

## AHRQ HCUP CENTRAL DISTRIBUTOR USER GUIDE

To access the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System (CDORS), see:  
<https://cdors.ahrq.gov/>

For assistance with obtaining AHRQ HCUP databases, contact the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Team at [HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov)

For technical assistance with payment, or using the HCUP databases and tools, contact HCUP-User Support at [HCUP@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP@ahrq.gov)

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE AHRQ HCUP CENTRAL DISTRIBUTOR

### What is the purpose of the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor?

- The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor is the mechanism that AHRQ uses to distribute restricted-access public-release versions of the AHRQ HCUP Nationwide and State databases and supplemental files, and to collect payment on behalf of HCUP Partners.
- The HCUP Central Distributor also tracks the secure use of purchased HCUP databases, through data use agreements, state data re-use requests, and data custody transfers.

### What is the purpose of the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor User Guide?

- The intent of the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor User Guide is to be a resource for new and experienced HCUP users who want more information about purchasing, protecting, sharing, or re-using HCUP data.
- The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor User Guide provides an overview of databases available through the Central Distributor, and describes four main types of data applications available through the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor.
  - Securely Store and Use of the AHRQ HCUP Databases
  - Purchase the AHRQ HCUP Databases
  - Re-Use the AHRQ HCUP Databases
  - Transfer Custodianship of the AHRQ HCUP Databases

### Where is the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor?

- Many, if not all, of these actions can be performed on the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System (CDORS) website (<https://cdors.ahrq.gov/>).
- For additional assistance with completing these actions, please contact [HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.hhs.gov).

## SELECT AHRQ HCUP DATABASES

### Databases Available for Purchase through the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor

#### AHRQ HCUP Nationwide and State databases

AHRQ offers restricted-access publicly available Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) [Nationwide Databases and State Databases](#) for purchase **for research, analytics and aggregate statistical analyses**. HCUP databases are available for purchase online through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) by applicants who complete the [AHRQ HCUP Data Use Agreement \(DUA\) Training](#) and sign an HCUP DUA.

#### Nationwide Databases:

<b>Nationwide Database</b>	<b>Description</b>
<a href="#">National Inpatient Sample (NIS)</a>	Largest sample of all-payer inpatient records from all acute care hospitals in participating states, yielding national estimates of hospitalizations. Available annually beginning in 1988.
<a href="#">Kids' Inpatient Database (KID)</a>	Largest sample of all-payer pediatric inpatient records from all acute care hospitals in participating states. Available every 3 years beginning in 2006.
<a href="#">Nationwide Ambulatory Surgery Sample (NASS)</a>	Largest all-payer sample of therapeutic ambulatory surgeries performed in hospital-owned facilities. Available annually beginning in 2016.
<a href="#">Nationwide Emergency Department Sample (NEDS)</a>	Largest all-payer records on ED visits from a sample of emergency departments (EDs), yielding national estimates of ED visits in hospital-owned facilities. Available annually beginning in 2006.
<a href="#">Nationwide Readmission Database (NRD)</a>	Largest all-payer database for producing national estimate of readmissions. Available annually beginning in 1997.

#### State Databases:

<b>State Database</b>	<b>Description</b>
<a href="#">State Inpatient Database (SID)</a>	State-specific files that contain all inpatient care records from all non-Federal acute care hospitals.
<a href="#">State Emergency Department Database (SEDD)</a>	State-specific files that contain records on all visits at non-Federal acute care hospital-owned emergency departments (EDs) that do not result in hospitalization.
<a href="#">State Ambulatory Surgery and Services Database (SASD)</a>	State-specific files that contain records from all ambulatory surgery encounters or other outpatient services from hospital-owned facilities.

## AHRQ HCUP Supplemental Files

In addition, HCUP produces several hospital and discharge-level [Supplemental Files](#) that augment the information on the nationwide and state databases. All supplemental files are intended to be used with HCUP data and are not standalone resources.

