



## 2019-20 In-Person Survey (IPS) reporting: Why NCI is not producing a national report or calculating an NCI average this year

### Brief background

The 2019-20 IPS survey data collection period was unexpectedly abbreviated due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. NCI recommended states pause in-person surveying on March 16, 2020. On April 15, 2020, the NCI team informed NCI states that stay-at-home orders, public health guidance, and the anticipated disruptions resulting from the ongoing pandemic response had made it necessary to end in-person data collection for the remainder of the 2019-20 survey year.

At the time IPS surveying was ended, states were in many different stages of survey administration. Very few states had completed data collection.

In response, the NCI team modified the criteria for reporting for 2019-20, balancing states' need for a data report of the 2019-20 data with the utility of to-date reported data for quality monitoring. Ultimately, we decided that, **to create a state report on the IPS data for a state this year, we would use a 10% Margin of Error (MoE) threshold.** This means that states will receive a state report if the number of surveys collected prior to the IPS surveying shut-down reach a threshold of 10% MoE (based on the sample frame number reported in the state work-plan). Previous years of IPS reporting have used a 5% MoE threshold.

### What is the Margin of Error (MoE) and why is it important?

The MoE is an indicator of the range of values between which we think the "true" population value is. The "true" population value is the percentage you would get if you exhaustively interviewed everyone.

Although there is no standardized rule about an appropriate threshold for research to be used for decision-making, 5% has come to be widely regarded as an acceptable level of precision for a sample survey. NCI is relaxing the required MoE from 5% to 10% as the threshold for our reporting of the 2019-20 IPS because COVID 19 has created unusual circumstances and we are trying to balance scientific rigor against the need to make the available data useful for states that have already invested significant time and effort into the In-Person Survey.

### Variation in type and extent of selectivity: Why is it important?

In addition to a wider variation in MoE across states, participating states' IPS surveying was interrupted at various stages of their data collection process. This has created variation across states in factors that may impact the representativeness and precision of their data. Regional or other variations in how the surveys were completed, (e.g. geographic regions or proportionally more rural or urban residents surveyed) may have introduced selectivity that the NCI team is unable to measure or correct for. The

variation across states in the type and extent of selectivity may further affect the ability of an NCI average to estimate the “true” population value.

Variability in MoE and selectivity has led us to decide not to produce a national IPS report and forgo reporting NCI Average for the data collected in 2019-20.

A key function of an NCI average is its potential use as a benchmark. To have a dependable benchmark, the state-level numbers going into the average must provide an average that, aggregated, is sufficiently representative of the NCI states overall. Given that states may have much smaller samples than they expected to collect (and thus higher MoEs) and given that states were interrupted at different stages of their data collections, the numbers they contribute to the NCI average will differ in their representativeness. The large variability across states in everything from MoE, the stage at which they were interrupted, and countless other factors caused by this crisis, decreases the utility of the NCI average as a way for states to compare their performance to other states.