

NHEX Product Review



The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) is committed to ensuring that our long-standing products — including our data sets, indicators and reports — continue to resonate with stakeholders and reflect the evolving Canadian health care landscape. We have been using a life cycle approach to evaluate new products for some time, and we've now decided to expand this approach to look at some of our more established releases.

In August 2020, we completed our first review of this kind on the National Health Expenditure Database (NHEX) annual release, which provides an overview of how much is spent on health care annually. The review examined the underlying data, methodologies, content and format of the NHEX product to ensure it continues to meet the needs of stakeholders into the future.

Review process

Guided by external experts, the review drew on an environmental scan, interviews with internal and external stakeholders, a document review and an online questionnaire. Pan-Canadian feedback was provided from both government and non-government stakeholders. We noted consistency among the findings from each component of the review.

Key findings

Overall, the review affirmed the value of the product, particularly with respect to jurisdictional comparisons, historical time series, public/private spending breakdowns and international comparisons. It also suggested some areas for enhancement for the future.

Based on stakeholder feedback, we identified 7 themes and developed recommendations for future enhancements of data, methodologies, content and format of NHEX information:

1. Clarify definitions of spending categories, and ensure more uniform use of data across the provinces and territories.
2. Reformat the current presentation of actual and forecast information to better analyze the differences between intended and actual spending.
3. Address identified issues with specific secondary data sources and definitions (e.g., source of capital expenditure estimates, drugs derived from private insurance).
4. Refine and explore the potential to separate specific spending categories (e.g., other health spending).

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5. Add an additional lens to the NHEX report by spending purpose (e.g., home and community care) and/or related to emerging issues (e.g., COVID-19).
6. Connect NHEX with other data in an effort to increase the granularity of the results (e.g., sub-provincial results).
7. Improve user experience with data display and self-service options through different targeted digital initiatives.

Implementation plan

We've developed a phased implementation plan that takes into account our current understanding of the issues and opportunities raised, stakeholders' priority needs, and the amount of time and investment required to implement the recommendations.

Activities to enhance future NHEX releases are already underway, and a number of recommendations will be incorporated into the next release. These include organizing a jurisdictional technical working group, improving the format for actual and forecast estimates, offering additional stakeholder support during the product's embargo period, adding an in-focus section to the report (e.g., impact of COVID-19 on health expenditures) and helping users find the information on health spending they need. Improvements for future releases will focus on ways to address issues with specific secondary data sources, to refine specific spending categories and to connect NHEX with other data sources.

What's next?

Our next long-standing products slated for review include the Physicians in Canada, Nursing in Canada and Health Workforce Database releases, which are being examined as a bundle.



For more information on the NHEX product review or to request the complete NHEX product review report (English only), please contact us at nhex@cihi.ca.

