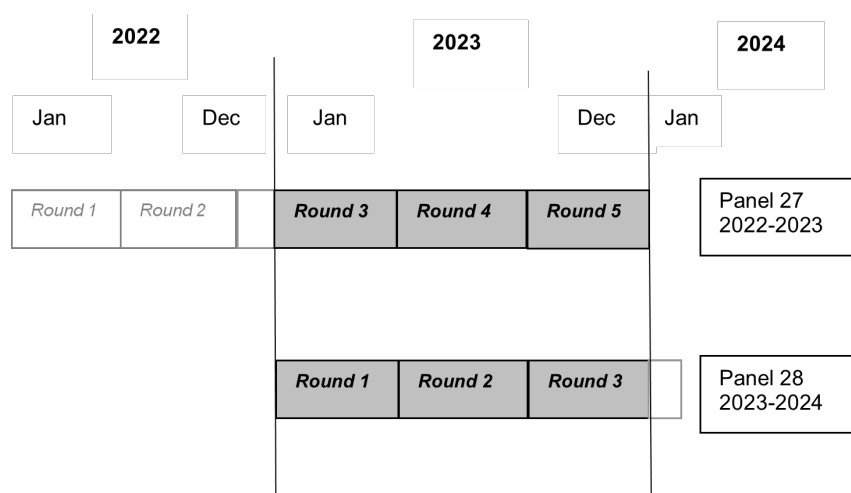
As soon as the MEPS data are collected and edited, they are released to the public in stages of microdata files and tables via the [MEPS website](#) and datatools.ahrq.gov.

Additional information on MEPS is available from the MEPS project manager or the MEPS public use data manager at the Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857 (301-427-1406).

C. Technical and Programming Information

1.0 General Information

This documentation describes one in a series of public use event files from the 2023 MEPS HC and MPC. It was released as an ASCII data file (with related SAS, Stata, R, and SPSS programming statements and data user information) and as a SAS dataset, a SAS transport file, a Stata dataset, and an Excel file. The 2023 Emergency Room Visits Public Use File (hereafter referred to as the EROM PUF), provides detailed information on emergency room visits from a nationally representative sample of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. Data from the EROM PUF can be used to make estimates of emergency room utilization and expenditures for calendar year 2023. The file contains 53 variables and has a logical record length of 309 with an additional 2-byte carriage return/line feed at the end of each record. This PUF consists of MEPS survey data in the 2023 portion of Round 3, and all of Rounds 4 and 5 for Panel 27; and Rounds 1, 2 and the 2023 portion of Round 3 for Panel 28 (i.e., the rounds for MEPS panels covering calendar year 2023), as illustrated below.



Emergency room events reported in Panel 27 Round 5 and Panel 28 Round 3 and known to have occurred after December 31, 2023 are not included in this PUF.

Annual counts of emergency room visits are based entirely on household reports. Information from the MEPS MPC is used to supplement expenditure and payment data reported by the household and does not affect use estimates.

Data from the EROM PUF can be merged with other 2023 MEPS HC PUFs for purposes of appending person-level data such as demographic characteristics or health insurance coverage to each emergency room record.

This PUF can also be used to construct summary variables of expenditures, sources of payment, and related aspects of emergency room visits. Aggregate annual person-level information on the use of emergency rooms and other health services is provided on the MEPS 2023 Full Year

Consolidated PUF (hereafter referred to as the Consolidated PUF), where each record represents a MEPS sampled person.

This document offers an overview of the types and levels of data provided, and the content and structure of the PUF and the codebook. It contains the following sections:

- Data File Information (Section 2.0)
- Survey Sample Information (Section 3.0)
- Strategies for Estimation (Section 4.0)
- Merging/Linking MEPS Data Files (Section 5.0)
- Variable - Source Crosswalk (Section D)

Any variables not found in this PUF but released in previous years' PUFs may have been excluded because they contained only missing data.

For more information on the MEPS HC sample design, see Chowdhury et al. (2019). For information on the MEPS MPC design, see RTI (2019). Copies of the HC and the MPC survey instruments used to collect the information in the EROM PUF are available in the *Survey Questionnaires* section of the [MEPS website](#).

2.0 Data File Information

The 2023 EROM PUF consists of one event-level file. The file contains characteristics associated with the emergency room event and imputed expenditure data.

The 2023 EROM PUF contains variables and frequency distributions for 4,241 emergency room visits reported during the 2023 portion of Round 3, and all of Rounds 4 and 5 for Panel 27 and Rounds 1, 2, and the 2023 portion of Round 3 of Panel 28 of the MEPS HC. This PUF includes emergency room visit records for all household survey members who resided in eligible responding households and reported at least one emergency room visit. Records where the emergency room visit was known to have occurred after December 31, 2023 are not included in this PUF. Of these 4,241 records, 4,171 were associated with persons having positive person-level weights (PERWT23F). The persons represented in this PUF had to meet either a) or b):

- a) Be classified as Key in-scope persons who responded for their entire period of 2023 eligibility (i.e., persons with a positive 2023 full-year person-level weight, $PERWT23F > 0$), or
- b) Be an eligible member of a family whose Key in-scope members have a positive person-level weight ($PERWT23F > 0$). (Such a family consists of all persons with the same value for FAMIDYR.) That is, the person must have a positive full-year family-level weight ($FAMWT23F > 0$). Note that FAMIDYR and FAMWT23F are variables on the 2023 Consolidated PUF.

Persons with no emergency room visit events for 2023 are not included in this event-level EROM PUF but are represented on the person-level 2023 Full Year Population Characteristics PUF (hereafter referred to as the Population Characteristics PUF).

Each emergency room visit record includes the following: date of the visit; whether person saw a doctor; type of care received; type of services (i.e., lab test, sonogram or ultrasound, x-rays, etc.) received; medicines prescribed during the visit; flat fee information; imputed sources of payment; total payment and total charge; a full year person-level weight; variance strata; and variance PSU.

To append person-level information such as demographic characteristics or health insurance coverage to each event record, data from this PUF can be merged with 2023 MEPS HC person-level data (e.g. Consolidated or Population Characteristics PUFs) using the person identifier, DUPERSID. Emergency room visit events can also be linked to the MEPS 2023 Medical Conditions PUF (hereafter referred to as the Conditions PUF). Please see Section 5.0 and the Appendix to MEPS 2023 Event Files (hereafter referred to as the Appendix PUF), HC 248I for details on how to merge MEPS data files.

2.1 Codebook Structure

For most variables on this EROM PUF, both weighted and unweighted frequencies are provided in the accompanying codebook. The exceptions to this are weight variables and variance estimation variables. Only unweighted frequencies of these variables are included in the accompanying codebook file. See the Weights Variables list in Section D: Variable-Source Crosswalk.

The codebook and data file list variables in the following order:

- Unique person identifiers
- Unique emergency room event identifiers
- Emergency room characteristic variables
- Imputed expenditure variables
- Weight and variance estimation variables

Note that the person identifier corresponds to a unique person and the emergency room event identifier corresponds to a unique event.

2.2 Reserved Codes

This EROM PUF contains several reserved code values.

Table 1***Reserved Code Values and Definitions***

Value	Label	Definition
-1	Inapplicable	Question was not asked due to skip pattern
-7	Refused	Question was asked and respondent refused to answer question
-8	Don't know	Question was asked and respondent did not know answer or the information could not be ascertained
-15	Cannot be computed	Value cannot be derived from data

The value Cannot be Computed (-15) is assigned to MEPS constructed variables when there was not enough information from the instrument to calculate the constructed variables. Not having enough information is often the result of skip patterns in the data or of missing information stemming from the responses Refused (-7) or Don't Know (-8). Note that, in addition to Don't Know, reserved code -8 also includes cases for which the information from the question was not ascertained.

