

Using Mail Surveys for Health Data Collection

SRBI has conducted numerous mail surveys with varied populations and obtained response rates similar to those obtained in telephone surveys. Mail surveys are less costly than telephone surveys but typically require a longer field period. SRBI has also successfully combined mail surveys with a telephone follow-up to obtain higher response rates and to categorize respondents correctly. We have used mail surveys very successfully to survey physicians and other health providers and have found that a well-designed short mail survey is often more successful with busy physicians than a telephone survey.

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Case Studies:

National Needs Assessment of COPD in the United States: 2003

In 2003, SRBI conducted this study on behalf of the National Coalition on COPD, a network of COPD patient organizations. This survey included two samples of COPD sufferers receiving a four-page mail questionnaire, one from a list sample of emphysema sufferers and the other from the lists of members of patient organizations. Additionally, there were two samples of physicians: (1) a national survey of 500 primary care doctors; and (2) a national survey of 500 pulmonologists sampled from AMA/AOA lists who were mailed an identical four-page questionnaire. Finally, a list sample of respiratory therapists also received a four-page mail questionnaire. The study design allowed comparisons of the attitudes and disease management practices for COPD between the two physician populations, as well as compared to patient reports from the parallel survey of patients with COPD and the respiratory therapists reports.

Implementation of a System Wide Satisfaction Measurement System for VA Residency Programs

Because no complete listing of VA residents existed, SRBI first needed to institute a registration process. An eight-page questionnaire and an advance letter were mailed to the registered physician residents four times resulting in a response rate of 53% (1,732 completed questionnaires returned out of 3,240 registered physician residents). This was a very high response rate considering that there was no telephone follow-up or incentive and the questionnaire itself was 8 pages. SRBI has found that incentives, short, well-designed questionnaires and enough time and follow-up are required to achieve high response rates with mail surveys.

Study Examples:

- National Survey of Public and Stakeholders' Attitudes and Awareness of Genetic Issues
- Beyond Diagnosis: National Survey of the Management and Treatment of Depression
- Survey of Students, Faculty and Staff for Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center
- National Needs Assessment of COPD in the United States: 2003
- National Survey of Hospices
- National Survey of Medical Examiners and Coroners
- Primary Immune Deficiency Disease in America
- Survey of Entroviral Meningitis and Encephalitis in Immuno-compromised Patients
- Survey of Health Care Trends
- And many others