Research vs Operations Decision Tool

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VHA maintains patient health information and other data used for a variety of purposes, such as program administration, healthcare quality improvement, program evaluation, and research. The process for requesting access to data is based on how the data will be used.

The Access Category Finder on the next page will help you identify the correct data access category. Select a Data Use to view examples. Select an Access Category to view information on the VHA Data Portal about requesting data access.

Suggested Citation

Acknowledgements
The material for this tool was gathered from presentations on data access given by the Offices of Research Oversight and Research and Development.
Conducting a project funded as research

Conducting a VA approved research project that contributes to generalizable knowledge

Preparing a research proposal or protocol intended to contribute to generalizable knowledge

Evaluating a process, activity, or program within VHA

Planning and administrative analysis for a VHA facility or program office

Improving a process or activity within VHA

Evaluating a process, activity, or program within VHA

Access Category Definition Data Use

Preparatory to Research

Program Administration

Quality Improvement

Program Evaluation

Preparatory to Research

Research

Access Category

Operations

Preparatory to Research

Research

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Evaluating a process, activity, or program within VHA
Program Administration

Activities designed for internal VA purposes
- Operational monitoring
- Business planning and development

Examples
- Cost-management and planning analyses related to managing and operating an entity
- Business management and general administrative activities
- Financial auditing
Quality Improvement

Activities designed for internal VA purposes
  - Routine data collection and analysis for program improvement purposes

Examples
  - Cardiac Assessment Reporting and Tracking System (CART)
  - External Peer Review Program (EPRP)
  - Home and Community Based Quality Care Initiative
  - VA Surgical Quality Improvement Program (VASQIP)
  - VHA Quality Improvement Initiative (VQuIP)
  - Mental Health Program Evaluation Centers
Program Evaluation

Activities designed for internal VA purposes such as routine data collection and analysis for evaluations.

Examples of evaluation activities

- VHA system redesign, patient satisfaction surveys, case management and care coordination, policy and guideline development and related evaluation, benchmarking

- Competence or qualification reviews of VA employees and health care professionals, provider and health plan performance evaluations; peer review; training and education; accreditation, licensing, and credentialing; Joint Commission visits and related activities
Preparatory to Research

Activities using data containing Protected Health Information (PHI) to prepare a research proposal or protocol prior to submission for funding or IRB approval.

_VHA Handbook 1200.05_ provides information about requirements for Preparatory to Research data activities.
Research

- Activities designed to
  - Add to generalizable knowledge
  - Produce information to expand the knowledge base of a scientific discipline or scholarly field of study

- Activities funded or otherwise supported as research by the Office of Research & Development (ORD) or any other entity.

- Clinical investigations as defined under Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations

- Examples
  - Double blind interventions
  - Placebo controls
  - Prospective patient-level randomization to clinical interventions not tailored to individual patient benefit