
DATA USERS REFERENCE GUIDE CHANGES

General Information

Initially published in November 1993, the 2000 release of the Data Users Reference Guide represents the fourth edition of this publication. The third addition was published in March 1997.

This edition of the Data Users Reference Guide contains substantial changes from previous editions. Narrative revisions of each chapter have been furnished by the responsible HCFA component. Data Element lists and the appendix of codes have been removed from the document and will be published in the future on the HCFA web site at www.hcfa.gov. We recommend this document be reviewed in its entirety to ascertain the full scope of changes to our databases, subsidiary files, access facility software, and data administration and/or data management policies.

Data Availability

Many of the files described in this reference guide are not accessible to individuals outside of HCFA. Modified and summary versions of some files are available for purchase as Public Use Files (PUFs) and Beneficiary Encrypted Files (BEFs).

The PUFs are the primary source of data for Federal agencies outside of HCFA, government contractors, academic researchers, and commercial enterprises that are not permitted access to individual identifiable information. The PUFs chapter in this guide provides descriptions of PUFs offered for sale by HCFA.

In addition, HCFA files containing person-specific data elements are available for purchase as Beneficiary Encrypted Files (BEFs). In these files all identifiers have been encrypted, ranged, or blanked to protect the privacy of our beneficiaries. The BEFs require the submission of a signed Data Use Agreement (DUA). The BEFs chapter in the guide provides descriptions of BEFs offered for sale by HCFA.

When user requirements cannot be met through PUFs or BEFs, customized datasets for epidemiological research, program management, program integrity studies, and investigative activities may be requested. The requirements for obtaining specialized datasets are contained in the HCFA Data Use Policies and Procedures chapter of this guide. More information on HCFA data release policies and procedures can be obtained by contacting the OIS, EDG, Division of Data Liaison and Distribution (DDLDD) at (410) 786-3690. Adhoc reports are also available from summarized level data to satisfy request from the health care community. For more information about obtaining adhoc statistical reports contact the OIS, EDG, Division of Information

Distribution (DID) at (410)786-3689.

The PUF and BEF chapters have been changed to reflect the layout of the PUF catalog, with the exception of the costs of files.

Data Release Chapter

This chapter has been changed to include a complete set of instructions and forms for obtaining specialized files from HCFA.