

Actionable Intelligence  
*Using Integrated Data Systems to  
Achieve a More Effective, Efficient,  
and Ethical Government*

Edited By

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ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE

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# Preface

Complex, multifaceted social problems in the United States, like disaster relief, homelessness, health disparities, and academic achievement gaps, cannot be adequately addressed with isolated and disconnected public-service agencies. Complex social problems require a more holistic government response, one that integrates relevant information across diverse service systems to produce a more responsive and effective government.

The Obama administration has wholeheartedly responded to this need for transforming government services through increased collaboration, transparency, and accountability. Obama's Open Government Partnership has charged departments and agencies to generate innovative cross-cutting initiatives that recognize the critical role integrated data can play in advancing innovation. The Department of Education, for example, has introduced the Promise Neighborhoods program. The aim of this initiative is to explicitly use information across service agencies to meet the diverse needs of children and families in targeted geographic areas. Health-care reform programming, directed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Institute of Medicine, has involved major collaborative programs like the Community Health Data Initiative. In response to public requests and executive planning, DHHS released aggregate data on regional and service-linked health outcomes, which now inform community health decision making. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has recently initiated the Choice Neighborhoods program. This initiative looks to transform distressed neighborhoods and public/assisted housing projects by targeting local collaboration between housing, economic development, early childhood education, and other social-service providers. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has emphasized the critical role that integrated administrative data can play in improving the effectiveness of government programs. OMB has recently issued memoranda calling for the expanded capacity and use of evaluation and evidence in government decision making, underscoring the importance of this use to the evaluation of cross-program effects. We are now in a national context where our federal government recognizes that the complex problems that confront Americans are

connected and should be addressed by services informed by rigorous evidence using integrated administrative data from multiple programs.

Integrated administrative databases provide a powerful source of information for research and policy analysis. Because they track the business activities of public agencies, administrative data are directly relevant to program design, management, and evaluation. The routine gathering and maintenance of administrative records provides an opportunity for longitudinal, population-based research with real-time or nearly real-time data. At its simplest, a program's administrative database can be used to identify the prevalence and patterns of service utilization within a given agency, the risk and protective factors associated with program use, and the costs associated with various patterns of utilization. But people who use one public program are often users of other programs and at different developmental points in their lives. Public agencies have much to gain by understanding how their collective activities could be leveraged to maximize outcomes and optimize the efficiency of resources, both across programs and over time. Thus the integration of administrative data systems provides potentially even more compelling information on patterns of multisystem program use, costs, and outcomes. Interventions or program investments in one domain (e.g., housing stabilization) can be designed and evaluated to reduce the use of costly or inappropriate services in another area (e.g., emergency rooms). Programs can be designed to target particular subpopulations of program users (e.g., preschool children) who are known to have identified antecedents of care in other systems (e.g., child welfare). Policy analysts can use these data to identify which programs in one area (e.g., after-school programs) may have the most significant long-term gains as measured by program outcomes in other areas and across the life course (e.g., delayed child bearing, work effort, or improved school attendance and performance). And perhaps as important as the results that it can provide, such research might be possible in months rather than years and at a fraction of the cost as compared to longitudinal research based on primary data collection. These integrated data are needed to describe the conditions of program participants and the services they receive. They are also needed to answer the critical policy and program questions of "what works," "for whom," and "at what cost." As a result of these pressing needs, the integration of administrative data across service agencies has been identified as the next frontier for generating quality evidence to inform public policy and system reform.

Building integrated administrative data systems (IDSs) that are used is *easier said than done!* Despite the great promise of IDSs and the executive orders to create IDSs, very few jurisdictions have created useable and sustainable integrated data systems. In response to all these mandates and initiatives, naïve efforts have encountered a host of vexing problems that are inherent in the development of

sustainable and useable systems. Many have built big-data warehouses complete with fancy computer architecture to integrate data on individuals across agencies, but they have found that this is insufficient. Major legal, ethical, scientific, and economic/political barriers have thwarted establishing useful IDSs. One must start with the realization that integrated data systems are complex systems of operation with sizeable legal, ethical, scientific, and economic issues that must be simultaneously navigated to operate effectively.

The field of IDSs is growing as foundations and governments at all levels (federal, state, and local) look to measure the benefits of their investments in health, housing, education, and social services. Recognizing the national significance of IDSs and the complexity that they represent, the MacArthur Foundation provided funding to Culhane and Fantuzzo to establish the Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP) network of integrated data systems. The network comprises exemplary IDS sites for the purpose of (1) identifying IDS best practices across the core legal, ethical, scientific, and economic dimensions of IDS functioning; (2) using the network to conduct cross-site research projects that address major social problems in a low-cost and time-efficient manner; and (3) studying the IDS field to identify innovations to advance IDS benefits for federal, state, and local governments.

Currently the network contains 12 well-established sites with track records of sustainable functioning for the purposes of policy and practice research. These include systems that involve state-level data (Florida, Michigan, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin) and seven at the county or city level (Allegheny County [Pittsburgh], Cook County [Chicago], Cuyahoga County [Cleveland], Los Angeles County, Mecklenburg County [Charlotte], New York City, and Philadelphia).

Members from each site represent a wealth of knowledge about IDS operations and use. The purpose of this edited book is to introduce readers to the concept of *actionable intelligence* (AI) to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government services and the role of high-functioning IDSs to provide the capacity to produce AI through careful attention to legal, scientific, ethical, and political and economic issues.

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