Accessing Medicaid and Medicare Data at the University of Chicago

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The Medicaid Working Group (MWG) has obtained multiple years of identifiable, restricted Medicaid and Medicare claims data, which are housed at the Center for Research Informatics (CRI) in the Biological Sciences Division. However, access to Medicaid and Medicare data is strictly governed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) through Data Use Agreements (DUAs).

Applying to Use the Data

Access to the data by other University of Chicago researchers may be obtained by applying to CMS for re-use of the data through a separate DUA. Each DUA is project-specific. All DUA applications are processed through ResDAC, a contractor to CMS that also provides technical assistance and advice regarding CMS data. Instructions for re-use applications may be found on the ResDAC website, which also contains detailed data descriptions and documentation:

https://www.resdac.org/

The Medicaid Working Group (MWG), as custodians of the original DUA, must approve requests for re-use of the data in order for them to be approved, according to CMS rules. The MWG will supply the data management portion of any application for re-use, and applicants must agree to abide by the data management and security policies. Applications often take several months to be processed and CMS charges a fee for re-use, currently $2000. Once the re-use DUA is approved, access to the data on CRI will be granted.

All co-investigators who want to access the data will need to be named on the re-use DUA. An individual may be covered by the DUA without signing it if directly supervised by a signatory to the primary or re-use DUA. This applies to programmers, research assistants (including doctoral students serving as RAs), and other staff who need access to the data as part of an investigator-led team and are not carrying out independent research. All aspects of the relevant DUA apply.

Pilot Data

Unfortunately, DUA rules strictly prohibit access to the data for purposes not listed in an existing DUA, including access for exploratory analysis to generate preliminary data, to check data quality in key fields, or to assess prevalence for power analyses. Researchers who want to apply for re-use must find other ways to make these assessments, such as estimates from prior literature or by checking the data documentation on the ResDAC site. In some cases, investigators working on related issues under existing DUAs may have generated relevant counts or other statistics that could be shared without violating the DUA terms, subject to minimum cell counts.

Students

Students who wish to use the data for dissertation research must also apply for a re-use DUA. However, CMS waives the re-use fee for students.

Researchers at Other Institutions
For investigators not at the University of Chicago, access to our data will generally not be possible except in the case of active collaboration with a University of Chicago PI on research covered under a University of Chicago DUA.