### [Supplemental Files for Use with HCUP Nationwide Databases](#)

Supplemental File	Description
<a href="#">Cost-to-Charge Ratio (CCR) Files</a> <sup>a</sup>	Hospital-level files designed to supplement the nationwide <i>inpatient</i> and <i>emergency department</i> databases
<a href="#">Hospital Market Structure (HMS) Files</a> <sup>a</sup>	Hospital-level files on hospital market competition designed to supplement the HCUP inpatient databases.
<a href="#">NIS-Trend Weights Files</a> (1993-2011) <sup>b</sup>	Discharge-level files designed to enable longitudinal analyses of the NIS, bridging NIS redesign in 2012 with prior years
<a href="#">NIS Hospital Ownership Files</a> (1998-2007) <sup>b</sup>	Hospital-level files designed to facilitate analysis of the NIS by hospital ownership categories
<a href="#">NIS 1993-2002 Discharge-Level Supplemental Files</a> (1993-2002) <sup>a</sup>	Discharge-level files designed to facilitate longitudinal analyses that use the NIS 1993-2002
<a href="#">KID-Trend File</a> (1997) <sup>b</sup>	Discharge-level file designed to enable longitudinal analyses for KID 1997 and subsequent years of the KID

<sup>a</sup>Available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#), <sup>b</sup>Available on [HCUP-US website](#)

### [Supplemental Files for Use with HCUP State Databases](#)

Supplemental File	Description
<a href="#">Cost-to-Charge Ratio (CCR) Files</a> <sup>a</sup>	Hospital-level files designed to supplement data elements in state <i>inpatient</i> and <i>emergency department</i> databases
<a href="#">American Hospital Association (AHA) Linkage Files</a> <sup>b</sup>	Hospital-level file that contains a small number of data elements from the AHA Annual Survey Databases (Health Forum, LLS © 2012) (see requirements for IA, MN, NE and ND)
<a href="#">Hospital Market Structure (HMS) Files</a> <sup>a</sup>	Hospital-level files on hospital market competition designed to supplement the HCUP State inpatient databases.
<a href="#">Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses</a> <sup>c</sup>	Discharge-level files designed to facilitate analyses that need to track patients across time and hospital settings while adhering to strict privacy guidelines
<a href="#">State-Specific Supplemental Files - Maryland</a>	Discharge-level skinny files containing patient ZIP code information for data years 2008-2017, which can be merged with a year-specific discharge-level database.
<a href="#">State-Specific Supplemental Files – West Virginia</a>	Discharge-level skinny files containing expected payer as provided by source for data years 2009-2021, which can be merged with a year-specific discharge-level SID database.

<sup>a</sup>Available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#), <sup>b</sup>Available on [HCUP-US website](#) with the exception of files for Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and North Dakota which is available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#), <sup>c</sup>Older years (2003-2008) are available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) and included with purchase of relevant state databases. Revisit data elements are included in the participating state databases starting in 2009.

Some AHRQ HCUP Supplemental files are frequently used by researchers, and require additional explanation:

- HCUP Cost-to-Charge Ratio (CCR) Files for HCUP Nationwide and State databases
- HCUP AHA Linkage Files for HCUP State databases
- HCUP Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses
- State-Specific Supplemental Files for Maryland and West Virginia

### *AHRQ HCUP Cost-to-Charge Ratio (CCR) Files for HCUP Nationwide and HCUP State databases*

AHRQ HCUP [Cost-to-Charge Ratio \(CCR\) Files](#) are hospital-level files designed to supplement the data elements in the Nationwide (NIS, KID, NEDS, NRD) and State (SID and SEDD) databases. They are not intended to be used as stand-alone files. Therefore, they are only available with the purchase of or documented access to the respective HCUP databases.



**NOTE:** AHRQ HCUP CCR Files are not available for ambulatory surgery databases.

The [HCUP CCR Files](#) are linkable files developed by AHRQ that enable the conversion of total charges (defined as the amount a hospital billed for services) into how much the hospital services actually cost. Cost information was obtained from the hospital accounting reports in the Healthcare Cost Report Information System (HCRIS) files collected by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Some imputations for missing values were necessary. The CCR Files are hospital-level files designed to supplement the data elements in HCUP inpatient and emergency department (ED) databases.

Each AHRQ HCUP CCR File contains hospital-specific cost-to-charge ratios based on all-payer inpatient or ED cost for nearly every hospital in the corresponding database. The CCR Files are updated annually for the SID, NIS, and NRD and every 3 years for the KID beginning with 2001 data, and for the SEDD and NEDS beginning with 2012 data.

