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LibGuides: Going from Ordinary to Extraordinary

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Introduction

The Taubman Health Sciences Library creates online learning environments in Lib-Guides for our patrons to use 24 hours a day. Many of them have been enthusiastically embraced.

In the past, we were most concerned with getting information up and organized in a traditional manner, so we categorized resources by type or format (databases, e-books, web-based resources).



However, we are finding this system of organization does not make sense to our users or always meet their needs, as the content of both can be similar.

For example, the library provides access to both databases and web-based resources. If we feature a particular resource on a guide and it exists in multiple formats, should it appear in multiple locations, organized by format? Or does it make more sense to highlight the resource's different formats in one location? In other words, should we organize resources by format or by content? We think the latter is better and that it is more efficient. Organizing resources by format can lead to unnecessary overlap.

We have made changes not only in the organization of materials but in the subjects of our guides as well as resources have grown in type and number. We still maintain guides for departments, such as Dermatology or Environmental Health Sciences, but we have also created guides that cross over departmental boundaries, such as our guides on **Health Statistics**, **Patient Safety**, and **Health Disparities in the U.S.**

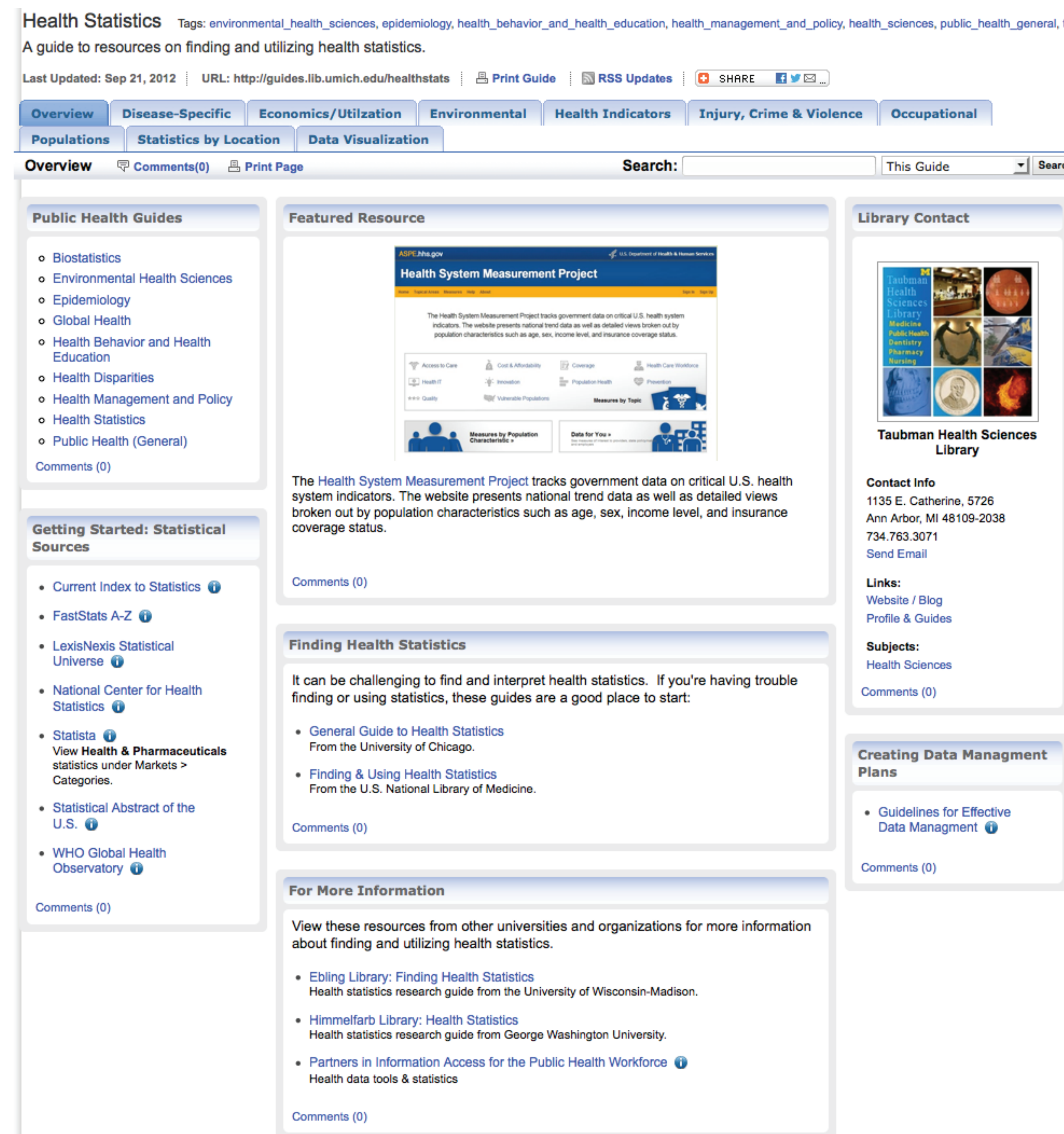
Boxes

Too many words and too much information in a box will overwhelm users (see below). We keep it simple with links and succinct descriptions.



