

Appendix A

Health information management and development

What is national health information and why is it needed?

National health information is information that is either national in coverage or has relevance nationally and relates to:

- the health of the population;
- the determinants of the population's health, including external factors (physical, biological, social, cultural and economic) and those internal to individuals (e.g. knowledge, behaviour, disease risk factors);
- health interventions or health services, including those provided directly to individuals and those provided to communities, covering information on the nature of interventions, management, resourcing, accessibility, use and effectiveness; and
- the relationships among these elements.

Health information is needed by consumers and providers of health services, the health industry, governments and the community to enable informed decision-making. Consumers need information to guide their decisions to seek care, modify their behaviour, choose between different treatment options and understand the care they are receiving. Providers of health services need information about the needs of the populations they serve, the effectiveness of their interventions and for whom they are effective, and the acceptability of these interventions to consumers. Providers also require nationally consistent information to be able to compare the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations with those of their peers. The health industry and governments need information to make decisions about how to provide services equitably, efficiently and effectively, and to monitor health service financing, performance and health outcomes (Jellie & Shaw 1999).

National Health Information Agreement

The National Health Information Agreement (NHIA) provides the infrastructure for health information development in Australia. The Agreement ensures that the compilation and interpretation of national information is appropriate to government and community requirements and that data are collected and reported efficiently. The Agreement has been signed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, the AIHW and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and operates under the auspices of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC). The National Health Information Management Group and the National Health Data Committee, in consultation with other national working groups, provide the mechanism for State and Territory endorsement of data standards and collections. The NHIA aims to improve access to uniform health information by community groups, health professionals, and government and non-government organisations. Under the NHIA provisions, all jurisdictions agree on definitions, standards and rules of collection of information and on guidelines for the coordination of access, interpretation and publication of national health information (AIHW 1994). The National Health Information

Work Program is a rolling triennial work program of national health information projects. The NMDS for alcohol and other drug treatment services project has been included as part of the National Health Information Work Program.

National Health Information Management Group

The National Health Information Management Group (NHIMG) is responsible for:

- overseeing the direction, development, review and implementation of the National Health Information Agreement and the agreed work program;
- making recommendations to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council on national health information priorities, work programs, funding implications and other policy issues;
- negotiating with other groups and individuals for the collection and dissemination of information which will enhance the provision of health care;
- overseeing the role and function of the National Health Data Committee; and
- overseeing the review and maintenance of the *National Health Data Dictionary*.

National Health Data Committee

The National Health Data Committee (NHDC) coordinates national information development and endorses all definitions proposed for inclusion in the *National Health Data Dictionary* prior to submission to the National Health Information Management Group. The *National Health Data Dictionary* is a set of data items and definitions that is intended to facilitate the collection of uniform data in order to more accurately describe and compare health services in Australia. Other responsibilities include:

- reviewing and endorsing national minimum data sets in the health field;
- promoting and facilitating the sharing of information about developments in national health information; and
- taking a pro-active role in health information development that is consistent with identified National Health Information Priority Areas.

National Health Data Dictionary

The *National Health Data Dictionary* is a compilation of data items and definitions that is intended to facilitate the collection of uniform data in order to more accurately describe and compare health services in Australia. It has been produced every year since 1991 and originally it covered only the National Minimum Data Set—institutional health care. However, since the implementation of the National Health Information Agreement in 1993, it has become the vehicle for all national data definitions developed through the NHDC. Coverage has extended beyond institutional health care, drawing on data development projects in the National Health Information Work Program. Given the continuing policy interests in non-institutional health care, further expansion of the Dictionary's coverage over the next few years is anticipated.

National Minimum Data Sets

National minimum data sets (NMDS) are subsets of the *National Health Data Dictionary* data definitions that are agreed for mandatory collection and reporting at a national level. Proposed NMDSs require endorsement by both the NHDC and NHIMG. One NMDS may include data elements that are also included in another NMDS. An NMDS is contingent upon a national agreement to collect uniform data and to supply it as part of the national collection, but does not preclude agencies and service providers from collecting additional data to meet their own specific needs. Existing NMDSs include: institutional health care, hospital waiting times, institutional mental health care, community mental health care, health labour force and the perinatal collection.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The AIHW is a statutory authority of the Australian Government established by the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*. This legislation:

- authorises the Institute to undertake data collection (with agreement of the Australian Bureau of Statistics);
- authorises arrangements with other bodies for performance of functions on behalf of the Institute;
- provides confidentiality protection for individual persons or organisations;
- enables research access (subject to confidentiality constraints).

The mission of the Institute is to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians and to inform community discussion and decision making through national leadership in developing and providing health and welfare statistics and information.