

*The Characteristics and Perceptions of the Medicare Population: Data from the 1996 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey* is the first in a new series of source books based on the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) Access to Care data file. The focus of this series is the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the Medicare population, their health status, their secondary health insurance, and their access to and satisfaction with Medicare services.

The MCBS is a continuous, multipurpose survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 16,000 Medicare beneficiaries designed to aid HCFA's administration, monitoring and evaluation of the Medicare program. The survey is focused on health care use, cost and sources of payment. Data from the MCBS enables HCFA to determine sources of payment for all medical services used by Medicare beneficiaries, including co-payments, deductibles, and non-covered services; develop reliable and current information on the use and cost of services not covered by Medicare (such as prescription drugs and long-term care); ascertain all types of health insurance coverage and relate coverage to use of services and to sources of payment; and monitor the personal and financial effects of changes in the Medicare program. Additionally, the MCBS is the only source of multidimensional person-based information about the characteristics of the Medicare population and their access to and satisfaction with Medicare services.

Data from the MCBS are released to the public in two annual data file series: the "Access to Care" series and the "Cost and Use" series. The Access to Care files -- available for calendar years 1991 through 1996 -- contain information collected in the fall interview on beneficiary access to medical providers,

satisfaction with their health care, indicators of their health status and functioning, secondary health insurance coverage, and demographic and financial information. The Access to Care files also provides Medicare program expenditures for the entire calendar year. The Cost and Use files -- available for calendar years 1992 through 1995 -- include much of the data from the Access to Care files, e.g., demographic information, beneficiary health status and functioning and secondary health insurance coverage. However, the focus of the Cost and Use file is total personal health care use and expenditures for all health care services used by the Medicare population by sources of payment.

*The Characteristics and Perceptions of the Medicare Population* series is based upon the Access to Care file series. The data from the Access to Care file has been augmented and adjusted, as described in Technical Appendix A, to represent the entire Medicare population, i.e., individuals who were enrolled for any portion of 1996. This series of source books differs from those derived from the Cost and Use files (*Health and Health Care of the Medicare Population*) in several significant ways. First, because it is based upon the Access to Care file, *The Characteristics and Perceptions of the Medicare Population* series will be more current than source books based upon the Cost and Use file. Second, the socioeconomic and demographic data may differ slightly from those produced from the Cost and Use file both because of sampling and because of the methodologies for composing the ever-enrolled population. Finally, this series will not cover the detailed health care use, expenditures and payment sources of the Medicare population. Instead, summary Medicare benefit payment data will be provided.