



Australian Government
**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

Linking data with AIHW

Ten steps to project completion: a short guide for researchers

AIHW Data Integration Services Centre
linkage@aihw.gov.au

The AIHW logo, consisting of the letters 'AIHW' in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 'A' is blue, 'I' is green, 'H' is purple, and 'W' is red.

AIHW

Stronger evidence,
better decisions,
improved health and welfare

The linkage process

Ten steps of data linkage at AIHW

1. Prepare
2. Research proposal
3. Data custodian approvals
4. Ethics committee approvals
5. Public Interest Certificate
6. Suitable analysis environment
7. Linkage
8. Secure data file transfer
9. Merge, analyse, interpret, report
10. Destroy data and close project

Linking data with AIHW

1. Prepare

- Check out the AIHW [data linkage website](#)
- On the website, be sure to visit our helpful [Researcher Resources](#) pages
- Contact the Data Integration Services Centre:
 - if you need more information
 - to get a Technical Assessment form
 - linkage@aihw.gov.au
- At first contact, you will be assigned a Project Manager for guidance through the entire journey, right up to data destruction and project closure

2. Research proposal

- Tips for a great linkage project:
 - Clear, well-defined research or policy question/s or aims
 - Can the study questions or aims be answered using the requested data?
 - There are clear community benefits
 - Contact the Data Integration Services Centre if you need assistance with design, methodology or data flows: linkage@aihw.gov.au

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3. AIHW data custodian approvals

- Your Project Manager will liaise with AIHW data custodians once a final draft Technical Assessment has been completed
- Suggestions and feedback will be provided to you
- AIHW data custodian/s sign-off
- Project Manager sign-off

4. Ethics committee approvals

- For AIHW Ethics Committee, two step process:
 1. Signed-off Technical Assessment
 2. Online application ([EthOS](#))
- Also require:
 - approval from additional NHMRC Human Research Ethics Committee
 - independent peer review
 - more information can be found [here](#)

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5. Public Interest Certificate (PIC)

- Only necessary if access to certain Commonwealth datasets is required – e.g. Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)
- PIC signed by Chief Data Steward or delegate of the Secretary of the relevant Commonwealth department
- Authorises AIHW to release data to researchers
- Your Project Manager will organise this
- Prior to submission you will be asked to confirm all requested data collections, variables and the data flow

6. Suitable analysis environment

- Some linked data must be accessed in a [secure environment](#):
 - data custodian requirement for some Commonwealth data collections (MBS, PBS, Australian Immunisation Register)
 - AIHW curates all inbound and outbound files once Commonwealth data uploaded into environment
- Your Project Manager can provide advice about requirements for your project

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7. Linkage

- Once all approvals are in place, the Data Integration Services Centre undertakes the linkage
- A linkage report will be provided

8. Secure data transfer

- Data Integration Services Centre securely transfers data files to your AIHW Ethics Committee approved access and storage environment

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9. Merge, analyse, interpret, report

- Researchers merge datasets in the access environment by a unique, random, project-specific identifier generated by a linkage unit
- Analyses are undertaken within the approved access environment
- Compile reports and publications that comply with AIHW Ethics Committee approval

10. Destroy data, close project

- Annual monitoring reports to AIHW Ethics Committee
- Destroy data as approved by the AIHW Ethics Committee. Close data access and storage environment
- Close project and submit final AIHW Ethics Committee report