- The CCR Files can be linked to records in the AHRQ HCUP databases using the HCUP hospital identification number, which is a unique hospital number exclusive to the HCUP data. The name of the data element representing the hospital identification number varies by database and data year.
  - o For AHRQ HCUP Nationwide database CCR Files (CCR-NIS, CCR-KID, CCR-NRD, and CCR-NEDS), the CCR records can be merged directly with the records in the corresponding database using the database's hospital identification number (HOSP\_NIS, HOSP\_KID, HOSP\_NRD, and HOSP\_ED, respectively).
  - o For States that release an HCUP AHA Linkage File, linkage between the CCR File and the SID or SEDD is achieved in two steps:



- First, link the AHA Linkage File to the SID or SEDD Core File by the data elements HOSPST and DSHOSPID to add the data element HOSPID. (For Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and North Dakota, this linkage is achieved using the data element KEY.)
- Second, link the resulting file with the CCR File for the SID or SEDD by the data element HOSPID.
- For States that do not release an HCUP AHA Linkage File, HOSPID is included directly on their SID or SEDD file. For these States, the data elements from the CCR File can be merged onto the SID or SEDD by HOSPID.



**NOTE:** The AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases (NIS, KID, NEDS, or NRD) come with the complementary CCR File applicable to that database. The CCR Files for the SID or SEDD must be ordered separately.



**NOTE:** The structure of the CCR Files for the SID and SEDD was revised in February 2026. Previously, there was a multi-state CCR-SID and a multi-state CCR-SEDD file per data year. These multi-state files have been split into state-specific files. There is one CCR-SID and one CCR-SEDD file per SID and SEDD, respectively, for each data year. Please see the CCR User Guides for [Inpatient](#) and [Emergency Department](#) files for more details.



**NOTE:** CCR Files can only be used with AHRQ HCUP databases.

### *HCUP AHA Linkage Files for HCUP State databases*

[HCUP AHA Linkage Files](#) are used to supplement the AHRQ HCUP State databases (SID, SEDD, and SASD) with hospital-level information from the AHA Annual Survey Databases. They include the hospital identifier used on the AHA Annual Survey Databases and the HCUP hospital identifier for those HCUP Partner States that release hospital identifiers. The HCUP AHA Linkage Files can be linked to the HCUP SID, SEDD, and SASD using the HCUP data source hospital identification number (data element DSHOSPID). Then, subsequently, users can merge the data elements of interest from the AHA Annual Survey Databases to the HCUP AHA Linkage Files using the AHA hospital identifier (data element AHAIID).

The AHA Linkage Files are updated annually. **Please note that not all HCUP Partner states release hospital identifiers.** Consult the HCUP Availability of Data Elements by Year Documentation regarding the availability of data elements and their definitions for the [SID](#), [SEDD](#), and [SASD](#).



**NOTE:** For those states that allow hospital identifiers, the HCUP AHA Linkage Files are [available for download](#) from HCUP-US for the SID, SEDD, and SASD beginning with 2006 data, with the exception of AHA Linkage Files for Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and North Dakota which are available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). The HCUP AHA Linkage Files prior to 2006 were included on the data DVDs provided with purchase.



**NOTE:** The AHA Annual Survey Databases are purchased separately from the [American Hospital Association](#).

### *HCUP Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses*

The [HCUP Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses](#), or revisit variables, are additional variables that were developed by AHRQ. They facilitate analyses to track patients across time and hospital settings exclusively in the State databases (SID, SEDD, and SASD) while adhering to strict privacy guidelines.

There are two HCUP supplemental variables:

- Synthetic person-level identifiers that have been verified against the patient's date of birth and sex and examined for completeness (HCUP variable VisitLink).
- A timing variable that can be used to determine the days between hospital events for an individual without the use of actual dates (admission, discharge, or birth) (HCUP variable DaysToEvent).

Appendix A of the [HCUP Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses User Guide](#) provides a detailed list of which States, years, and types of data are available. Consult HCUP Database Documentation regarding the availability of data elements and their definitions.



**NOTE:** Some HCUP Partners modify the encryption routines used for their synthetic patient linkage numbers over time. If this occurs, there will be a one-time disruption in the ability to track a patient over time. For more information, review Appendix C of the [HCUP Supplemental Variables for Revisit Analyses User Guide](#) to determine the consistency of VisitLink over time.



**NOTE:** Beginning with 2009 data, the Revisit Variables are included in the SID, SEDD, and SASD databases for select States that are purchased through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor](#). For 2003-2008 data, the Revisit Variables are provided free of charge as a separate file with the applicable State databases.

### *HCUP Maryland SID/SASD/SEDD Skinny Files*

The MD-ZIP Skinny Files (2008-2017) are available for Maryland SID, SASD and SEDD databases for data years 2008 through 2017.

