Alternative and Complementary Medicine (CAM) Use in the U.S.: New Data from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) Available in the Integrated Health Interview Series (IHIS)

What is the Integrated Health Interview Series?
- Harmonized data from the public use files of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)—the principal source of information on the health of the U.S. population
- Annual data from 1969 forward
- Easy documentation browsing
- Detailed discussion of comparability issues
- Free web-based data extraction
- Support for statistical packages including STATT, SAS, and SPSS
- Over 1,000 harmonized variables currently available at www.ihis.us

Why does CAM matter?
- Complementary and alternative medicine is "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products not considered to be part of conventional medicine."
- Over half of non-institutionalized civilian adults used some form of CAM in 2002.
- In 2007, U.S. adults spent 33.9 billion dollars out-of-pocket on visits to CAM practitioners and CAM products.
- Full understanding of U.S. medical care requires consideration of CAM as well as conventional medicine.
- Data on CAM have been collected by the NHIS in 1999, 2002, and 2007.
- IHIS will make these CAM use data available in August, 2010.

Data on CAM collected in NHIS
In 1999: 1 adult per household was asked whether he or she had used any of 11 specific alternative health techniques in the preceding 12 months.

In 2002 and 2007: 1 adult per household was asked about the use of 15 specific alternative health techniques, as well as use of herbs and vitamins.

Further information was collected on:
- Ever use of technique, as well as use in past 12 months
- Why used CAM technique
- Whether combined CAM treatment with conventional medicine
- Whether informed health care practitioners about CAM use
- Times saw CAM practitioner and amount paid per visit
- Why discontinued use of CAM technique
- Which health conditions CAM was used to treat

In 2007, information was also collected about use of CAM techniques, herbs, and vitamins by children.

Possible areas of investigation using CAM data
Because IHIS contains variables about SES, demographic characteristics, access to conventional medicine, and health behaviors, investigators can address such questions as the following:
- How does use of CAM vary by age, sex, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
- Are people with less access to conventional medicine (e.g., in rural areas, uninsured, without regular source of care) especially likely to use accessible CAM sources (e.g., vitamins or herbs)?
- Is use of CAM associated with good health habits generally (e.g., nonsmoking, regular exercise, moderate use of alcohol)?
- How is use of CAM associated with recommended use of conventional medicine (e.g., cancer testing, dental care, checkups)?