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AHRQ News and Numbers

New statistics underscore how rapidly rising health care costs are eating into the budgets of America's families. Data show that the percentage of Americans younger than 65—whose family's out-of-pocket expenses for health care, including insurance, exceeds \$2,000 a year—rose from 37.3 percent in 1996 to 43.1 percent in 2003, a 16 percent increase. [Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, MEPS, *Statistical Brief #121: Out-of-Pocket Expenditures for Health Care and Insurance Premiums among the Nonelderly Population, 2003*, [statistical brief](#).]

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1. AHRQ Launches New Web-based Tool for States to Measure Quality Performance

AHRQ today released a new interactive Web-based tool for States to use in measuring health care quality at a press conference at the Association of Health Care Journalists meeting in Houston, TX. The new *State Snapshot* Web tool is based on the *2005 National Healthcare Quality Report* and *2005 National Healthcare Disparities Report*, released January 9, and provides quick and easy access to the many measures and tables of the quality report from each State's perspective. Select to view the [State Snapshot](#) tool. The *2005 National Healthcare Quality Report* and the *2005 National Healthcare Disparities Report* are available online at [AHRQ's Qualitytools.gov](#). Print copies of the reports are available by sending an e-mail to AHRQPubs@ahrq.hhs.gov. In addition, we have posted an audio Newscast about the *State Snapshot* tool. The newscast features an interview with AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D., discussing the importance of the tool and its key elements. In addition, AHRQ's Dr. Dwight McNeill explains how to use some of the tool's features. Select to listen to the [program](#).

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2. AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D., Receives the AMA's Nathan Davis Award

AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D., received the American Medical Association's Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service on March 14 in Washington, DC. This award, established by the AMA in 1989, is recognized nationally as one of the most prestigious honors extended to elected officials and career government employees for outstanding endeavors that advance public health. Named for the founder of the AMA, this award strives to encourage and stimulate public recognition for the significant accomplishments attained by men and women who give of themselves to advance the well-being of all. Select to read the [AMA press release](#).

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3. AHRQ Receives the American College of Cardiology Presidential Citation

AHRQ, along with CMS, JCAHO, and the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Performance Measures, received the American College of Cardiology's Presidential Citation at the group's 55th Annual Scientific Session in Atlanta, GA, on March 13. The ACC, which represents approximately 16,000 cardiovascular physicians, honored the groups for their work in quality of cardiology care. They also were honored for achieving a single national measurement standard for heart failure and ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) and non-ST-segment elevation MI (NSTEMI) care. The groups' collaboration "reduces the burden of measure development, broadens the endorsement of measures for public reporting and accountability and, most importantly, contributes focused quality improvement efforts in everyday practice," said ACC President Pamela Douglas, M.D. Select for more information on AHRQ's [measures](#).

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4. Wrong Beliefs about Asthma Affect Inner City Patients' Medication Use

A new AHRQ-funded study published in the March 13 issue of *Chest* shows that many inner city adults with severe asthma apparently believe that they have the disease only when they have symptoms. Asthma is a debilitating, costly, and potentially deadly chronic disease that is especially prevalent in poor, inner city neighborhoods. Yet the researchers found that more than half of a sample of 198 mostly Hispanic or African-American adults with severe asthma did not believe that their disease was chronic. The researchers called this common misconception the "No symptoms, no asthma" health belief. The patients were interviewed when hospitalized for asthma and again 1 month and 6 months after discharge. According to Ethan Halm, M.D., M.P.H., who led the research team from Mount Sinai School of Medicine and Rutgers University, the finding is important because daily use of anti-inflammatory medications has been shown to improve asthma control and is the cornerstone of NIH's recommended best practices for treating the disease. Dr. Halm believes the findings provide an important lesson for clinicians and could help in the development of more effective asthma management strategies for inner city residents. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

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5. AHRQ and CMS to Host 10th National CAHPS® User Group Meeting on March 29-31

AHRQ and CMS are sponsoring the 10th National CAHPS® User Group Meeting: A Decade of Advancing Patient-Centered Care on March 29-31 in Baltimore, MD. The conference will feature presentations and discussion forums for and by users of CAHPS surveys and data. The keynote speakers are AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D., and Jennifer Daley, M.D., Chief Medical Officer at Tenet Healthcare Corporation. Select to [register](#).