Generally, values of -1, -7, -8, and -15 for non-expenditure variables have not been edited in this PUF. Analysts who would like to recode these values can find skip patterns in the [HC survey questionnaire](#) located on the [MEPS website](#).

2.3 Codebook Format

The codebook describes an ASCII dataset (although the data are also being provided in a SAS data set, a SAS transport file, a Stata data set, and an Excel file) and provides the programming identifiers for each variable.

Table 2***Programming Identifiers for Each Variable in the EROM PUF***

Identifier	Description
Name	Variable name
Description	Variable descriptor
Format	Number of bytes
Type	Type of data: numeric (indicated by NUM) or character (indicated by CHAR)
Start	Beginning column position of variable in record
End	Ending column position of variable in record

2.4 Variable Source and Naming Conventions

In general, the variable names reflect the content of the variable. All imputed/edited variables end with an “X”.

As the collection, universe, or categories of variables were altered, some variable names have been appended with “_Myy” where “yy” indicates the collection year in which the alterations were made. Such alterations are described in detail throughout this document.

2.4.1 Variable-Source Crosswalk

Variables in this EROM PUF were derived from the MPC data collection instrument, from CAPI, or were assigned in sampling. The source of each variable is identified in Section D: Variable - Source Crosswalk in one of four ways:

1. Variables derived from CAPI or assigned in sampling are indicated as “CAPI derived” or “Assigned in sampling,”
2. Variables from one or more specific questions have those questionnaire sections and question numbers indicated in the “Source” column; questionnaire sections are identified as:
 - ER - Emergency Room section
 - FF - Flat Fee section
 - CP - Charge Payment section;
3. Variables constructed from multiple questions by using complex algorithms are labeled “Constructed” in the “Source” column; and
4. Variables that have been edited or imputed are so indicated.

2.4.2 Expenditure and Source of Payment Variables

The names of the expenditure and source of payment variables follow a standard convention and end in an “X”, indicating that they were edited/imputed. Please note that imputed means that a series of logical edits, as well as an imputation process to account for missing data, were performed on the variable.

The total sum of payments and the 10 source of payment variables are named in the following way:

The first two characters indicate the type of event:

IP - inpatient stay

ER - emergency room visit

HH - home health visit

OP - outpatient visit

OM - other medical equipment

DV - dental visit

OB - office-based visit

RX - prescribed medicine

For expenditure variables in the EROM PUF, the third character indicates whether the expenditure is associated with the facility (F) or the physician (D).

In the case of the source of payment variables, the fourth and fifth characters indicate:

SF - self or family

TR - TRICARE

MR - Medicare

OF - other federal government

MD - Medicaid

SL - state/local government

PV - private insurance

WC - Workers' Compensation

VA - Veterans
Administration/CHAMPVA

OT - other insurance

XP - sum of payments

In addition, the total charge variable is indicated by TC in the variable name.

The sixth and seventh characters indicate the year (23). The eighth character, being "X", indicates the variable is edited/imputed.

For example, ERFSF23X is the edited/imputed amount paid by self or family for the facility portion of the expenditure associated with an emergency room visit.

2.5 File Contents

2.5.1 Survey Administration Variables

Person Identifiers (DUID, PID, DUPERSID)

The definitions of Dwelling Units (DUs) in the MEPS Household Survey are generally consistent with the definitions employed for the NHIS. The dwelling unit ID (DUID) is a 7-digit number consisting of a 2-digit panel number followed by a 5-digit random number assigned after the case was sampled for MEPS. A 3-digit person number (PID) uniquely identifies each person within the DU. The variable DUPERSID is the combination of DUID and PID. IDs begin with the 2-digit panel number.

For detailed information on dwelling units and families, please refer to the documentation for the 2023 Population Characteristics PUF.

Record Identifiers (EVNTIDX, ERHEVIDX, FFEEIDX)

EVNTIDX uniquely identifies each emergency room visit/event (i.e., each record in this EROM PUF) and is the variable required to link emergency room events to the Conditions PUF. EVNTIDX begins with a 2-digit panel number and ends with a 2-digit event type number. For details on linking, see Section 5.0: Merging/Linking MEPS Data Files, or the MEPS 2023 Appendix PUF, HC 248I.

ERHEVIDX is a constructed variable identifying an emergency room record that has its facility expenditures represented on an associated hospital inpatient stay record. When provider-reported ER-HS links are set, they take precedence. These links are established based on MPC-reported start and end dates, along with other provider-reported information. For events without the provider-reported ER-HS links, ERHEVIDX is constructed from the final linkage between a hospital inpatient stay and an emergency room visit reported by the household (see Section 2.5.6: Emergency Room/Hospital Inpatient Stay Expenditures).

The variable ERHEVIDX contains the EVNTIDX of the linked event. In the 2023 EROM PUF, there are 896 emergency room events linked to subsequent hospital stays. Please note that where the emergency room visit is associated with a hospital stay (and its expenditures and charges are included with the hospital stay), the physician expenditures associated with the emergency room visit remain in the EROM PUF.

FFEEIDX is a constructed variable that uniquely identifies a flat fee group, that is, all events that were a part of a flat fee payment.

Round Indicator (EVENTRN)

EVENTRN indicates the round in which the emergency room visit was reported. Please note: Rounds 3 (partial), 4, and 5 are associated with MEPS data collected from Panel 27. Likewise: Rounds 1, 2, and 3 (partial) are associated with data collected from Panel 28.

Panel Indicator (PANEL)

PANEL is a constructed variable used to specify the panel number for the person. PANEL will indicate either Panel 27 or Panel 28 for each person in the PUF. Panel 27 is the panel that started in 2022 and Panel 28 is the panel that started in 2023.

2.5.2 MPC Data Indicator (MPCDATA)

MPCDATA is a constructed variable that indicates whether MPC data were collected for the emergency room visit. While all emergency room events are sampled into the MPC, not all

emergency room event records have MPC data associated with them. This depends upon the cooperation of the household respondent to provide permission forms to contact the emergency room facility as well as the cooperation of the emergency room facility to participate in the survey.

2.5.3 Emergency Room Visit Event Variables

This PUF contains variables describing emergency room visits/events reported by household respondents in the Emergency Room section of the MEPS HC questionnaire. The questionnaire contains specific probes for determining details about the emergency room event. These variables have not been edited.

Visit Details (ERDATEYR-VSTRELCN)

When a person reported having had a visit to the emergency room, the year and month of the emergency room visit was recorded (ERDATEYR and ERDATEMM respectively). The type of care the person received (VSTCTGRY) and whether the visit was related to a specific condition (VSTRELCN) were also determined.

Services, Procedures, and Prescription Medicines (LABTEST_M18-MEDPRESC)

Services received during the visit included whether the person received lab tests (LABTEST_M18), a sonogram or ultrasound (SONOGRAM_M18), x-rays (XRAYS_M18), a mammogram (MAMMOG_M18), an MRI or CAT scan (MRI_M18), an electrocardiogram / an electroencephalogram (EKG_M18), or a vaccination (RCVVAC_M18). Due to design changes, beginning in 2017, EEG was combined with EKG; ANESTH (This visit did p receive anesthesia) and THRTSWAB (This visit did p have a throat swab) were removed. Beginning in 2018, OTHSVCE was removed. Whether a surgical procedure was performed during the visit was asked (SURGPROC). The questionnaire determined if a medicine was prescribed for the person during the emergency room visit (MEDPRESC).