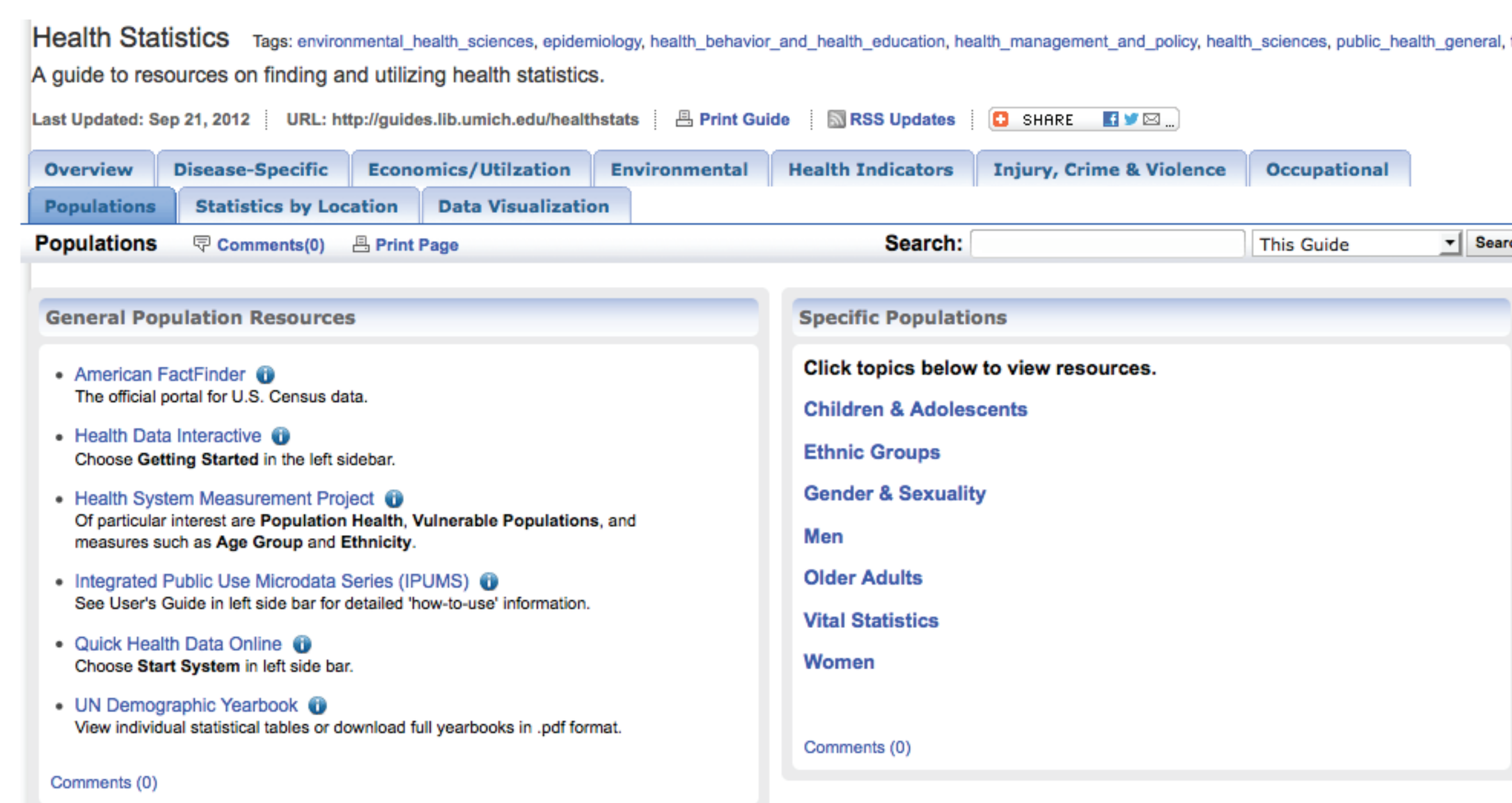
Interdisciplinary Guides

Our Health Statistics guide is an example of an interdisciplinary guide.



We wanted to provide as many statistical sources as possible and discovered hundreds of resources and thus hundreds of links. We then organized the guide on several salient characteristics, including **Disease**, **Health Indicator**, and **Population**.

