

Introduction

American Health: Demographics and Spending of Health Care Consumers

The consumers of health care drive one of the nation's largest and most important industries. Understanding who those consumers are, what they want, and how their wants and needs are changing is vital to health insurance companies, hospitals, doctors, pharmaceutical companies, government policy makers, and every business that provides its employees with health insurance. Fortunately, there are enough statistics collected and published about health care consumers to answer almost any question. The problem is not whether the numbers exist, but how to find and make sense of them.

American Health: Demographics and Spending of Health Care Consumers brings together in one volume data on health care consumers from many sources, providing a comprehensive look at the demand for health care. With more than 300 tables, *American Health* includes twice as many tables as the federal government's annual health care reference book, *Health, United States*. It provides a comprehensive look at the demographics of health care consumers and the services they use, ranging from cosmetic surgery to prayer as alternative medicine, from doctor visits to contraception. It includes detailed health care spending data from the federal government's highly respected Consumer Expenditure Survey and the less well-known Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. It presents the latest data on health care coverage and the reasons people do not have health insurance. It has the latest information on the growing girth of the population, in pounds and percentages. It examines teen attitudes toward sex and teen and adult use of contraception.

How to use this book

American Health is divided into 14 chapters, each exploring a different facet of health care. The topics are Addictions, Aging, Alternative Medicine, Attitudes toward Health Care, Births, Coverage and Costs, Deaths, Disability, Diseases and Conditions, Health Care Visits, Hospital Care, Mental Health, Sexual Attitudes and Behavior, and Weight and Exercise. Each chapter includes tables showing the demographics of health care consumers as well as explanatory text and charts revealing the most important trends.

Most of the tables in *American Health* are based on data collected by the federal government, in particular the National Center for Health Statistics. The federal government continues to be the best source of up-to-date, reliable information on the changing characteristics of Americans. Despite the volume of data produced by the federal government, finding relevant health care information and compiling it in a meaningful way is time consuming—and often frustrating—because the government publishes its health care information in a wide array of reports and on numerous web sites. The National Center for Health Statistics attempts to collate its information in the annual publication *Health, United States*. Because the purpose

of *Health, United States* is to provide an overview of health care, it focuses only briefly on health care consumers. *American Health* goes further, giving readers a comprehensive look at health care from the public's perspective.

To explore the attitudes of Americans toward health care, *American Health* presents data from the General Social Survey of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. Other attitudinal data included in the book are from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, Pew Internet & American Life Project, the Gallup Organization, and the Kaiser Family Foundation.

While the federal government collected most of the data in *American Health*, the majority of tables published here are not just reprints of the government's tabulations. Instead, most were individually compiled and created by New Strategist's editors to reveal the trends—the story behind the statistics. If you need more information than the tables provide, explore the data source cited at the bottom of each table.

American Health includes a list of tables to help you locate the information you need. For a more detailed search, use the index at the back of the book. Also at the back of the book are a complete bibliography of data sources and a comprehensive glossary defining the terms used in tables and text.

With *American Health: Demographics and Spending of Health Care Consumers* in hand, you will discover the change that lies ahead not just for the health care industry, but also for the nation. Because health care is one of the largest industries in the United States, the ever-changing demands of its customers will shape the future of every American alive today—and those yet to be born.