2.5.4 Clinical Classification Software Refined

Information on household-reported medical conditions (ICD-10-CM condition codes) and aggregated clinically meaningful categories generated using Clinical Classification Software Refined (CCSR) for each emergency room visit are not provided in this PUF. For information on ICD-10-CM condition codes and associated CCSR codes, see the Conditions PUF.

2.5.5 Flat Fee Variables (FFEEIDX, FFERTYPE)

Definition of Flat Fee Payments

A flat fee is the fixed dollar amount a person is charged for a package of health care services provided during a defined period. Examples are: an obstetrician's fee covering a normal delivery, as well as pre- and post-natal care; or a surgeon's fee covering a surgical procedure and post-surgical care. A flat fee group is a set of medical services (i.e., events) that are covered under the same flat fee payment. The flat fee groups represented in this EROM PUF include flat fee groups where at least one of the health care events, as reported by the HC respondent, occurred during 2023. By definition, a flat fee group can span multiple years. Furthermore, a single person can have multiple flat fee groups.

It is important to note that certain flat fee bundle types reported by household respondents were identified as having a high likelihood of being simple events misidentified as bundle events. To address this, starting in 2021, HC-reported flat fee bundles were considered as flat fees if the bundle consisted only of dental events.

Other HC-reported bundles were not allowed as flat fee bundles, and events in these bundles were treated as simple events. HC-reported bundles that included a mix of emergency room and hospitalization events were treated as linked events. All emergency room expenditures were combined with hospital inpatient expenditures. However, provider-reported flat fees were processed in a similar way to prior years.

Flat Fee Variable Descriptions

Flat Fee ID (FFEEIDX)

As noted in "Record Identifiers," the variable FFEEIDX uniquely identifies all events that are part of the same flat fee group for a person. On any 2023 event PUF, every event that is part of a specific flat fee group has the same value for FFEEIDX. Note that prescribed medicine and home health events are never included in a flat fee group, and FFEEIDX is not a variable in those event PUFs.

Flat Fee Type (FFERTYPE)

FFERTYPE indicates whether the 2023 emergency room visit is the "stem" or "leaf" of a flat fee group. A stem (records with FFERTYPE = 1) is the initial medical service (event) which is followed by other medical events that are covered under the same flat fee payment. The leaves of the flat fee group (records with FFERTYPE = 2) are those medical events that are tied back to the initial medical event (the stem) in the flat fee group. These "leaf" records have their expenditure variables set to zero. For the emergency room visits that are not part of a flat fee payment, the FFERTYPE is set to Inapplicable (-1).

Counts of Flat Fee Events that Cross Years

Starting in 2021, HC-reported flat fee bundles were treated as flat fees only if the bundle consisted exclusively of dental events. Other HC-reported bundles were not recognized as flat fee bundles; instead, the events within those bundles were treated as simple events. Because flat

fee bundles can span multiple years, 2023 is the first year in which FFBEFYY and FFTOTYY contain no valid values, so these variables have been removed from the PUF.

Caveats of Flat Fee Groups

There are 4 emergency room visits that are identified as being part of a flat fee payment group in this EROM PUF. In general, every flat fee group should have an initial visit (stem) and at least one subsequent visit (leaf). There are some situations where this is not true. For some flat fee groups, the initial visit reported occurred in 2023, but the remaining visits that were part of this flat fee group occurred in 2024. In this case, the 2023 flat fee group represented in this PUF would consist of one event, the stem. The 2024 events that are part of this flat fee group are not represented on the file. Similarly, the household respondent may have reported a flat fee group where the initial visit began in 2022 but subsequent visits occurred during 2023. In this case, the initial visit would not be represented in this PUF. This 2023 flat fee group would then only consist of one or more leaf records and no stem. Note that the Variable-Source Crosswalk lists all possible flat fee variables.

2.5.6 Expenditure Data

Definition of Expenditures

Expenditures in this PUF refer to payments for health care services. More specifically, expenditures in MEPS are defined as the sum of payments for care received for each emergency room visit, including out-of-pocket payments and payments made by private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, and other sources. The definition of expenditures used in MEPS differs from its predecessors: the 1987 NMES and 1977 NMCES surveys where “charges” rather than the sum of payments were used to measure expenditures. This change was adopted because charges became a less appropriate proxy for medical expenditures during the 1990s due to the increasingly common practice of discounting. Although measuring expenditures as the sum of payments incorporates discounts in the MEPS expenditure estimates, the estimates do not incorporate any payment not directly tied to specific medical care visits, such as bonuses or retrospective payment adjustments by third party payers. Currently, charges associated with uncollected liability, bad debt, and charitable care (unless provided by a public clinic or hospital) are not counted as expenditures because there are no associated payments. While charge data are provided in this PUF, analysts should use caution when working with these data because a charge does not typically represent actual dollars exchanged for services or the resource costs of those services; nor are they directly comparable to the expenditures defined in the 1987 NMES. For details on expenditure definitions, see Monheit, et al. (1999). AHRQ has developed factors to apply to the 1987 NMES expenditure data to facilitate longitudinal analysis. These factors are published in Zuvekas and Cohen (2002), and also can be accessed via the CFACT data center. For more information, see the [Data Center section of the MEPS website](#).

Expenditure data related to emergency room visits are broken out by facility and separately billing doctor expenditures. When a facility bills directly for the services provided by physicians and other providers, in MEPS, the facility charge and payments in such cases include the

physician and other providers' charge and payments. This PUF contains six categories of expenditure variables per visit: basic hospital emergency room facility expenses; expenses for doctors who billed separately from the hospital for any emergency room services provided during the emergency room visit; total expenses, which is the sum of the facility and physician expenses; facility charge; physician charge; and total charges, which is the sum of the facility and physician charges. If examining trends in MEPS expenditures, please refer to Section 3.5: Using MEPS Data for Trend Analysis for more information.

Data Editing and Imputation Methodologies of Expenditure Variables

The expenditure data included in this PUF were derived from both the MEPS HC and MPC. The MPC contacted medical providers identified by household respondents. The charge and payment data from medical providers were used in the expenditure imputation process to supplement missing household data. For all emergency room visits, MPC data were used if available; otherwise, HC data were used. Missing data for emergency room visits, where HC data were not complete and MPC data were not collected, or MPC data were not complete, were imputed through the imputation process.

General Data Editing Methodology

Logical edits were used to resolve internal inconsistencies and other problems in the HC and MPC data. The edits were designed to preserve partial payment data from households and providers, and to identify actual and potential sources of payment for each household-reported event. In general, these edits accounted for outliers, copayments or charges reported as total payments, and reimbursed amounts that were reported as out-of-pocket payments. In addition, edits were implemented to correct for misclassifications between Medicare and Medicaid and between Medicare HMOs and private HMOs as payment sources. These edits produced a complete vector of expenditures for some events and provided the starting point for imputing missing expenditures in the remaining events.

Imputation Methodologies

The predictive mean matching imputation method was used to impute missing expenditures. This procedure uses regression models (based on events with completely reported expenditure data) to predict total expenses for each event. Then, for each event with missing payment information, a donor event with the closest predicted payment with the same pattern of expected payment sources as the event with missing payment was used to impute the missing payment value. The imputations for the flat fee events were carried out separately from the simple events.

A weighted sequential hot-deck procedure was used to impute the missing total charges. This procedure uses survey data from donors to replace missing data while taking into account the donors' weighted distribution in the imputation process to ensure that the weighted distribution of recipients' expenditures reflects the weighted distribution of the donors' expenditures.

