

# WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Health Boards

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**Enclosure(s):** None

## Information Quality

Dear Colleague,

### Information Quality Improvement Initiative

Poor information quality negatively impacts the work of the NHS and the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) and represents a reputational risk to the Welsh Government. The provision of care, policy development, implementation and monitoring and the performance of the NHS are all improved if based on better quality information. High quality information requires high quality data.

Official statistics are the public face of NHS Wales's performance and activities. Poor data quality has meant recently there have been a number of withdrawals, revisions and postponements of published data.

This circular outlines existing development and assurance processes aimed at driving up information quality but recognises that more targeted effort is required. To this end, it introduces the Information Quality Improvement Initiative and set out early actions for recipient organisations.

### Information standard development

At a summary level, the development stages of a new information requirement are:

- Specification of business requirement;
- Translation of the business requirement into information required to fulfil the business requirement;
- Identification of the relevant operational processes and data;
- Assessing the impact of introducing this data requirement in affected parts of the service and, where appropriate, DHSS
- Producing a Data Set Change Notice (DSCN) to specify the changes / additions in the NHS Wales Data Dictionary (cross-referenced to the policy mandate communicated via a Welsh Health Circular);
- For national indicators or measures, producing an analysis method to describe how the data are used to derive this information which is used to understand or performance manage the NHS;
- Using the understanding gained from the information to drive improvement.

Alongside this development pathway is an assurance process, namely the Information Standards Assurance Process. This is overseen by the Welsh Information Standards Board (WISB) which has responsibility for assuring submissions and approving DSCNs. The board was introduced by [WHC \(2006\) 83](#), it comprises information specialists from DHSS, Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS), Health Boards, Public Health Wales and the NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS). It appraises submissions from development sponsors (DHSS leads) and advises on changes and improvements to the data and information to make it better support the business requirement. For data submissions it also strives to minimise the burden of data collection on the service. The latter is particularly important in a period of austerity. Data collection costs staff time and effort and poorly-

developed data collection puts unjustifiable burden on front line staff.

The Chief Executive of NHS Wales has recently reinforced the importance of all DHSS staff taking their developments through this process. NHS colleagues are expected to give priority to ensuring the information quality of central requirements mandated through Welsh health circulars and data standards change notices.

More details on WISB, its role in improving information quality, conduct of its business and its sub-groups can be found on the internet and at:

<http://howis.wales.uk/informationstandards>

### **Post Information Standard Mandation**

Although healthcare provider organisations are among those involved in the development of information standards and these are mandated for implementation via a DSCN, it is observed that this does not result in all relevant organisations comprehensively and consistently conforming to all these standards over time.

It is appreciated that there are many reasons why this is so. However, the causes are not being systematically identified and documented across the healthcare system.

A renewed focus on WISB Review Submissions is planned. Such submissions are part of the full data standard life-cycle. Their purpose is to encourage review of approved data standards. For central data collections, the review covers analysis of the quality of the data received and whether those data are fit for purpose in providing information which is enabling insight and improvement. Such reviews will identify whether there should be continued collection, change or withdrawal of the data set. These reviews will also cover operational data standards.

### **Information Quality Improvement Initiative**

Although there are a number of good information-quality improvement practices in place currently, there is no national plan in place to address the shortfalls across all steps in the development and implementation of data standards in operational systems and national submissions.

Health Boards, Welsh Ambulance and Velindre and Public Health Wales Trusts, NWIS, KAS, and DHSS each have a range of good practices in place to tackle problems with data quality. However these are not routinely captured in nationally-submitted and published data quality policies and improvement programmes. The development and publication of such policies and programmes will help raise the profile of data quality and better inform all staff who have a role in its improvement. This will form part of the Information Quality Improvement Initiative (IQII).

NWIS Information Standards has already engaged with Health Board Heads of Information in collaborative prioritisation of data quality improvement in existing national data set submissions. This work will be expanded to include operational data standards, including 'reference data', and fundamental standards such as the NHS number. All coded data items with national

definitions are considered to be within the scope of this initiative. All new WISB-approved standards will also be incorporated and prioritised.

Alongside nominated leads from Welsh Health Boards and Trusts, the IQII will include representatives from DHSS and KAS at Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and NWIS. Each has a role to play in information quality improvement.

It is expected that reports on individual organisations' progress within the initiative will be published on the web so that improvements in data timeliness, completeness, consistency, validity and accuracy are available to all.

NWIS Information Standards will be writing to you shortly elaborating on the initiative that has been described above.

In the meantime, the following actions are requested:

- submit your organisation's Information Quality Policy to David Hawes in NWIS ([David.Hawes@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:David.Hawes@wales.nhs.uk)) by 3 July 2015
- nominate an individual to represent your organisation in IQII meetings
- undertake initial preparations for the establishment of a structured IQII in your organisation

If colleagues have any queries regarding this circular, they should contact Sally Greenway, Head of Information Standards and Governance at:

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Yours sincerely,



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