

IG 101: What is Information Governance?

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by Diana Warner

Unlike most businesses and industries, in a simplified view healthcare is really about life and death, where data and information can be considered the lifeblood of any organization in providing healthcare services. Healthcare information a critical resource that must be understood and utilized appropriately in order to provide safe, effective, and high-quality care. With the current environment of incentives and other drivers for adoption of health information technology, there is a need to ensure the integrity of healthcare information, in other words, it must be accurate, timely, relevant, valid, and complete.

AHIMA uses Gartner's [definition](#) of information governance:

- The specification of **decision rights** and an **accountability framework** to ensure appropriate behavior in the valuation, creation, storage, use, archiving, and deletion of *information*
- The **processes, roles and policies, standards, and metrics** that ensure the effective and efficient use of information in enabling an organization to achieve its goals.

The [Data Governance Institute](#) defines data governance as:

- The overall management of the availability, usability, integrity, and security of the **data** employed in an organization or enterprise.

Traditionally, the focus has been to fix information and data problems as they are uncovered—after the fact. In this approach, some of the problems can even get to near-crisis level before HIM professionals are able to react to fix them. A primary example of the consistent reactive mode is all the retrospective review and cleanup typical of HIM duties. Records are audited for missing information and reviewed for completeness and accuracy of data. What if we could take a prospective approach? What if we could set up systems and processes so that we could ensure accuracy up front? Have assurance that records will be purged on time and that only clean claims are going out the door? Information governance allows for enforcing policies not only through training and education, but also through workflows and systems configurations.

All information is not created equal and different types have different values to the organization. Information Governance is also about managing the redundant, outdated, and trivial information to ensure effectiveness, efficiency, and financial benefits; it becomes costly for organizations not to manage resources.

How does data governance differ from information governance?

Information governance speaks to the accountability framework or who is responsible for what, as well as who can make decisions about the information asset. Its goal is to make sure that all information resources and investments support the business goals effectively and efficiently and that they enable the healthcare organization to accomplish its strategic goals. Information governance is led, not just sponsored, by executive leadership at the enterprise level.

Data governance is more narrowly focused and it is focused on one specific type of information resource, the data. It is the management of the availability, usability, integrity, and security of the data employed in an organization. Data is unprocessed information. Data governance is led at the business unit level. Data governance is a component of information governance. With the need for business intelligence, data governance has become a priority in many organizations to be able to produce reports to meet the regulatory needs.

A strong information governance program mitigates the information management crises by assessing risks, understanding gaps, and doing some advanced planning and putting policies, procedures, and tools in place that let HIM professionals proactively manage data and information—not just in HIM, but enterprise-wide.

This is the first article in a six-part web series, [Information Governance 101](#), that discusses information governance programs and seeks to define the terms associated with information governance. The next article will discuss the key drivers for an information governance program.

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