Emergency Room Visit Data Editing and Imputation

Facility expenditures for emergency room services were developed in a sequence of logical edits and imputations. "Household" edits were applied to sources and amounts of payment for all events reported by HC respondents. "MPC" edits were applied to provider-reported sources and

amounts of payment for records matched to household-reported events. Both sets of edits were used to correct obvious errors in the reporting of expenditures. After the data from each source were edited, a decision was made as to whether household- or MPC-reported information would be used in the final editing and predictive mean matching imputations for missing expenditures. The general rule was that MPC data would be used where a household-reported event corresponded to an MPC-reported event (i.e., a matched event), since providers usually have more complete and accurate data on sources and amounts of payment than households.

One of the more important edits separated flat fee events from simple events. This edit was necessary because groups of events covered by a flat fee (i.e., a flat fee bundle) were edited and imputed separately from individual events covered by a single charge (i.e., simple events). Most emergency room events were imputed as simple events because hospital facility charges are rarely bundled with other events. (See Section 2.5.5: Flat Fee Variables for more details on flat fee groups). However, some emergency room visits were treated as free events because the person was admitted to a hospital through its emergency room. In these cases, emergency room charges are included in the charge for an inpatient hospital stay.

Logical edits also were used to sort each event into a specific category for the imputations. Events with complete expenditures were flagged as potential donors for the predictive mean matching imputations, while events with missing expenditure data were assigned to various recipient categories. Each event with missing expenditure data was assigned to a recipient category based on the extent of its missing charge and expenditure data. For example, an event with a known total charge but no expenditure information was assigned to one category, while an event with a known total charge and partial expenditure information was assigned to a different category. Similarly, events without a known total charge and no or partial expenditure information were assigned to separate recipient categories.

The logical edits produced eight recipient categories in which all events had a common extent of missing data. However, for predictive mean matching imputations, the recipients were grouped into four categories based on the known status of total charge and the sources of payment: (1) known charge but unknown payment status of at least one potential paying source; (2) unknown charge and unknown payment status of at least one potential paying source; (3) known charge and known status of all payment sources; and (4) unknown charge and known status of all payment sources. Separate predictive mean matching imputations were performed on events in each recipient group. For emergency room events, the donor pool was restricted to events with complete expenditures from the MPC. To improve the reliability of imputation, current year donors and inflation-adjusted prior year donors are used for the predictive mean matching imputations.

The donor pool included “free events” because, in some instances, providers are not paid for their services. These events represent charity care, bad debt, provider failure to bill, and third party payer restrictions on reimbursement in certain circumstances. If free events were excluded from the donor pool, total expenditures would be over-counted because the distribution of free events among complete events (donors) would not be represented among incomplete events (recipients).

Expenditures for some emergency room visits are not shown because the person was admitted to the hospital through the emergency room. These emergency room events are not free, but the expenditures are included in the inpatient stay expenditures. The variable ERHEVIDX can be used to differentiate between free emergency room care and situations where the emergency room charges have been included in the inpatient hospital charges.

Expenditures for services provided by separately billing doctors in hospital settings were also edited and imputed. These expenditures are shown separately from hospital facility charges for hospital inpatient, outpatient, and emergency room care.

Imputation Flag (IMPFLAG)

IMPFLAG is a six-category variable that indicates if the event contains complete HC or MPC data, was fully or partially imputed, or was imputed in the capitated imputation process (for OP and OB events only). The following list identifies how the imputation flag is coded; the categories are mutually exclusive.

IMPFLAG = 0 not eligible for imputation (includes zeroed out and flat fee leaf events)

IMPFLAG = 1 complete HC data

IMPFLAG = 2 complete MPC data

IMPFLAG = 3 fully imputed

IMPFLAG = 4 partially imputed

IMPFLAG = 5 complete MPC data through capitation imputation (not applicable to ER events)

Flat Fee Expenditures

The approach used to count expenditures for flat fees was to place the expenditure on the first visit of the flat fee group. The remaining visits have zero facility payments, while physician's expenditures may still be present. Thus, if the first visit in the flat fee group occurred prior to 2023, all the events that occurred in 2023 will have zero payments. Conversely, if the first event in the flat fee group occurred at the end of 2023, the total expenditure for the entire flat fee group will be on that event, regardless of the number of events it covered after 2023. See Section 2.5.5: Flat Fee Variables for details on the flat fee variables.

Zero Expenditures

There are some medical events reported by respondents where the payments were zero. Zero payment events can occur in MEPS for the following reasons: (1) the visit was covered under a flat fee arrangement (flat fee payments are included only on the first event covered by the arrangement), (2) there was no charge for a follow-up visit, (3) the provider was never paid by an

individual, insurance plan, or other source for services provided, (4) charges were included in the bill for a subsequent hospital admission (emergency room events only), or (5) the event was paid for through government or privately-funded research or clinical trials.

Discount Adjustment Factor

An adjustment was also applied to some HC-reported expenditure data because an evaluation of matched HC/MPC data showed that respondents who reported that charges and payments were equal were often unaware that insurance payments for the care had been based on a discounted charge. To compensate for this systematic reporting error, a weighted sequential hot-deck imputation procedure was implemented to determine an adjustment factor for HC-reported insurance payments when charges and payments were reported to be equal. As for the other imputations, selected predictor variables were used to form groups of donor and recipient events for the imputation process.

Emergency Room/Hospital Inpatient Stay Expenditures

Records in the MEPS 2023 PUFs include the HC data collected using the CAPI instrument. For persons reporting an emergency room visit that preceded a hospital stay, the instrument creates links between the two events.

For events where the provider-reported ER-HS links are set, the provider-reported information is used. These links are established based on MPC-reported start and end dates, along with other provider-reported information. In these situations, the facility expenditures associated with the preceding emergency room visit were included in the hospital facility expenditures.

For events without the provider-reported ER-HS links, a final linkage is established between a hospital inpatient stay and an emergency room visit of a person is created using the household-reported information and the CAPI generated links. For a given person and facility provider pair, if the emergency room visit occurred anytime within two days before and one day after the hospital inpatient event, then the two events are linked. The facility expenditures, if any, reported for the emergency room visit are rolled onto the facility expenditures of the inpatient event linked to the emergency room visit.

The record of a linked preceding emergency visit in the EROM PUF will have its facility expenditure information zeroed out to avoid double-counting. The variable ERHEVIDX identifies those hospital stays whose expenditures include the facility expenditures for the preceding emergency room visit (see ERHEVIDX in “Record Identifiers”). It should also be noted that for these cases, there is only one hospital stay associated with the emergency room stay.

Sources of Payment

In addition to total expenditures, variables are provided which itemize expenditures according to major source of payment categories. These categories are:

1. Out-of-pocket by User (self or family) - includes any deductible, coinsurance, and copayment amounts not covered by other sources, as well as payments for services and providers not covered by the person's insurance or other sources,
2. Medicare,
3. Medicaid,
4. Private Insurance,
5. Veterans Administration/CHAMPVA, excluding TRICARE,
6. TRICARE,
7. Other Federal Sources - includes Indian Health Service, military treatment facilities, and other care by the federal government,
8. Other State and Local Source - includes community and neighborhood clinics, state and local health departments, and state programs other than Medicaid,
9. Workers' Compensation, and
10. Other Unclassified Sources - includes sources such as automobile, homeowner's, and liability insurance, and other miscellaneous or unknown sources.

Prior to 2019, for cases where reported insurance coverage and sources of payment are inconsistent, the positive amount from a source inconsistent with reported insurance coverage was moved to one or both of the source categories Other Private and Other Public. Beginning in 2019, this step is removed and the inconsistency between the payment sources and insurance coverage is allowed to remain - the amounts are not moved to Other Private and Other Public categories anymore. The two source of payment categories, Other Private and Other Public, are no longer available.

Imputed Emergency Room Expenditure Variables

This PUF contains two sets of imputed expenditure variables: facility expenditures and physician expenditures.

