

Supplemental Material: Recruitment Information

A convenience sample of Medicaid beneficiaries was recruited for this study. Medicaid beneficiaries ages 18 and older who were able to complete the survey in English or Spanish were eligible to participate. Nearly all participants were recruited through their membership in one of six Medicaid health plans from five states (Georgia, California [two plans], Missouri, New Hampshire, and Mississippi). Recruitment methods included mailed and emailed invitations, automated phone calls, community outreach events, and home visits from health plan staff. When used, home and e-mail addresses of enrolled plan members were provided by health plans. Participants who met the eligibility criteria were also recruited through two volunteer research databases, one national (Research Match) and one maintained by Washington University in St. Louis.

Due to the variety of methods used for recruitment, it is not possible to provide an overall response rate. For fliers posted to advertise the study, for example, we cannot calculate a response rate because we do not know the number of people that saw them. Sample numbers for other methods of recruitment can give a sense of the range of response rates. For the first health plan that provided member email addresses, for example, 38,323 emails were sent to invite people to participate. From these, 683 people (1.7%) clicked on the link to the survey in either English or Spanish; 394 people answered at least one social needs question in English or Spanish (1.0%), which was our definition of a “complete” survey for the current analyses. For the second health plan for which we used email addresses, 80,957 emails were sent, which led to 1082 clicks on the link in English and 1 in Spanish (a total of 1083, or 1.3%) and produced 519 completed surveys (.6%).

For mailing, for example, one health plan mailed letters to 2,000 people inviting them to participate. This led to 72 clicks on the survey in English (3.6%; none in Spanish) and 62 completed surveys (3.1%). For another health plan, 1985 letters were mailed, with 56 clicks on the survey in English (2.8%; none in Spanish) and 49 completed (2.5%).

For the Washington University volunteer database, 45 people were contacted and invited to participate. Of these, 20 clicked on the survey link in English (44.4%; none in Spanish), and 17 completed it (37.7%). From the Research Match volunteer database, 4500 emails were sent to potential participants, which led 88 people to click on the survey link in English (2.0%; none in Spanish), and 71 to complete it (1.6%).

The American Association for Public Opinion Research provides information about calculating response rates for “mailed surveys to specifically named persons” and “internet surveys to specifically named persons” (AAPOR, 2016). In the case of our study, potential participant contact information was often taken from baseline enrollment information from health plans, which in some cases was out-of-date. Because it is impossible to determine conclusively whether the named person was actually reached via mail or email, such non-responses are considered “unknown eligibility” (AAPOR, 2016). For cases of unknown eligibility, one can conduct sensitivity analyses that yield a range of response rates depending on how many people may have actually been reached and eligible. For example, for the first health plan mentioned above that recruited participants via email, if we assume that 10% of the email addresses were not, in fact, current, but that all the others reached the intended recipient, the response rate for completed surveys would be 1.1%. If we assume that 40% of the email addresses were not current, the rate rises to 1.7%.

Although we cannot provide a precise overall response rate for the entire study, it is clear that, with the exception of the university's volunteer database, the response rate was quite low. In that light, results are best understood as those from a convenience sample of Medicaid beneficiaries.

Reference

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). (2016.) Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys. 9th edition. Retrieved from https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf