



About Using Data for Better Health Outcomes

In this module we explore the use of data in assessing the health of communities, and examine the links between these findings with the geographical features of specific areas.

Data can be collected using electronic tools that combine computer-mapping capabilities with additional database management and data analysis tools. Using data in this way can contribute to preventative health activities, which can be implemented to improve the overall population health outcomes.

Using Data for Better Health Outcomes in General Practice

In health care, the primary source of data comes from general practice through clinical care delivery to patients. When this data is used outside of the general practice setting, for purposes other than which it was originally collected, it is referred to as secondary use of data. This includes clinical analysis and research, quality measurement, public health planning and decision-making.

Secondary use of data is controlled through legislation, which covers the handling of personal health information to ensure patient privacy is maintained. Data can only be used to provide information to support a population health approach, which aims to improve the health of the entire population and to reduce health inequalities among population groups.

Improving patient care through Using Data for Better Health Outcomes

Using data to understand population health helps paint a picture of the overall wellbeing of a community. Data can highlight differences in health status between social groups and can help determine what approaches need to be prioritised. With advances in technology, general practices are able to capture and analyse health data more efficiently and without additional costs.

In general practice, population data can be used to help:

- Implement preventative programs for patients leading to a decrease in morbidities.
- Ensure local governments understand community health needs.
- Provide better community facilities and services such as well-lit walking paths and gymnasiums, to promote physical activity as a preventative measure where obesity could be a population health problem.

Using Data for Better Health Outcomes: A guide for General Practice

General practices providing data for secondary use must ensure data is de-identified to protect patient privacy. Data provided for population health research should be accurate, complete, relevant, timely, sufficiently detailed, clear, and should retain enough information to support clinical decision-making. Some practices may have poor quality data, which cannot contribute to community studies.

Is providing Data for Better Health Outcomes right for your practice? Things to consider:

1. Are you providing your information to reputable research organisations?
2. Do you have quality data that can be used?
3. How will this benefit your patients and the community?
4. Do you have a policy around the secondary use of data?
5. Are you currently contributing any health data to national studies?
6. How will you de-identify your data?
7. Have you considered security and privacy issues?



Supporting information

- The Framingham Heart Study

This study was conducted in 1948 and it was a joint project of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and Boston University. The website outlines that the objective of the study was to 'identify the common factors or characteristics that contribute to cardio vascular disease (CVD) by following its development over a long period of time in a large group of participants who had not yet developed overt symptoms of CVD or suffered a heart attack or stroke.' At this point in time little was known about CVD and it is now recognised as one of the major causes of mortality and morbidity in Australia. As the website outlines, today, the study remains a world-class epicentre for cutting-edge heart, brain, bone, and sleep research.
Link: <http://www.framinghamheartstudy.org/>

- The Busselton health Study

The Busselton Health Study has been running epidemiological research programs since 1966 and is one of the longest running research programs of its type in the world. Busselton is a small town in the south-west of Western Australia and the community has been involved in a series of health surveys which have helped to contribute to the understanding of a range of health conditions. As the website states, Dr Kevin Cullen initiated this collection of data 'to establish and conduct population health research in a community setting that would not only provide important information into the prevalence and causes of common diseases but also to empower participants to take an active role in their health and well-being.'
Link: <http://www.busseltonhealthstudy.com/>

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government under the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. Their reports and data are used for making policy decisions on health, housing and community services matters.
Link: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/home/>

- Population Health Research Network

The Population Health Research Network are conducting a Australia first data linkage program where information about people, places and events from different data collections is brought together allowing population health research to be carried out more thoroughly and more effectively. For more information about this program click on the below link:
Link: <http://www.phrn.org.au/home>

The patient should always be the focus of any data use; therefore, the patients' rights and privacy must always be protected