Emergency Room Facility Expenditures (ERFSF23X-ERFOT23X, ERFXP23X, ERFTC23X)

Emergency room expenses include all expenses for treatment, services, tests, diagnostic and laboratory work, x-rays, and similar charges, as well as any physician services included in the emergency room charge.

ERFSF23X - ERFOT23X are the 10 sources of payment. The 10 sources of payment are: self/family (ERFSF23X), Medicare (ERFMR23X), Medicaid (ERFMD23X), private insurance (ERFPV23X), Veterans Administration/CHAMPVA (ERFVA23X), TRICARE (ERFTR23X), other federal sources (ERFOF23X), state and local (non-federal) government sources (ERFSL23X), Worker's Compensation (ERFWC23X), and other insurance (ERFOT23X). ERFXP23X is the sum of the 10 sources of payment for the emergency room expenditures, and ERFTC23X is the total charge. Please note that where an emergency room visit record is linked to a hospital inpatient stay record, all facility sources of payment variables, as well as ERFTC23X, have been zeroed out.

Emergency Room Physician Expenditures (ERDSF23X - ERDOT23X, ERDXP23X, ERDTC23X)

Charges for services provided in a hospital setting by physicians and other providers are sometimes billed directly by the hospital. In such cases, these charges are included in the hospital-facility charge and payments. When the charges are not billed directly by the hospital, physicians and other providers bill charges for the provided services directly to the third-party and the patient. In such cases, these providers are called separately billing doctors (SBD). SBD expenses typically cover services provided to patients in hospital settings by providers like anesthesiologists, radiologists, and pathologists, whose charges are often not included in emergency room visit bills.

For physicians who bill separately (i.e., outside the emergency room visit bill), a separate data collection effort within the MPC was performed to obtain this same set of expenditure information from each separately billing doctor. It should be noted that there could be several separately billing doctors associated with a medical event. For example, an emergency room visit could have a radiologist and an internist associated with it. If their services are not included in the emergency room visit bill, then this is one medical event with two separately billing doctors. The imputed expenditure information associated with the separately billing doctors was summed to the event level and is provided in this PUF. ERDSF23X - ERDOT23X are the 10 sources of payment, ERDXP23X is the sum of the 10 sources of payments, and ERDTC23X is the physician's total charge.

Analysts should consider whether to analyze facility and SBD expenditures separately, combine them within service categories, or collapse them across service categories (e.g., combine SBD expenditures with expenditures for physician visits to offices and/or outpatient departments).

Total Expenditures and Charges for Emergency Room Visits (ERXP23X, ERTC23X)

Analysts interested in total expenditure should use the variable ERXP23X, which includes both the facility and physician amounts. Those interested in total charges should use the variable ERTC23X, which includes both facility and physician charges (see Section 2.5.6: Expenditure Data for an explanation of the "charge" concept). However, please note that where the emergency room visit is linked to a hospital inpatient stay record, ERFTC23X has been zeroed out. Thus, ERTC23X may be equal to "0" or the doctor total charge (ERDTC23X).

2.5.7 Rounding

The expenditure variables have been rounded to the nearest penny. Person-level expenditure information released on the Consolidated PUF were rounded to the nearest dollar. It should be noted that using the MEPS event PUFs to create person-level totals will yield slightly different totals than those found on the Consolidated PUF. These differences are due to rounding only. Moreover, in some instances, the number of persons with expenditures on the event PUFs for a particular source of payment may differ from the number of persons with expenditures on the person-level Consolidated PUF for that source of payment. This difference is also an artifact of rounding only.

3.0 Survey Sample Information

3.1 Discussion of Pandemic Effects on Quality of MEPS Data

Modification to the MEPS sample design because of the pandemic ended in 2022. Concerns of potential bias due to these modifications should no longer apply to data collected in this PUF. However, like most other surveys, MEPS has been substantially affected by the pandemic. As a result of these changes, potential bias continues to be a concern. One effect of the pandemic is the significantly lower response rates (Section 3.2), and these lower rates might differentially exclude households more likely to experience IP stays. The demographic shifts on MEPS between 2019 and 2022 suggest a more educated, higher-income, older MEPS sample. (For more detail, see Section 3.1 of the [2020 Consolidated PUF](#), Section 3.1 of the [2021 Consolidated PUF](#), and Section 3.1.2 of the [2022 Consolidated PUF](#).)

Analyses undertaken to examine the quality of the MEPS FY 2023 data compare health care utilization and health insurance coverage for the MEPS target population between the panels fielded. These comparisons were undertaken for the full sample and the three age groups of 0-17, 18-64, and 65+. These comparisons found no abnormal differences between the two panels. Analyses across years also suggest a rebound to pre-pandemic utilization levels for most key event types.

The various actions taken in the development of the person-level weights for the MEPS FY 2023 data were designed to limit the potential for response bias. However, evaluations of MEPS data quality in 2020 through 2022 suggest that analysts of the MEPS FY 2023 Population Characteristics PUF should continue to exercise caution when interpreting estimates and assessing analyses based on data collected from these three calendar years. This includes the comparison of such estimates to those of other years and corresponding trend analyses.

3.2 Sample Weight (PERWT23F)

There is a single full-year person-level weight (PERWT23F) assigned to each record for each Key, in-scope person who responded to MEPS for the full period of time that the person was in scope during 2023. A Key person was either a member of a responding NHIS household at the

time of the interview or joined a family associated with such a household after being out of scope at the time of the NHIS (the latter circumstance includes newborns as well as those returning from military service, an institution, or residence in a foreign country). A person is in scope whenever the person is a member of the civilian noninstitutionalized portion of the U.S. population.

3.3 Details on Person Weight Construction

The person-level weight PERWT23F was developed in several stages. First, a person-level weight for Panel 27 was created, including an adjustment for nonresponse over time and raking. The raking involved adjusting to several sets of marginal control totals reflecting Current Population Survey (CPS) population estimates based on six variables. The six variables used in the establishment of the initial person-level control figures were: educational attainment of the reference person (three categories: no degree; high school/GED only or some college; bachelor's or a higher degree); Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West); MSA status (MSA, non-MSA); race/ethnicity (Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Asian, non-Hispanic; and other); sex; and age (0-18, 19-25, 26-34, 35-44, 45-64, and 65 or older). (Note, however, that for confidentiality reasons, the MSA status variables are no longer released for public use.) The person-level weight for Panel 28 was created similarly. Secondly, a composite weight was formed by multiplying each weight from Panel 27 by the factor .40 and each weight from Panel 28 by the factor .60. The choice of factors reflected the relative effective sample sizes of the two panels, helping to limit the variance of estimates obtained from pooling both samples. Weights for the 2023 Population Characteristics PUF were then developed by raking the composite weight to the same set of CPS-based control totals.

The approach for establishing the 2023 Consolidated PUF weight is as follows. When poverty status information derived from MEPS income variables becomes available, a final raking is undertaken. The full sample weight appearing on the Population Characteristics PUF for a given year is re-raked, replacing educational attainment with poverty status while retaining the other five raking variables previously indicated. Specifically, control totals based on CPS estimates of poverty status (five categories: below poverty, from 100 to 125 percent of poverty, from 125 to 200 percent of poverty, from 200 to 400 percent of poverty, at least 400 percent of poverty) as well as age, race/ethnicity, sex, region, and MSA status are used to calibrate weights.

3.3.1 MEPS Panel 27 Weight Development Process

The person-level weight for MEPS Panel 27 was developed by using the 2022 full-year weight as a “base” weight for survey participants present in 2023.

