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# VA Research & Development Guidance for Securely Obtaining Informed Consent

*System Security Support Department  
Research Support Division Cybersecurity Program*

*OIS Bulletin No. 427*

**December 22, 2020**

## Overview

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Information Security (OIS), System Security Support (SSS) Department, Research Support Division (RSD) in collaboration with the Office of Research & Development (ORD) has developed an enterprise guidance document titled, "Research Guidance for the Use of Electronic Methods to Securely Obtain Informed Consent". The objective of this published guidance is to provide best practices for utilizing electronic methods when securely obtaining consent and signatures from VA participants or a Legally Authorized Representative (LAR) for Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved research studies that require a written informed consent form.

This RSD guidance document outlines the use of electronic methods to transfer informed consent documents to, and from, potential VA research participants in VA IRB-approved research studies and will provide the greatest benefits for R&D stakeholders (Principal Investigators (PI), Research Coordinators, Research Administrative Officers, IRB/Research and Development Committee (R&DC) members, Information System Security Officers (ISSO)) who are engaged in IRB-approved research studies that have been impacted by COVID-19. The aforementioned guidance document also provides R&D stakeholders awareness of several new and existing secure VA-approved capabilities available for R&D purposes.

## Guidance

VA R&D stakeholders are encouraged to review this RSD guidance document, posted on the OIS Knowledge Service portal, at:

[https://vaw.vashare.oit.va.gov/sites/ois/KnowledgeService/KSPublications/Research%20Guidance\\_Use%20of%20Electr%20Methods\\_Obtain%20Informed%20Consent\\_101520.pdf](https://vaw.vashare.oit.va.gov/sites/ois/KnowledgeService/KSPublications/Research%20Guidance_Use%20of%20Electr%20Methods_Obtain%20Informed%20Consent_101520.pdf)

The following VA-approved secure methods for electronically transmitting informed consent forms and obtaining wet, electronic, or digital signatures from VA participants or an LAR for R&D purposes are detailed within the guidance document:

- VA Rights Management Services (RMS): Secure transmission using encrypted email with return of wet signatures
- MyHealthVet: Secure transmission using encrypted email with return of wet signatures
- DocuSign: Transmitting informed consent forms and obtaining digital signatures
- IMedConsent (VA internal use only): Obtaining informed consent electronically
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health record: Secure scanning of informed consent forms
- Use of external electronic informed consent applications or systems

## Resource Links

**Office of Information Security (OIS) System Security Support (SSS) Research Support Division (RSD) "Research Guidance for the Use of Electronic Methods to Securely Obtain Informed Consent"**

[https://vaw.vashare.oit.va.gov/sites/ois/KnowledgeService/KSPublications/Research%20Guidance\\_Use%20of%20Electr%20Methods\\_Obtain%20Informed%20Consent\\_101520.pdf](https://vaw.vashare.oit.va.gov/sites/ois/KnowledgeService/KSPublications/Research%20Guidance_Use%20of%20Electr%20Methods_Obtain%20Informed%20Consent_101520.pdf)

**Office of Research & Development (ORD) "Research Information Security & Cybersecurity Toolkit"**

[https://www.research.va.gov/programs/orppe/education/information\\_security.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/programs/orppe/education/information_security.cfm)

**Office of Research & Development (ORD) "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Regarding COVID-19 Impacts on Research"**

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vacovhacomm/admin/projects/covid19/SitePages/ORD-Communications.aspx>

## Points of Contact

**Office of Information Security (OIS) System Security Support (SSS) Department  
Research Support Division (RSD)**

[OITITOPSSOESOResearchSupportDivision@va.gov](mailto:OITITOPSSOESOResearchSupportDivision@va.gov)

**Office of Research & Development (ORD)**

**Office of Research Protections, Policy, and Education (ORPP&E)**

[vhacoordregulatory@va.gov](mailto:vhacoordregulatory@va.gov)

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