


BEST PRACTICES FOR RESEARCHERS

DATA DISCLOSURE USING THE FIVE SAFES FRAMEWORK


Data requests are evaluated using the Five Safes Framework: safe projects, safe data, safe people, safe settings and safe outputs. Researchers must adhere to all five dimensions, ensuring ethical and responsible data use.

Factors affecting the evaluation of a request include the presence/absence of patient consent, identifiability of the data, data sharing plans, registry creation, artificial intelligence involvement, and commercialization intent. Such factors may increase the complexity of the request and may require a more detailed review.




SAFE PROJECTS

- Include a completed application form, research proposal, and evidence of ethics approval from an Alberta Research Ethics Board.*
- Ensure your research objectives are well-defined and specific.
- Narrow your cohort to a specific and well-justified subset of the population.
- If applicable, ensure patients have provided consent for the intended use and collection of data.




SAFE DATA

- Only request variables that are essential to your current research questions and provide justification for why they are required.
- Avoid requesting patient identifiers (e.g., PHN, postal code, date of birth, date of death, etc.) unless necessary. Consult with AHS analytics teams on how to reduce the identifiability of your dataset.**
- For projects involving chart reviews, limit the number of patients' PHN's requested to an amount that addresses your research questions & can be feasibly conducted within the resourcing & timeframe of the project.




SAFE PEOPLE

- Demonstrate that you and your team have the knowledge, skills, and experience to analyze, use and interpret the data responsibly.
- Engage with AHS data and analytics teams to address any questions you may have about the data / analyses.



SAFE SETTINGS

- Clearly identify how and where the data will be securely stored and analyzed.
- Maintain data on AHS servers, if possible, as this can expedite the review process.
- Never share data with third parties unless appropriate data transfer agreements clearly specifying the arrangement are in place with AHS.



SAFE OUTPUTS

- Ensure that all results produced are only released in aggregate form.
- Provide an outline of the expected output (e.g., shell tables).
- Ensure that outputs do not inadvertently reveal sensitive information.

*Obtaining ethics approval does not guarantee access to data. As a custodian of health information, Alberta Health Services (AHS) is committed to complying with the Health Information Act (HIA) principles and may impose additional conditions in addition to those listed by the Research Ethics Board.

**Personal identifiers will not be released for the purpose of linking with other AHS datasets; such linkages must be performed internally by AHS teams.