For Key, in-scope members who joined an RU at some time in 2023 after being out of scope in 2022, the initially assigned person-level weight was the corresponding 2022 family weight. The weighting process also included an adjustment for person-level nonresponse over Rounds 4 and 5 as well as raking to the population control figures for December 2023 for Key, responding persons in scope on December 31, 2023. These control totals were derived by scaling back the population distribution obtained from the March 2024 CPS to reflect the December 31, 2023

estimated population total (estimated based on Census projections for January 1, 2024). Variables used for person-level raking included: education of the reference person (no degree, high school/GED only or some college, bachelor's or a higher degree); Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West); MSA status (MSA, non-MSA); race/ethnicity (Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Asian, non-Hispanic; and other); sex; and age. (Note, however, that for confidentiality reasons, the MSA status variables are no longer released for public use.) The final weight for Key, responding persons who were not in scope on December 31, 2023 but were in scope earlier in the year was the nonresponse-adjusted person weight without raking.

Note that the 2022 full-year weight that was used as the base weight for Panel 27 was derived using the 2022 MEPS Round 1 weight and reflected adjustment for nonresponse over the remaining data collection rounds in 2022 as well as raking to the December 2022 population control figures.

3.3.2 MEPS Panel 28 Weight Development Process

The person-level weight for Panel 28 was developed using the 2023 Round 1 person-level weight as a “base” weight. The Round 1 weights incorporated the following components: the original household probability of selection for the NHIS and for the NHIS subsample reserved for the MEPS, an adjustment for NHIS nonresponse, the probability of selection for MEPS from the NHIS, an adjustment for nonresponse at the dwelling unit level for Round 1, and raking to control figures at the person level obtained from the March CPS of the corresponding year. For Key, in-scope members who joined an RU after Round 1, the Round 1 DU weight served as a “base” weight.

The weighting process also included an adjustment for nonresponse over the remaining data collection rounds in 2023 as well as raking to the same population control figures for December 2023 that were used for the Panel 27 weight for Key, responding persons in scope on December 31, 2023. The same six variables used for Panel 27 raking (education level of the reference person, Census region, MSA status, race/ethnicity, sex, and age) were also used for Panel 28 raking. Similar to Panel 27, the Panel 28 final weight for Key, responding persons who were not in scope on December 31, 2023 but were in scope earlier in the year was the nonresponse-adjusted person weight without raking.

3.3.3 The Final Weight for 2023

The final raking of those in scope at the end of the year has been described above. In addition, the composite weights of two groups of persons who were out of scope on December 31, 2023 were adjusted for expected undercoverage. Specifically, the weights of those who were out of scope on December 31, 2023, but in scope at some time during the year and were residing in a nursing home at the end of the year were poststratified to an estimate of the number of persons who were residents of Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing homes for part of the year (approximately 3-9 months) during 2014. This estimate was developed from data on the Minimum Data Set (MDS) of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The weights of persons who died while in scope were poststratified to corresponding estimates derived using data obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center

for Health Statistics (NCHS), [Provisional Mortality Statistics, 2018 through Last Week](#) on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2024, the latest available data at the time. Separate decedent control totals were developed for the “65 and older” and “under 65” civilian noninstitutionalized populations.

Overall, the weighted population estimate for the civilian noninstitutionalized population for December 31, 2023 is 330,710,135 (PERWT23F >0 and INSC1231=1). The sum of person-level weights across all persons assigned a positive person-level weight is 334,530,273.

3.4 Coverage

The target population associated with MEPS is the 2023 U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population. However, the MEPS sampled households are a subsample of the NHIS households interviewed in 2021 (Panel 27) and 2022 (Panel 28). New households created after the NHIS interviews for the respective panels and consisting exclusively of persons who entered the target population after 2021 (Panel 27) or after 2022 (Panel 28) are not covered by the 2023 MEPS. Nor are previously out of scope persons who joined an existing household but are not related to the current household residents. Persons not covered by a given MEPS panel thus include some members of the following groups: immigrants, persons leaving the military, U.S. citizens returning from residence in another country, and persons leaving institutions. Those not covered represent a small proportion of the MEPS target population.

3.5 Using MEPS Data for Trend Analysis

For analysts using the MEPS data for trend analysis, we note that there are uncertainties associated with 2020, 2021, and 2022 data quality for reasons discussed throughout Section 3. Evaluations of important MEPS estimates suggest that they are of reasonable quality. Nevertheless, analysts are advised to exercise caution in interpreting these estimates, particularly in terms of trend analyses, since access to health care was substantially affected by the pandemic, as were related factors such as health insurance and employment status for many persons.

The MEPS began in 1996, and the utility of the survey for analyzing health care trends expands with each additional year of data; however, when examining trends over time using the MEPS, the length of time being analyzed should be considered. In particular, large shifts in survey estimates over short periods of time (e.g. from one year to the next) that are statistically significant should be interpreted with caution unless they are attributable to known factors such as changes in public policy, economic conditions, or the MEPS methodology.

With respect to methodological considerations, changes in data collection methods, such as interviewer training, were introduced in 2013 to obtain more complete information about health care utilization from MEPS respondents; the changes were fully implemented in 2014. This effort likely resulted in improved data quality and a reduction in underreporting starting in the second half of 2013 and continuing throughout the 2014 full year files; the changes have also had some impact on analyses involving trends in utilization across years. The changes in the NHIS sample design in 2016 and 2018 could also potentially affect trend analyses. The new NHIS

sample design is based on more up-to-date information related to the distribution of housing units across the United States. As a result, it can be expected to better cover the full civilian noninstitutionalized population, the target population for MEPS, as well as many of its subpopulations. Better coverage of the target population helps to reduce the potential for bias in both NHIS and MEPS estimates.

Another change with the potential to affect trend analyses involved major modifications to the MEPS instrument design and data collection process, particularly in the events sections of the instrument. These were introduced in the spring of 2018 and thus affected data beginning with Round 1 of Panel 23, Round 3 of Panel 22, and Round 5 of Panel 21. Since the full year 2017 MEPS files were established from data collected in Rounds 1-3 of Panel 22 and Rounds 3-5 of Panel 21, they reflected two instrument designs. To mitigate the effect of such differences within the same full-year file, the Panel 22 Round 3 data and the Panel 21 Round 5 data were transformed to make them as consistent as possible with data collected under the previous design. The changes in the instrument were designed to make the data collection effort more efficient and easier to administer. In addition, expectations were that data on some items, such as those related to health care events, would be more complete with the potential of identifying more events. Increases in service use reported since the implementation of these changes are consistent with these expectations. *Analysts should be aware of the possible impacts of these changes on the data and especially trend analyses that include the year 2018 because of the design transition.*

Process changes, such as data editing and imputation, may also affect trend analyses. For example, analysts should refer to Section 2.5.11: Utilization, Expenditures, and Source of Payment Variables in the Consolidated PUF (HC 251) and, for more detail, to the documentation for the prescription drug file (HC 248A) when analyzing prescription drug spending over time.

As always, it is recommended that, before conducting trend analyses, analysts should review relevant sections of the documentation for descriptions of these types of changes that might affect the interpretation of changes over time.

To smooth or stabilize trend analyses based on the MEPS data, analysts may also wish to consider using statistical techniques such as comparing pooled time periods (e.g. 1996-1997 versus 2011-2012), working with moving averages, or using modeling techniques with several consecutive years of the data.

Finally, statistical significance tests should be conducted to assess the likelihood that observed trends are not attributable to sampling variation. In addition, researchers should be aware of the impact of multiple comparisons on Type I error. Without making appropriate allowance for multiple comparisons, conducting numerous statistical significance tests of trends will increase the likelihood of concluding that a change has taken place when one has not.

