Accessing NDWS Data video transcript, Sept. 10, 2026

Welcome to the NDWS tutorial #2, Accessing NDWS Data. In this video, we will start with an overview of how to access NDWS survey data and other linkable files, including both public and restricted use files.

Data Products Overview

NDWS data are released in three different tiers, and each tier involves a different access process. Tier 1 is the simplest way to access data through the Public Use Files, though some data are modified, and the survey cannot be linked with any other data sources.

Tiers 2 and 3 allow full access to the surveys and linkable data, but the access process is more involved. In the next few slides, we will walk through the tiers and the types of data available in each tier. All NDWS data, including the linked data files, are free to access.

Public Use Files (PUFs)

The Public Use Files, or PUFs, are available through NACDA, which is the NIA-funded National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging.

Users simply register on NACDA with an email address, and then any data there can be downloaded. The first two years of Community Clinician, Nursing Home, and Assisted Living data are available on NACDA. Because the sample for Home Care surveys is still being developed, we have not released a PUF version, but hope to for future waves.

All direct identifiers are removed, and to help reduce disclosure risk, some variables have been modified or are suppressed completely. For example, the CC survey includes a question about the number of years the respondent has been in practice; for the PUF, responses have been collapsed into categories.

Once the PUF is prepared for release, we update the survey questionnaires to indicate which items are modified or suppressed.

Where to Download PUFs

The PUFs can be directly downloaded through NACDA after registering with an email address. This QR code will take you to NDWS data on NACDA, or you can go to the main NACDA page and search for NDWS.

Alternatively, you can go to the Surveys and Data page on our website and find links to NACDA there.

Why is [Variable] Missing in the PUF?

After our first PUF release of the Wave 1 surveys, the most common email question we received was “why is X variable missing?” As we said in a previous slide, the PUF versions of our survey

data are modified to reduce disclosure risk and guard respondent privacy. If you download the PUF survey and cannot find a variable you're looking for, the most likely explanation is that that variable was removed or modified as part of this process.

Each year, once a survey's PUF has been prepared, we update the questionnaires on our website to indicate which variables are removed or masked in the PUF. The questionnaires also include a high-level overview of our disclosure protection process, so you can read more there.

Data Access Tiers: Restricted Use Files (RUFs)

Now, back to our three data access tiers. Next, we'll walk through Tiers 2 and 3. This is where you can access unmodified surveys, the administrator surveys, as well as the linked data that are available.

There are several reasons a researcher might want to access the Restricted Use Files, beginning with the fact that the full respondent surveys are available, along with the administrator surveys for the Nursing Home, Assisted Living, and Home Care surveys.

In addition, because the rough survey versions include county and state identifiers, as well as clinician and nursing home identifiers used in CMS data, there are several types of linked data available. It is important to note that these state, county, and provider identifiers are all encrypted. Let me say that one more time. These state, county, and provider identifiers are all encrypted. For example, you do not have access to the actual FIPS county code where a respondent works, or their *actual* NPI number.

As the screenshot might suggest, you can read about all the linked data available through our website.

Tier 2

If you want to access the Restricted Use Files and available linked data, but do not need CMS data, this puts you in Tier 2. Those projects are housed in the enclave of the Michigan Center on the Demography of Aging, or MiCDA.

Tier 3

Finally, the last tier of data access is Tier 3, for researchers who want to link NDWS surveys to beneficiary-level CMS data or to the claims-based summary files that NDWS has created for researchers to use. These projects require IRB approval, NDWS approval, and approval by the NIA Privacy Board.

NDWS Website

The place to get the most up-to-date information about available data and the data access process is our website. There's a good chance that, by the time you are watching this video, we have already added some additional linked data resources, or some element of the access

process has changed. So please occasionally check the webpage for the most up-to-date information.

Acknowledgement

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