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6. New ACTION Program Contracts Awarded

Fifteen new partnerships have been awarded contracts under AHRQ's new Accelerating Change and Transformation in Organizations and Networks (ACTION) program, the successor to AHRQ's Integrated Delivery System Research Network. ACTION is a model of field-based research that fosters public-private collaboration in rapid-cycle, applied research. It links many of the Nation's largest health care systems with top health services researchers. AHRQ actively seeks input on research topics for consideration in developing future ACTION projects. AHRQ also is interested in hearing from organizations that may wish to sponsor, or suggest sponsors, for one or more projects. Please contact the ACTION Program Officer, Cynthia Palmer at Cynthia.Palmer@ahrq.hhs.gov. Of particular interest are topics that fit within ACTION's unique research niche and have clear and direct relevance to practice, public policy and/or the organization and management of healthcare delivery. To nominate concepts for projects, e-mail 1-2 page descriptions to the Program Officer. Each concept should include a brief rationale for the study, suggested methods, if known, a description of how findings may improve health care delivery/health outcomes, a timeframe (12-18 months maximum), and an estimated total budget.

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7. AHRQ's Healthcare411 Audio Series Features Special Reports on Quality

AHRQ has posted two new audio special reports as part of the Healthcare411 series, called "Quality 101." These are interviews with AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D., on such topics as "Understanding Health Care Quality," "Questions to Ask Before Surgery," and "How to Get the Most out of a Visit with Your Health Care Professional." The latest are "Next Steps After Diagnosis," based on the consumer booklet on this topic, and "What is Patient Safety," produced for Patient Safety Awareness Week held early in March. If your computer has a sound card and speakers and can play MP3 audio files, you will be able to listen to the audio on your computer whenever you have 10 or 15 minutes. Select to listen to "[Next Steps After Diagnosis](#)" and select to listen to "[What is Patient Safety](#)". Transcripts also are available from that site. If you want to receive all AHRQ newscasts automatically, you will need subscription software. The AHRQ subscription is free. Select for more [details](#).

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8. New AHRQ Publication—AHRQ At A Glance

This updated brochure summarizes the mission, focus, and strategic goals of AHRQ. Select to read the [brochure](#). A print copy is available by sending an e-mail to AHRQPubs@ahrq.hhs.gov.

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9. Calling All AHRQ Researchers! "Help Us to Help You."

As you may know, AHRQ can help you promote the findings of your research but we can't do it without you. AHRQ has been successful in working with our grantees and contractors to promote findings to the media and to transfer knowledge based on the research to appropriate audiences in the health care community. However, we know we can do better. Please notify us when you have an article accepted for publication. Please send a copy of the manuscript, anticipated publication date, and contact information for the journal and your institution's PR office to your AHRQ project officer and AHRQ Public Affairs at journalpublishing@ahrq.hhs.gov. Your

manuscript will be reviewed to determine the level of marketing we will pursue. Please be assured that AHRQ always honors the journal embargo. Thank you for your cooperation.

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10. AHRQ in the Professional Literature

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Morales LS, Staiger D, Horbar JD, et al. Mortality among very low-birthweight infants in hospitals serving minority populations. *Am J Public Health* 2005 Dec; 95(12):2206-2212. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

Raebel MA, Lyons EE, Chester EA, et al. Improving laboratory monitoring at initiation of drug therapy in ambulatory care: a randomized trial. *Arch Intern Med* 2005 Nov 14; 165(20):2395-2401. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

Zinn J, Spector W, Hsieh L, et al. Do trends in the reporting of quality measures on the Nursing Home Compare Web site differ by nursing home characteristics? *Gerontologist* 2005 Dec; 45(6):720-730. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

Cunningham WE, Hays RD, Duan N, et al. The effect of socioeconomic status on the survival of people receiving care for HIV infection in the United States. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2005 Nov; 16(4):655-676. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

Finkelstein JA, Lozano P, Fuhlbrigge AL, et al. Practice-level effects of interventions to improve asthma care in primary care settings: the Pediatric Asthma Care Patient Outcomes Research Team. *Health Serv Res* 2005 Dec; 40(6Pt 1):1737-1757. Select to read the [abstract](#) in PubMed®.

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