



news

233 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Fl.
Chicago, IL 60601

phone » (312) 233-1100
fax » (312) 233-1090
web » www.ahima.org

For more information, please contact:

Mike Bittner

312-233-1087

Michael.Bittner@ahima.org

AHIMA Statement: A More Just Society Through Healthcare Data

*Statement from Ginna Evans, MBA, RHIA, CPC, CRC, FAHIMA, AHIMA President/Chair,
and Wylecia Wiggs Harris, PhD, CAE, AHIMA Chief Executive Officer*

CHICAGO – June 3, 2020 – In the past days, our nation has been rocked by grief and anger over the senseless death of George Floyd. In many cities, we have seen this grief and anger turn to violence and destruction; however, we have also been heartened by the many peaceful protests in communities across the country and the world, as people step up in solidarity.

Once the initial shock has passed, as a country and world we need a long-term strategy to address, with empathy and compassion, the social inequities that exist—once and for all. We recognize the historical inequities that perpetuate systems of inequality, including their impact on health and healthcare. AHIMA’s mission, “empowering people to impact health,” compels us to ask: How can we as a society use healthcare data to understand, track, and solve problems to create better health for all?

As HIM professionals, we believe that health information is human information, and it is important even when it is telling the saddest, most infuriating, unjust story. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen healthcare data tell many such stories, including the larger picture of structural racism that translates into the virus taking a disproportionately higher toll on black and brown communities.

AHIMA agrees with many of our fellow healthcare associations that racism is a public health issue, and we know that disease causality and general health and wellness can be linked and exacerbated by factors such as social and environmental disparities, economic stability, and behavioral and mental health, which are often stratified by race. We believe that collecting and reporting these social determinants of health (SDOH) data can help us push for data-driven changes and tear down barriers to building better health outcomes and achieving health equity.

Until recently, efforts to incorporate social determinants into the healthcare journey of an individual or population have been sporadic. We see SDOH as an opportunity to use data to infer not just the typical medical causality assigned to chronic conditions, but also to understand the factors that may be influencing them, without stigmatizing people. Data—and how it is applied—will play a central role, which means that AHIMA professionals are essential stakeholders. We believe it is vital for social determinants of health to be recorded in medical records, and we understand how these factors impact many health and health IT issues, including privacy and security, interoperability, access to care, coding and documentation, data standards, and data governance.

We also stand together with other healthcare organizations in support of recommendations for how we as a nation can better report and monitor data related to legal intervention deaths. We agree with other organizations' call for states to require the reporting of legal intervention deaths and law enforcement officer homicides to public health agencies, and for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to add legal interventions to its list of nationally notifiable conditions. This would provide more timely, complete, and available data that, in addition to other social and legal changes, would help our society stop this pernicious problem.

AHIMA represents HIM professionals with different views and backgrounds, yet we share a common interest in empowering people to impact health. We look forward to working together to create a better world.

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About AHIMA

AHIMA is a global nonprofit association of health information (HI) professionals. AHIMA represents professionals who work with health data for more than one billion patient visits each year. AHIMA's mission of empowering people to impact health drives our members and credentialed HI professionals to ensure that health information is accurate, complete, and available to patients and providers. Our leaders work at the intersection of healthcare, technology, and business, and are found in data integrity and information privacy job functions worldwide.