

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION EXAMINATION  
SURVEYS (NHANES) 1971 - 1980

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Under the authority of the Public Health Service Act the National Center for Health Statistics has carried out a group of ongoing surveys, one of which collects data through physical examination, clinical and laboratory tests, and other measurement procedures, in addition to interview and medical history questionnaires. These data are collected from scientifically designed probability samples of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population of specified age groups. The methodology is uniquely suitable for the collection of several classes of data: prevalence rates of specifically defined diseases or conditions, including those not previously diagnosed; normative or descriptive data; interrelationships of health and nutritional variables in the general population; assessment of change of health and nutritional variables in the population over time. Examples of each class of data were given from the first National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES I) program.

The content and conduct of the NHANES I and II programs which uniquely provide data on the assessment of nutritional status in the general population, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics during the years 1971-1975 and 1976-1980 respectively, were presented. Strengths and concerns about the methodology employed in these programs were covered. The availability of NHANES data in the form of publications and micro-data tapes was discussed as well as efforts to increase the analysis of the data through contractual and collaborative arrangements. Major analyses of NHANES I dietary intake data as related to assessments of nutritional anemia, of heart disease and cardiovascular risk factors, of dental health, and of other measures of health and nutritional status are being conducted under contractual arrangements. Final reports are due from the contractors in Fall 1980.

The field procedures consistently employed in obtaining the 24-hour recall and food frequency data in NHANES I and II, in addition to the nutrient data bank of NHANES II as updated over the years 1971 - 1980, were described briefly.