

Part 1: Introduction

Why link data?




Linking public health surveillance data can create system efficiencies that improve data quality, reduce workload for public health workers, streamline services for clients, and ultimately improve health outcomes. Data linkage is the process of identifying, matching, and merging records that correspond to the same person from several datasets or even within one dataset ([Australia, 2022](#)), and a ‘data linkage project’ seeks to achieve one or more types of data linkage. For the HRSA HIV/AIDS Bureau initiative, *Improving Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Outcomes Using a Tiered Technical Systems Approach to HIV/STI Linkages* (or “Enhancing Linkage TA initiative”), participating jurisdictions linked STI and HIV surveillance data, and the tools created may be applicable to and adapted for other data linkage projects.

Why evaluate your data linkage project?

Evaluation is a best practice for project teams to understand what is working or not working, and why, so they can make informed adaptations to their program during or after implementation. Evaluation can help project teams understand whether they have met their goals and objectives, and why or why not. Conducting an evaluation can help new projects or initiatives report on progress made toward linking data across systems and measure success of new approaches or innovations. Evaluations also provide evidence to support and inspire other jurisdictions to accomplish similar work.

We designed this evaluation module by adapting evaluation tools used by Abt Associates to carry out a mixed-methods evaluation of the Enhancing Linkage TA initiative (or “Enhancing Linkage evaluation”). More information on the project can be found at the [TargetHIV site](#).

Evaluation data reveals program leadership perceptions of the value of linked data

 <p>Improve care outcomes</p>	<p><i>“Having an integrated system really benefits people when you’re linking them into care [and] making sure they’re taking medication”</i></p> <p><i>“If we use all the data we have available we can improve care outcomes and make sure people are linked and engaged in care”</i></p> <p><i>“When you have a complete picture, you’re able to triage the individual and identify interventions that they might need”</i></p>
 <p>Successful outreach</p>	<p><i>“As we move forward with the data integration process, we are going to move to a more timely process for identifying individuals who have potentially fallen out of care. It will also help with our outreach activities and make us more successful in reaching individuals because the information that we will have will be more up to date”</i></p>
 <p>Understanding the overlap between the STI and HIV epidemics</p>	<p><i>“It’s important that we link our data, and it gives you a better picture of what’s happening in [Jurisdiction] particularly as the STD and HIV epidemics converge and overlap with each other”</i></p> <p><i>“...hope that it would lead to some increased prevention or even just bringing some of the overlapping issues to light for people who have either HIV or STDs.”</i></p>

How to use materials in this module

The intended users of this evaluation module are project and evaluation staff at state and local public health agencies or Ryan White HIV/AIDS Project (RWHAP) programs leading or supporting a data linkages project like the Enhancing Linkage TA initiative. The module includes a menu of materials to select and use based on your project's needs.

