

Introduction

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 numbers exist, but finding and making sense of them.

The third edition of *American Health: Demographics and Spending of Health Care Consumers* brings together in one volume the many sources of data on health care consumers, providing a comprehensive look at the demand for health care. With more than 300 tables, *American Health* provides a comprehensive look at the demographics of health care consumers and the services they use, ranging from fish oil supplements to mammograms, from doctor visits to birth control pills. 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 why 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. It explores the changing attitudes of Americans toward the role of the federal government in providing health care in the United States.

How to use this book

American Health is divided into 14 chapters, each examining a different facet of health care. The topics are Addictions, Aging, Alternative Medicine, Attitudes toward Health Care, Births, Coverage and Cost, 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 and the Census Bureau. 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 collates some of this information in the annual publication *Health, United States*. Because the purpose of *Health, United States* is to provide an overview of the health care industry, only a fraction of the volume focuses on health care consumers.

American Health goes further, giving readers a comprehensive look at health care from the individual 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, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Other attitudinal data included in the book are from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, Gallup, and the Monitoring the Future Survey of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research.

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 to reveal the trends—the story behind the statistics. If you need more information, you can 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 lengthy glossary defining the terms used in the tables and text.

With *American Health* 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.