4.0 Strategies for Estimation

4.1 Developing Event-Level Estimates

The data in this PUF can be used to develop national 2023 event-level estimates for the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population on emergency room visits as well as expenditures, and sources of payment for these visits. Estimates of total visits are the sum of the weight variable (PERWT23F) across relevant event records while estimates of other variables must be weighted by PERWT23F to be nationally representative. The tables below contain event-level estimates for selected variables.

Table 3

Selected Event-Level Estimates - Emergency Room Visits

Estimate of interest	Variable name	Estimate (SE)	Estimate excluding zero payment events (SE)
Total number of emergency room visits (in millions)	PERWT23F	67.5 (2.39)	61.9 (2.32)
Proportion of emergency room visits with expenditures > 0*	ERXP23X	0.916 (0.0062)	-----

* Zero payment events can occur in MEPS for the following reasons: (1) the visit was covered under a flat fee arrangement (flat fee payments are included only on the first event covered by the arrangement), (2) there was no charge for a follow-up visit, (3) the provider was never paid by directly for services provided by an individual, insurance plan, or other source, (4) charges were included in another bill, or (5) the event was paid for through government or privately-funded research or clinical trials.

Table 4

Selected Event-Level Estimates - Emergency Room Expenditures

Estimate of interest	Variable name	Estimate (SE)	Estimate excluding zero payment events (SE)
Mean total payments per visit	ERXP23X	\$1,315 (\$82.8)	\$1,435 (\$90.7)
Mean out-of-pocket payment per visit	ERDSF23X +ERFSF23X	\$136 (\$17.3)	\$148 (\$18.9)
Mean proportion of total expenditures paid by private insurance per visit	(ERDPV23X +ERFPV23X) /ERXP23X	-----	0.319 (0.0133)

4.2 Person-Based Estimates for Emergency Room Visits

To enhance analyses of emergency room visits, analysts may link information about emergency room visits by sample persons in this PUF to the annual Consolidated PUF (which has data for all MEPS sample persons), or conversely, link person-level information from the Consolidated PUF to this event-level PUF (see Section 5 below for more details). Both this PUF and the Consolidated PUF may be used to derive estimates for persons with emergency room care and annual estimates of total expenditures. However, for estimates that pertain to those who did not have emergency room care as well as those who did (for example, the percentage of adults with at least one emergency room event during the past year or the mean number of emergency room events in the past year among those 65 or older), this PUF cannot be used. Only those persons with at least one emergency room event are represented in this data PUF. The Consolidated PUF must be used for person-level analyses that include both persons with and without emergency room care.

4.3 Variables with Missing Values

It is essential that the analyst examine all variables for the presence of negative values used to represent missing values. For continuous or discrete variables, where means or totals may be calculated, it may be necessary to set negative values to values appropriate to the analytic needs. That is, the analyst should either impute a value or set the value to one that will be interpreted as missing by the software package used. For categorical and dichotomous variables, the analyst may want to consider whether to recode or impute a value for cases with negative values or whether to exclude or include such cases in the numerator and/or denominator when calculating proportions.

Methodologies used for the editing/imputation of expenditure variables (e.g., sources of payment, flat fee, and zero expenditures) are described in Section 2.5.6: Data Editing and Imputation Methodologies of Expenditure Variables.

4.4 Variance Estimation (VARSTR, VARPSU)

To obtain estimates of variability in the MEPS estimates (such as the standard error of sample estimates or corresponding confidence intervals), analysts should consider the complex sample design of the MEPS for both person-level and family-level analyses. Several methodologies have been developed for estimating standard errors for surveys with a complex sample design, including the Taylor series linearization method, balanced repeated replication (BRR), and jackknife replication. Various software packages provide analysts with the capability of implementing these methodologies. MEPS analysts most commonly use the Taylor series approach. Although this PUF does not contain replicate weights, analysts can use the BRR methodology to construct replicate weights to develop variances for more complex estimators (see Section 4.4.2: Balanced Repeated Replication Method).

4.4.1 Taylor Series Linearization Method

The variables needed to calculate appropriate standard errors based on the Taylor series linearization method are included on this file as well as all other MEPS PUFs. Software packages that permit the use of the Taylor series linearization method include SUDAAN, R, Stata, SAS (version 8.2 and higher), and SPSS (version 12.0 and higher). For complete information on the capabilities of a package, analysts should refer to the user documentation for the software.

With the Taylor series linearization method, variance estimation strata and the variance estimation PSUs within these strata must be specified. The variables VARSTR and VARPSU on this EROM PUF identify the sampling strata and primary sampling units required by the variance estimation programs. Specifying a “with replacement” design in one of the previously mentioned software packages will provide estimated standard errors appropriate for assessing the variability of the MEPS estimates. Note that the number of degrees of freedom associated with estimates of variability indicated by such a package may not appropriately reflect the number available. For variables of interest distributed throughout the country (and thus the MEPS sample PSUs), one can generally expect to see at least 100 degrees of freedom associated with the estimated standard errors for national estimates based on this MEPS database.

Before 2002, the MEPS variance strata and PSUs were developed independently from year to year, and the last two characters of the strata and PSU variable names denoted the year. Beginning with the 2002 point-in-time PUF, the approach changed with the intention that variance strata and PSUs would be developed to be compatible with all future PUFs until the NHIS design changed. Thus, when pooling data across years 2002 through Panel 11 of the 2007 files, analysts can use the variance strata and PSU variables provided without modifying them for variance estimation purposes for estimates covering multiple years of data. There are 203 variance estimation strata, each stratum with either two or three variance estimation PSUs.

Beginning in Panel 12 of the 2007 files, a new set of variance strata and PSUs was developed because of the introduction of a new NHIS design. There are 165 variance strata with either two or three variance estimation PSUs per stratum. Therefore, there are a total of 368 (203+165) variance strata in the 2007 Population Characteristics PUF, as it consisted of two panels that were selected under two independent NHIS sample designs. Since both MEPS panels in the full-year files from 2008 through 2016 are based on the same NHIS design, there are only 165 variance strata. These strata (VARSTR values) have been numbered from 1001 to 1165 so that they can be readily distinguished from those developed under the former NHIS sample design if data are pooled for several years.

The NHIS sample design was changed again in 2016, effectively changing the MEPS design beginning with calendar year 2017. Beginning with Panel 22 of the 2017 files, a new set of variance strata and PSUs were developed. There are 117 variance strata with either two or three variance estimation PSUs per stratum. Therefore, there are a total of 282 (165+117) variance strata in the 2017 Population Characteristics PUF, as it consisted of two panels that were selected under two independent NHIS sample designs. To make the pooling of data across multiple years of the MEPS more straightforward, the numbering system for the variance strata was changed. The strata associated with the new design are numbered from 2001 to 2117.

The NHIS sample design was further modified in 2018, so the MEPS variance structure for the 2019 Population Characteristics PUF was also modified, reducing the number of variance strata to 105. Consistency was maintained with the prior structure in that the 2019 variance strata were also numbered within the range of values from 2001 to 2117, although there are now gaps in the values assigned within this range. Because of the modification, each stratum could contain up to 5 variance estimation PSUs.

For Panel 26 in the 2021 and 2022 Population Characteristics PUFs, an additional NHIS sample was used for the MEPS to account for increasing nonresponse during the pandemic (as discussed in Section 3.1). The additional sample was assigned to the existing variance strata, so the 2021 and 2022 Population Characteristics PUFs continued to have 105 variance strata, numbered 2001-2117, with a few gaps in the values in that range. In many cases, the additional sample was assigned to new variance estimation PSUs, so in the 2021 and 2022 Population Characteristics PUFs, each stratum contained up to eight variance estimation PSUs.

