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## Data retention procedure

*For project teams using the NHDH*

### What to retain and delete

Project teams must distinguish between NHDH unit record files (i.e. NHDH data) and project files to be retained as a **Project Archive**. Project teams are strongly encouraged to minimise the file size of the **Project Archive** by retaining only essential files. The goal is to keep only what is necessary to reconstruct your output.

As such, project teams must not retain unit record files as AIHW has its own retention policy for NHDH modules.

The following components, where relevant, should be consolidated into a **Project Archive** folder:

- **Final codebase:** All scripts or code used for data cleaning, engineering, and analysis (e.g. R, Python, SAS, SQL etc). Code should be appropriately labelled.
- **Methodological documentation:** Technical manuals describing the logic, methodologies and algorithms applied in your project.
- **Metadata and data dictionaries:** Definitions of variables used, classifications and details of any derived variables created in your project.
- **Aggregated results:** Final tables, models, summary statistics, data visualisations, and outputs from your project, where required. Where these outputs have been approved for release from the NHDH, the aggregate results may not need to be retained.

Project teams are instructed to delete all files, data and outputs not designated for inclusion in the Project Archive prior to submitting a closure request.

### Request for project closure

To transition from the active project phase to the archival phase, project teams must submit a formal request for archive by contacting AIHW's [Linkage Client Services Unit \(LCSU\)](#) via [NHDH@aihw.gov.au](mailto:NHDH@aihw.gov.au). This process ensures that the project lead has accounted for the requirements of this data retention procedure.

Following project closure, user access to the project workspace within the secure access environment (SAE) will be revoked and the **Project Archive** will be transitioned to a secure, long-term environment for storage.



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## Retention periods

**Standard retention:** The default retention period, as required by the AIHW Ethics Committee, is **seven (7) years** from the date of project completion or closure.

**Exceptions:** Variations to the 7-year standard may be mandated by different ethics committee/s, statutory or regulatory requirements, or specific conditions of your project approval. Please direct enquiries seeking exceptions to the [Linkage Client Services Unit \(LCSU\)](#) via [NHDH@aihw.gov.au](mailto:NHDH@aihw.gov.au).

## Data integrity and reinstatement

Archived projects may be reinstated subject to necessary approvals. Any request for reinstatement must be made to the [Linkage Client Services Unit \(LCSU\)](#) via [NHDH@aihw.gov.au](mailto:NHDH@aihw.gov.au) and where required, NHDH data custodian and ethical approvals sought. Reinstated projects may be subject to project and user costs for the relevant periods.

Project teams are advised that technology environments change rapidly. AIHW cannot guarantee that original file formats will remain usable or readable if reinstatement is required in future. Users are encouraged to archive data in open, stable formats where possible.

## Secure destruction

Upon the expiry of the retention period, all data associated with the project will be irretrievably destroyed by AIHW.

### The project closure checklist

Before submitting a *Request for project closure*, consider the following:

- Have I retained crucial project components?** Have all components required to replicate my project outputs been retained in the Project Archive?
- Have I sanitised my workspace?** Have redundant, obsolete, or transitory (R.O.T.) files been cleared and deleted?
- Have I ensured NHDH unit record files are removed?** Have I only retained project-specific components?



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