Making National Survey Data Come Alive

Communication of data is essential to engaging all audiences, including those involved in research, program development, program evaluation, and policy making. When used effectively, data on children’s health can be a powerful tool to educate stakeholders, inform decision makers, and motivate and track improvement of children’s health care delivery. However, accomplishing these goals requires strategic communication of data results. For many stakeholders, data can be overwhelming and can lead to a lack of engagement or tuning out. To make data come alive, communicate data to your audience by grounding data in real life, easy to understand examples and scenarios.

**STEP 1:** Select a relevant data point to your research, program, or policy.

For data on children’s health, you can begin an interactive data search on children or children with special health care needs by going to: (http://childhealthdata.org/browse/survey).

- For this exercise, we selected the 2009 NS-CSHCN to examine the prevalence of children with special health care needs (e.g. the number of children who experience at least one ongoing health condition which results in an above routine use of health services) in California.

- In California, there are an estimated 997,000 children with special health care needs.

**NOTE:** The average school bus is 40 feet in length and holds 55 children (discovered via a quick Google search)

**STEP 2:** Frame your message. Consider your audience. What point do you want to get across? How can you communicate this in a clear and concise way, with relevance to a broad audience?

For example, select a reference point with common cultural understanding among your community of interest. Examples include the size of a local sports arena, distances between common sites, or how many children would fill city school buses. To increase overall impact, this should include a tangible idea that catches the reader based on interest and geographical area.

- To illustrate this point we will use the distance school buses would stretch if they were full of children with special health care needs from California. Note that you can use this example for a specific health outcome or consequence (such as children with asthma, or children without a medical home).

**STEP 3:** Translate the data point into a meaningful concept.

- For example, select a reference point with common cultural understanding among your community of interest. Examples include the size of a local sports arena, distances between common sites, or how many children would fill city school buses. To increase overall impact, this should include a tangible idea that catches the reader based on interest and geographical area.

**STEP 4:** Present your findings to your audience.
STEP 3: Calculate the data point into the chosen meaningful concept.

Calculate the number of miles school buses would stretch across California. In our example, there are approximately 997,000 children with special health care needs in California.

Number of Miles of School Buses

This would equate to \[
\frac{997,000 \text{ kids}}{1} \times \frac{1 \text{ Bus}}{40 \text{ kids}} \times \frac{55 \text{ feet}}{1 \text{ Bus}} \times \frac{1 \text{ mile}}{5280 \text{ feet}} = 259.6 \text{ miles}
\]

Since our population is CSHCN in California, we would look for a distance roughly equal to 260 miles in California (e.g. Santa Barbara to San Diego). The goal is to find something that will grab people’s attention.

STEP 4: Present your findings to your audience.

Simplicity is essential! Find a way to discuss your data in the most concise way possible. Consider using a graphic or picture, but only if it brings more clarity to your point and does not distract the audience. Making a simple, concise point will speak volumes about the needs of your specific population.

- All of the CSHCN in California would fill 24,925 school buses and stretch the entire distance from San Diego to Santa Barbara (259.6 miles).

Another example

- 2.7 million CSHCN have parents who cut back and/or stopped working due to their child’s condition. This is equivalent to the number of people who work for the US Federal Government.

Another example

- 11.2 million children in the U.S. have special health care needs. This would fill 280,000 school buses and stretch 2,917 miles—greater than the distance from Los Angeles, CA to New York, NY!