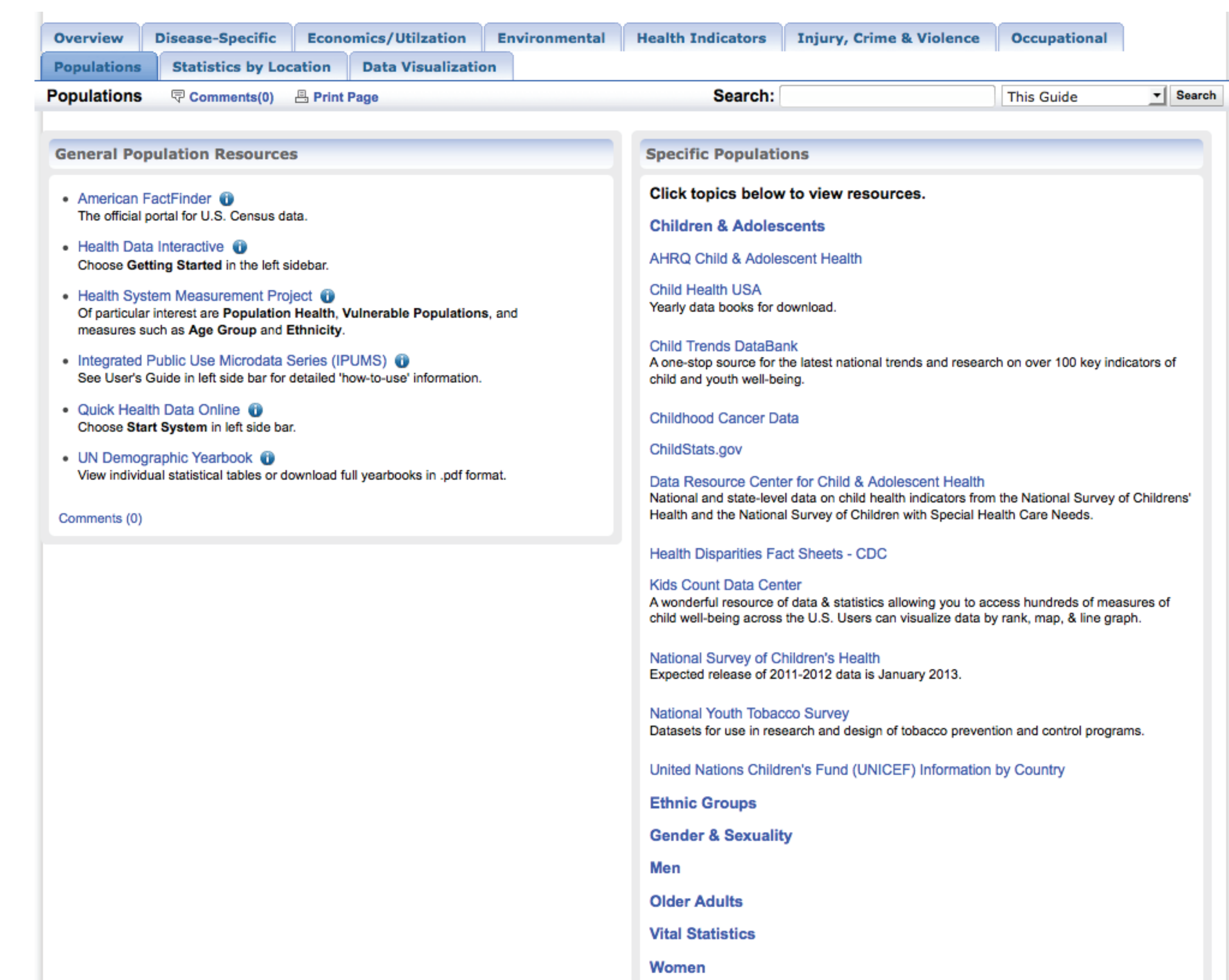
Most pages include a box of general population resources on the left to orient a new user and a box of more specific resources on the right for an experienced user. Specific resources are "hidden" in collapsible lists.



Collapsible Lists

Collapsible lists are utilized to organize large numbers of related resources. The guides are more easily navigable and are less likely to seem overwhelming. Collapsible lists allow information to be arranged and understood in smaller amounts.

In the example below, the **Populations** page on the Health Statistics guide includes resources organized within 7 topics. Clicking on a topic (**Children & Adolescents** in this case) expands that particular topic to reveal the resources and succinct descriptions.



Pages

A guide with ten rows of tabs will overwhelm rather than help viewers.



It is important to keep the number of pages to a minimum. We aim to exceed no more than two rows of tabs and to maintain a degree of consistency in their labels.

It is equally important to give pages succinct and informative titles: "Search Tools and Meet the Googles and GOVERNMENT" and "**** INFORMATION LITERACY ****" may be too vague. "**Health Indicators**" and "**Statistics by Location**" are more meaningful.