



The importance of data quality

The Data Exchange streamlines reporting to help produce meaningful data about the effectiveness of services for clients.

What is data quality and why is it important?

High quality data is consistent, complete and reliable. When data correctly represents what is occurring in your service, it becomes a powerful tool for planning, decision-making and evaluation. Providing quality data allows organisations to gain valuable insights into their service delivery models. It helps evaluate what works and where improvements can be made to achieve better outcomes for their clients.

Data quality issues happen when data is missing, incorrect, inconsistent, or when it is not recorded in a timely manner. Such deficiencies severely limit the usefulness of the data, and can lead to poor decision-making by both organisations and government.

How can data be improved and better understood?

1. **Record data regularly.** This will reduce the risk of data being lost or incorrectly entered. Create easy to use processes for data capture for staff within your organisation.
2. Check that your data is correct and consistent by **regularly using reports.** Compare with data in earlier reports, checking for any unusual data or unexpected changes.
3. **Learn to use the different options in the reports.** Be clear on what results you want to display. Familiarise yourself with the different filters, graphs and views of the data across the pages of the report you are using.
4. Use the wide range of resources available via the Data Exchange website to **get advice** on how to improve your data quality and your understanding of reports. Common areas of concern and ways to improve data capture are outlined in the 'Top 10 Items' table below.
5. Use your new insights as an **opportunity to make changes and improve** the way you deliver services and improve outcomes for your clients.

Outcomes data will enrich your understanding

We strongly encourage organisations that are already recording outcomes information for their clients to enter into the partnership approach. The partnership approach gives organisations access to reports that visualise their data in easy to understand ways. It also offers valuable relevant data from other agencies that is organised to supplement the additional data that partnership reports provide. It is an investment in understanding and improving long-term client outcomes and building evidence on services that positively impact clients.

Table 1 Data exchange - top 10 items for data quality checks

Data Items	Accurate and useful reported data	Errors, risks and consequences of poor data
Individual client details	By creating accurate “statistical linkage keys” (SLKs), we can gain insights into individual client outcomes and pathways. Client details can be updated at any time across reporting periods.	The SLK will be invalid if recorded client details (name, date of birth and gender) are incomplete or incorrect. Client details will not match when they return or move between services, and it will get harder to follow a client journey over time.
Pseudonyms	Pseudonyms should only be used where a client chooses not to disclose their real name to a service. The exact same pseudonym must then be used every time for outcomes data to be captured.	High use of pseudonyms increases the risk of recording mismatched or poor quality client data, which in turn limits insights into client pathways. Incorrect pseudonym use often comes from a poor understanding of ‘client consent’.
Unidentified/ 'group' clients	This field should only be used to capture clients attending a large group or community event where it is not practical to collect individual details and there is no ongoing client relationship.	When clients are known to the service but individual details are not recorded, there is a lost opportunity to capture demographic and SCORE outcomes information for them.
Date of birth	Date of birth (DOB) is part of the SLK and enables data analysis of targeted age groups. Client age will automatically adjust and display correctly for each session attended.	An inaccurate estimated DOB can result in errors, with corresponding risk of misinterpretation of service delivery for target groups. Large numbers of incorrect DOBs can skew the age data for an entire program.
Demographic data	Demographic data includes gender, cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD), disability, and Indigenous status. Reports will contain rich information on client profiles and target groups, when correct client demographic and other extended data is available.	Missing, ‘not stated’ or incorrect demographic data is a lost opportunity to gain insights about client profiles, making it harder to demonstrate that target groups are being reached.
Support persons	Correctly identifying support persons allow you to distinguish between clients and support persons in reports.	If ‘clients’ are incorrectly reported as ‘support persons’ or vice versa, this leads to a flawed understanding of service delivery. It also effects the usefulness of insights that can be gained from the reports.
Session details	Correct capture of session details (dates, service types, clients attending) provides rich information about the services delivered. Reports are driven by session data linked to client data.	Lack of consistency and regularity in session reporting will lead to discrepancies between the reality of services delivered and data reflected in reports. If clients are not linked to sessions, no information on sessions appears in reports.
Cases	Use case labels that make sense to your organisation. Correctly labelled cases allow you to efficiently link sessions and clients in ways that are useful to your service delivery model.	Poor naming conventions for cases make them less practical and efficient. In some cases, poorly named cases increase the risk of re-identifying clients (e.g. using client name or customer reference numbers in case names).
Outlets	Correctly set up and named, outlets provide valuable data on where services are located, and can show the service ‘footprint’, i.e. where clients come from to access services.	It becomes difficult to understand where services have been delivered, when all outlets are not recorded, or where duplicates, incorrect address or post code are provided.
Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting (SCORE)	Outcomes data is valuable in measuring the impact funded services are having on clients’ lives and on their communities over time.	If pre- and post- SCORE information is not ‘paired’ correctly, you cannot determine whether anything has changed for the client because of services received. Errors include selecting a different outcome domain for pre- and post-SCORE assessments, or recording a pre-SCORE for ‘satisfaction’.