Additional NHIS samples were no longer needed in 2023, leading to fewer variance estimation PSUs than in the 2021 and 2022 Population Characteristics PUFs. The 2023 Population Characteristics PUF continues to have 105 variance strata, numbered 2001-2117, with a few gaps in the values in that range. Each stratum contains up to six variance estimation PSUs.

Some analysts may be interested in pooling data across multiple years of MEPS data. When doing so, analysts should note that, to obtain appropriate standard errors, it is necessary to specify a common variance structure. Before 2002, each annual PUF was released with a variance structure unique to the particular MEPS sample in that year. Starting in 2002, the annual PUFs were released with a common variance structure that allowed analysts to pool data from 2002 through 2018. However, analysts can no longer do this routinely because the variance structure had to be modified beginning with 2019.

To ensure that variance strata are identified appropriately for variance estimation purposes when pooling MEPS data across several years, analysts can proceed as follows:

1. When pooling any year from 2002 through 2018, use the variance strata numbering as is.
2. When pooling (a) any year from 1996 to 2001 with any year from 2002 or later, or (b) the year 2019 and beyond with any earlier year, use the pooled linkage PUF HC-036, which contains the proper variance structure. The HC-036 file is updated every year so that appropriate variance structures are available with pooled data. Further details on the HC-036 file are included in the public use documentation of the HC-036 file.

4.4.2 Balanced Repeated Replication Method

BRR replicate weights are not provided on this MEPS PUF for the purposes of variance estimation. However, a file containing a BRR replication structure is made available so that analysts can form replicate weights, if desired, from the final MEPS weight to compute variances of MEPS estimates using either BRR or Fay's modified BRR (Fay, 1989) methods. The replicate

weights are useful for computing variances of complex nonlinear estimators for which a Taylor linear form is neither easy to derive nor available in commonly used software. For instance, it is not possible to calculate the variances of a median or the ratio of two medians by using the Taylor linearization method. For these types of estimators, analysts can calculate a variance using BRR or Fay's modified BRR methods. However, it should be noted that the replicate weights have been derived from the final weight through a shortcut approach. Specifically, the replicate weights are not computed starting with the base weight, and all adjustments made in different stages of weighting are not applied independently in each replicate. Thus, the variances computed by using this one-step BRR do not capture the effects of all weighting adjustments that would be captured in a set of fully developed BRR replicate weights. The Taylor series approach does not fully capture the effects of the different weighting adjustments either.

The dataset HC-036BRR, MEPS 1996-2021 Replicates for Variance Estimation File contains the information necessary to construct the BRR replicates. It includes a set of 128 flags (BRR1-BRR128) in the form of half sample indicators, each of which is coded 0 or 1 to indicate whether the person should or should not be included in that particular replicate. These flags can be used in conjunction with the full-year weight to construct the BRR replicate weights. For an analysis of MEPS data pooled across years, the BRR replicates can be formed in the same way by using the HC-036, MEPS 1996-2021 Pooled Linkage Variance Estimation File. For more information about creating BRR replicates, analysts can refer to the documentation for the [HC-036BRR pooled linkage file](#) on the AHRQ website.

5.0 Merging/Linking MEPS Data Files

Data from this PUF can be used alone or in conjunction with other PUFs for different analytic purposes. Merging characteristics of interest from other MEPS PUFs expands the scope of potential estimates. For example, the medical event PUFs can be merged with the person-level Consolidated PUF to calculate event-level estimates for persons with specific characteristics (e.g., age, race, sex, and education).

Most of the event PUFs can also be linked to the Conditions PUF by using the condition-event link (CLNK) PUF. When using the CLNK PUF, analysts should keep in mind that (1) conditions are household reported, (2) there may be multiple conditions associated with a medical event, (3) one condition may link to more than one event and (4) not all medical events link to the Conditions PUF.

In addition to linking to other MEPS PUFs, each MEPS panel can also be linked back to the previous year's NHIS public use files. This is because the set of households selected for MEPS is a subsample of those participating in the NHIS. For information on obtaining MEPS/NHIS link files please see the [MEPS website](#).

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D. Variable-Source Crosswalk

FOR MEPS HC 248E: 2023 EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS

Survey Administration Variables

Variable	Description	Source
DUID	Panel # + encrypted DU identifier	Assigned in sampling
PID	Person number	Assigned in sampling
DUPERSID	Person ID (DUID + PID)	Assigned in sampling
EVNTIDX	Event ID	Assigned in sampling
EVENTRN	Event round number	CAPI derived
ERHEVIDX	Event ID for corresponding hospital stay	Constructed
FFEEIDX	Flat fee ID	CAPI derived
PANEL	Panel number	Constructed
MPCDATA	MPC data flag	Constructed

Emergency Room Visit Event Variables

Variable	Description	Source
ERDATEYR	Event date - year	CAPI derived
ERDATEMM	Event date - month	CAPI derived
VSTCTGRY	Best category for care p recv on visit dt	ER10
VSTRELCN	This visit related to spec condition	ER20
LABTEST_M18	This visit did p have lab tests	ER50
SONOGRAM_M18	This visit did p have sonogram or ultrasd	ER50
XRAYS_M18	This visit did p have x-rays	ER50
MAMMOG_M18	This visit did p have a mammogram	ER50
MRI_M18	This visit did p have an MRI/Catscan	E505
EKG_M18	This visit did p have an EKG, EEG or ECG	ER50
RCVVAC_M18	This visit did p receive a vaccination	E505
SURGPROC	Was surg proc performed on p this visit	ER40
MEDPRESC	Any medicine prescribed for p this visit	ER60

Flat Fee Variables

Variable	Description	Source
FFERTYPE	Flat fee bundle	Constructed

Imputed Total Expenditure Variables

Variable	Description	Source
ERXP23X	Total exp for event (ERFXP23X + ERDXP23X)	Constructed
ERTC23X	Total chg for event (ERFTC23X + ERDTC23X)	Constructed

Imputed Facility Expenditure Variables

Variable	Description	Source
ERFSF23X	Facility amount paid, family (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFMR23X	Facility amount paid, Medicare (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFMD23X	Facility amount paid, Medicaid (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFPV23X	Facility amount paid, private insurance (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFVA23X	Facility amount paid, Veterans/CHAMPVA (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFTR23X	Facility amount paid, TRICARE (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFOF23X	Facility amount paid, other federal (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFSL23X	Facility amount paid, state/local government (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFWC23X	Facility amount paid, Workers Comp (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFOT23X	Facility amount paid, other insurance (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)
ERFXP23X	Facility sum payments ERFSF23X - ERFOT23X	Constructed
ERFTC23X	Total facility charge (Imputed)	CP Section (Edited)

Imputed Physician Expenditure Variables

Variable	Description	Source
ERDSF23X	Doctor amount paid, family (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDMR23X	Doctor amount paid, Medicare (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDMD23X	Doctor amount paid, Medicaid (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDPV23X	Doctor amount paid, private insurance (Imputed)	Constructed

Variable	Description	Source
ERDVA23X	Doctor amount paid, Veterans/CHAMPVA (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDTR23X	Doctor amount paid, TRICARE (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDOF23X	Doctor amount paid, other federal (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDSL23X	Doctor amount paid, state/local government (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDWC23X	Doctor amount paid, Workers Comp (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDOT23X	Doctor amount paid, other insurance (Imputed)	Constructed
ERDXP23X	Doctor sum payments ERDSF23X - ERDOT23X	Constructed
ERDTC23X	Total doctor charge (Imputed)	Constructed
IMPFLAG	Imputation status	Constructed

Weights Variables

Variable	Description	Source
PERWT23F	Expenditure file person weight, 2023	Constructed
VARSTR	Variance estimation stratum, 2023	Constructed
VARPSU	Variance estimation PSU, 2023	Constructed