Prior to data year 2018, the Maryland SID, SASD, and SEDD did not contain information on the patient's ZIP code (HCUP data element ZIP). Each year-specific MD-ZIP file contains HCUP data elements ZIP, HOSPST, YEAR and KEY. Data purchasers can link the year-specific skinny MD-ZIP files to the same year CORE file by using data elements YEAR and KEY.

New purchases of Maryland databases for these years will contain the MD-ZIP Skinny File packaged along with other HCUP data files. Purchases of Maryland databases for data years 2018 and beyond will have the ZIP data element within the CORE file.

### *HCUP West Virginia Skinny Files*

The WV-PAY Skinny files (2009-2021) are available for West Virginia SID databases for data years 2009-2021.

Prior to data year 2022, the West Virginia SID did not contain information on the expected payer as provided by the data source. For data years 2009-2021, year-specific skinny files containing the HCUP data elements PAY1\_X, PAY2\_X, PAY3\_X, PAYER1\_X, PAYER2\_X, PAYER3\_X, YEAR, and KEY. Data purchasers can link the year-specific skinny WV-PAY files to the same year CORE files by using data elements YEAR and KEY.

New purchases of West Virginia SID databases for these years will contain the WV-PAY Skinny File packaged along with the other HCUP data files. Purchases of WV SID databases for data years 2022 and beyond will have these payer elements within the CORE file.

### ***Availability and Pricing of HCUP Databases***

Database [availability](#) and pricing is available in the [Database Catalog](#) posted on the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). Announcements regarding the availability of data are made on [HCUP-US What's New](#) and the [AHRQ Newsletter](#).

The HCUP Nationwide databases (NIS, KID, NASS, NEDS, and NRD) are offered by AHRQ at a regular and a discounted price for students. See additional information for [student-priced data requirements and restrictions](#).

The HCUP State Databases (SID, SEDD, SASD) are provided by participating HCUP Partners and available for purchase by individuals residing in the United States. HCUP Partners decide what, if any, state-level databases are available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). Participating HCUP Partners set the price of their state databases. Some HCUP Partners offer reduced pricing for AHRQ grantees, students, and/or non-profit organizations. If an order is based on one of these pricing categories, additional documentation of affiliation or AHRQ grantee status or student status must be provided before the order may be fulfilled. See additional information for [student-priced data requirements and restrictions](#).



**NOTE:** HCUP Nationwide databases may be purchased by individuals residing outside of the United States, but HCUP State databases are not available for international data users at this time.

Supplemental files are available to HCUP data users free of charge, and may be accessed through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) or downloaded from HCUP-US.

Processing fees and shipping costs are included in the price of the databases. The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor does not collect Federal or State taxes. Customs and other duty charges for international delivery are not included in nationwide database sales (and not applicable for state databases).

## Size of AHRQ HCUP Databases

### AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases

The size of each HCUP Nationwide database file varies by type of database and year. As shown in the table below, the compressed database files range from 300 MB to 2 GB when downloaded, as shown in the table below. Nationwide databases range from 3 GB to 20 GB in the unzipped format.

Each Nationwide database product that is downloaded will contain several files when unzipped, including the core database file in comma-delimited or ASCII format, additional database files such as hospital or severity files, and support files such as database documentation.

Database	Download (Zip) Size	Unzipped Size
NIS	800 MB	12 GB
KID	300 MB	3 GB
NASS	330 MB	3 GB
NEDS	2 GB	20 GB
NRD	2 GB	20 GB



**NOTE:** Users will need SAS®, SPSS®, Stata®, or similar analysis software for processing the data, and all such processing requires *several times as much disk capacity as the core file* to perform typical processing steps. Because of variations in processing methods, analysis software varies greatly in how much disk space will be required. The amount of disk space required by a project will depend on which analysis software is being used, which database is involved, and the number of elements used from the database.

### AHRQ HCUP State databases

The size of each purchased file varies. The compressed State database files range from 5 KB to 1,950 MB. The unzipped size of each State database file varies by State, type of file, and year ([SID database sizes](#), [SEDD database sizes](#), [SASD database sizes](#)). More information on the databases is available on the HCUP-US [Database Documentation](#) page.

## Equipment and Software Required to Access the AHRQ HCUP Databases

### Packaging of AHRQ HCUP databases

AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases are downloaded from the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) once the purchase is approved.

