Census Bureau Survey Sponsors Meeting

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

October 16, 2023

- It is a pleasure to be meeting with you again! Meeting with you last February—the first time since before the pandemic—was energizing for me, and I look forward to a similar experience today.
- I particularly appreciate this sponsors' meeting because it serves two purposes:
  ◦ It gives me—and really, all of us here today from the Census Bureau—a chance to connect with you from a position of service to your programs, and making sure we are supporting your needs.
  ◦ It provides a chance for our community of agencies producing some of the nation's most important data products to convene in this relatively informal way. Here is an opportunity to discuss mutual challenges with traditional survey programs and openly discuss a shared vision for the production of data that is innovative, cost-effective, and minimally burdensome to the public.

TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNIZATION

- I want to talk for a few minutes about modernizing our approach to producing data. But I don't want to get on a soapbox about what we should be doing—rather today I want to acknowledge that *modernization is happening*. Now. Today.
- Despite very real challenges in the field and continuous declines in survey participation for households, we're starting to make the advances we need to ensure the relevancy and value of federal statistics.
- The last year has, in my estimation, demonstrated what can be accomplished when we bring smart people together and give them permission to think differently—about changes in our data so they continue to meet the moment, but new methods that improve efficiency or improve the quality of the data produced. Resource constraints are real, but they have not precluded us making progress together. Some points of note:
  ◦ With direction from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), we launched the **NHIS-TEEN Survey**, allowing teens in NHIS households to respond to their own online series of health questions. This allows NCHS and the Census Bureau to compare the responses teens gave themselves to the responses their parent or guardian gave to the same questions. This effort also included a reminder operation by text messaging, enabling us to target the best way to reach our teen respondents.
  ◦ We've just completed a field test for **a redesign of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) instrument content**. This is a collaboration years in the making with the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Next year we will, on BJS', behalf be concurrently administering the new and current instruments through a split sample design, to help bridge year-to-year estimates on crime victimization to mitigate impacts on the NCVS decades-long time series.

- In partnership with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the **Current Population Survey** is in an intense phase of modernization. Not only are we expanding respondents' options for participating by adding an internet self-response mode to the survey, but we are researching efficiencies to CAPI and CATI like adaptive design for workload management, and how can administrative records help with response burden on the Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

- The Census Bureau also is excited about its new partnership with U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service and the Food & Nutrition Service to conduct a pilot test of their **Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey**. Demand and expectations for these data are high, and we are working with USDA colleagues to determine the most resource-efficient way we can produce them leveraging administrative data in sample design and validation. Combined with food assistance administrative records (e.g., SNAP, WIC), these data provide a comprehensive resource for researchers evaluating the effectiveness of various food programs and policies.

- In September, the Census Bureau launched construction of the **Census Household Panel**, which is the first nationally-representative panel to be built by a federal statistical agency for federal statistical agency use. This effort is another step forward in our journey to develop a modern infrastructure for timely, evidence-based decision-making. Immediately, the panel will support the conduct of the **Census Bureau's Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Survey** as part of Census 2030 planning. Down the road we seek to further understand how a nationally representative, longitudinal survey infrastructure could meet timely data needs such as those collected by the Household Pulse Survey.

- As part of research related to the updating of **race and ethnicity standards** for the federal government, the Office of Management and Budget sought agency participation for testing proposed changes. In response, many agencies—including many of you in the room today— offered resources and your surveys as test beds. The willingness of your agencies and supporting Census Bureau staff to implement these tests quickly was a great demonstration of shared mission across our agencies for continuous improvement and being responsive to the times.

- As we have ramped down data collection at the Census Bureau for NCHS' Ambulatory Medical Care Surveys this year, we transitioned to a different kind of engagement with NCHS' Division of Health Care Statistics: this year we conducted a small demonstration project using Census Bureau data sources to meet emerging information needs related to the delivery of health care at **Retail Health Care Clinics** (RHCs, think clinics at CVS, Walgreens, etc.). Creating a Linked Retail Health Clinics (LiRHC) database—part of the Census Bureau's EHealth Program—we could understand the business characteristics of retailers with RHCs, the socioeconomic characteristics of people living near RHCs, and other sources of health care in proximity to RHCs. Future phases can examine populations living near retail health clinics, other health care providers located near these clinics, and the business characteristics of retailers that have RHCs. This work yields insights on a health care delivery system in the United States that is rapidly evolving—and for a fraction of the cost of traditional survey programs.

CALLOUTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Additionally, I am pleased to report that **progress on DICE**—the Census Bureau's next generation platform for data ingest and collection—is alive and well. We just marked the **launch of our first survey**—the Annual Integrated Economic Survey—in DICE. Building on this success, we are expanding the capabilities in DICE to support household surveys, with the Current Population Survey leading this transition. From that foundation we will be moving and laying the foundation for the full suite of surveys we support on your behalf.

- I'm especially happy today that we have our **regional directors here**! Our field staff remains our lifeblood. These individuals lead the largest workforce at the Census Bureau, and they must support our field representatives and field supervisors in accomplishing the most difficult job—making the case for participating in your surveys. In a matter of seconds on a doorstep, they must convey in compelling terms the saliency and importance of each interview. They do this in all kinds of weather, in all kinds of neighborhoods, and manage all kinds of engagements with respondents in the most professional way possible.

- Finally, I want to acknowledge that together our agencies are traveling the same landscape with regard to uncertain funding, potential for program disruptions, and making the case for the importance of federal statistics. But when I reflect on the progress made in the last year, my confidence is strong that we can collectively overcome these challenges. The door to modernization of our statistical system is already open and we are moving through it. We are by nature careful, deliberative people—and while we need to move expeditiously, we will do so with the same level of care and quality that preserve the integrity of our data products.

- Thank you—and I am happy to take any questions.