

# Consistent and Uniform Approach to Health Data and Its Use: AHIMA's Statement on Data Stewardship

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With the emergence of health IT, the rules of health data creation, management, exchange, and use are changing. A need for national standards on both data creation and use is emerging in place of the local, organizational policies that served in a time of more limited data mobility.

In November 2008 AHIMA released a position statement calling for a “nationwide effort among the healthcare and information technology industries, relevant government agencies, federal legislators, employers, and consumers to establish or identify and authorize a national health data stewardship entity.”

Such an entity, AHIMA wrote, would meet the current need for a universal, authoritative source that defines stakeholder rights and responsibilities and ensures consistency and integrity in data collection, distribution, and storage.

A portion of the statement is reprinted here. The entire statement may be read online at [www.ahima.org/dc/positions](http://www.ahima.org/dc/positions).

**As organizations** adopt [health] IT and begin leveraging [health information exchange], there are issues and concerns that must be addressed through data stewardship by developing uniform rules and guidelines:

- *Principles and Guidelines*—The principles for standardizing content of clinical documents and data definitions will greatly facilitate downstream data collection and aggregation, increase data quality, and give tremendous guidance to care delivery organizations, entities that build products based on data requirements, and electronic health record (EHR) system vendors.
- *Data Access, Use and Control*—In an increasing electronic environment, defining the guidelines to support this concept is critical for setting clear rules of engagement. Considering the rights of key stakeholders that must gain access and use healthcare data for various purposes is a key factor to ensure the privacy and security of a person's healthcare data remains intact.

To succeed in its transition to an interoperable healthcare system, the US must strive for the development of a consistent and uniform approach towards data standards and definitions and data that is leveraged for various uses. Achieving uniformity in structure, business policies and practices, and processing and delivery of data will reduce costs, streamline workflows, improve data compatibility, harmonize reporting requirement and reduce the reporting burden for healthcare organizations. These challenges have been highlighted by numerous organizations such as [the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality], the American Medical Informatics Association, and the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics.

## Recommendations

In order to move toward a nationwide goal of uniformity and consistency of data, AHIMA recommends the following:

- **Objective:** Identify and authorize a partnership of stakeholders that will establish national coordination in a transparent process with other entities to set uniform rules and the requirements for principles of data stewardship to achieve uniformity and consistency of data.
- **Action:** Establish mechanisms for collaboration among representative groups to ensure support and utilize the strengths from all organizations.

- **Objective:** Increase transparency in the operation and management of data access, use, and control. Individuals should have the opportunity to be informed of all potential uses of their health data.  
**Action:** Develop a framework for policy development to enable patients and consumers to meet their informational needs of transparency.
- **Objective:** Establish coordinated objectives at the federal, state, and local levels to improve data collection and use efficiencies and reduce the burden of cost.  
**Action:** In concert with all partners, identify and coordinate priorities, policies, and practices that are needed to develop and implement harmonized data reporting initiatives. As the need for data collection and reporting continue to increase, the administrative burden increases as well. These initiatives could benefit from improved coordination among the bodies through standards in reporting requirements.
- **Objective:** Enable an effective method for the standardized release of data to approved agencies and organizations as permitted by law.  
**Action:** Develop and implement a data release framework for policy development to promote and advance the trusted release of data for other uses.

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