AHRQ HCUP State databases are shipped on DVDs. **A DVD drive is required to access the files.**

### Utilities required to unzip and access databases

HCUP databases use a process that compresses and encrypts the files into a password-protected file (in either zip or exe format) which only can be extracted or unzipped using a third-party zip utility such as SecureZIP®, 7-zip, ZIP Reader, WinZip™, SecureZIP® for Mac, StuffIt Expander®, or Keka. Attempts to extract files using the built-in zip utilities in Windows® (Windows Explorer) or Mac (Archive Utility) will produce an error message warning of incorrect password and/or corrupted file or folder errors.

Third-party zip utilities are available from the following reputable vendors on their official websites.

- ZIP Reader (Windows) (free download offered by PKWARE®, Inc.)
- SecureZIP® and SecureZIP for Mac (free evaluation and licensed/fee software offered by PKWARE, Inc.)
- WinZip (Windows) (evaluation and fee versions offered by the WinZip corporation)
- Stuffit Expander® (Mac) (free evaluation and licensed/fee software offered by Smith Micro corporation)
- 7-Zip (Windows) (free download offered by the 7-Zip organization)
- Keka (Mac) (free download through Mac App Store)



**NOTE:** encryption software and operating system utilities are evolving rapidly. Older versions of zip software may not be effective with newer operating systems, and vice versa. In particular, newer versions of Mac may experience difficulties with any utility other than SecureZip for Mac.

### Statistical software required to load and process the databases

Databases come in ASCII or .csv format. SAS®, SPSS®, Stata®, or similar analysis software is required to load and process the data, and all such processing requires *several times as much disk capacity as the core file* to perform typical processing steps. Because of variations in processing methods, analysis software varies greatly in how much disk space will be required. The amount of disk space required by a project will depend on which analysis software is being used, which database is involved, and the number of elements used from the database.

Software programs to convert ASCII files are provided for each specific database on the HCUP-US. Please see the [Database Information](#) page (File Specification and Load Programs) for additional details.

### Resources for Selecting and Using AHRQ HCUP Databases

Please refer to the extensive documentation on HCUP-US regarding the use of HCUP data, including [Database Documentation](#), [Research Tools](#) that can be used with the HCUP Data and the [HCUP Online Tutorial Series](#). For questions related to the use of HCUP data, please contact HCUP Technical Assistance at [hcup@ahrq.gov](mailto:hcup@ahrq.gov).



**IMPORTANT: Consult HCUP Database Documentation regarding the availability of data elements and their definitions. Be sure that the databases being purchased meet the needs of the research project. AHRQ is unable to issue refunds once data is shipped and/or downloaded.**

**AHRQ HCUP Database Documentation** on HCUP-US (<https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/>).

Please refer to: <https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/databases.jsp> for extensive details on the databases.

Each specific database documentation page includes the following information:

- Description of the Database includes an overview and introduction to the database
  - File compositions are included along with descriptions of state databases to understand what was originally provided from the State.
- File Specifications and Load Programs (SAS, SPSS, and Stata) include dataset names, number of observations, record length, number of variables, and the record layout
- Availability and Description of Data Elements display information on HCUP data elements, including definitions and values, and each element's availability by year (and by State, for state databases).
- Summary Statistics provide the contents of all files including means of numeric variables, frequency distributions, and univariates on continuous variables.
- Known Data Issues include a list of issues with a given database that was identified after its release
- Label and Format Programs provide TXT files to label values of data elements, codes or other categories
- Supplemental File information

### Online Query Tools

The HCUP-US website also offers readily available statistics in the form of downloadable tables/figures or interactive data visualizations. Examples include the following:

- [HCUPnet](#) is a free, online query system that provides statistics and data tables based on HCUP data. [HCUPnet](#) can access statistics from most HCUP databases: the [NIS](#), the [KID](#), the [NRD](#), the [NEDS](#), selected [SID](#) and selected [SEDD](#).
- [HCUP Summary Trend Tables](#), which provide downloadable tables containing State-specific monthly trends in hospital utilization derived from the HCUP SID and SEDD
- [HCUP Fast Stats](#), which is an online query tool that uses visual displays to compare national or State statistics on a range of healthcare topics

- [HCUP Diagnosis and Procedure Frequency Tables](#), which provide frequencies of ICD-9-CM and ICD-10-CM/PCS codes (individually and by clinical categories) for the HCUP Nationwide databases (NIS, KID, NASS, NEDS, NRD)

### Additional AHRQ Products

In addition, the following examples provide publications and reports that can provide ready-made sources of statistics and guidance on a range of healthcare related subjects.:

- [HCUP Statistical Briefs](#), which present simple, descriptive reports on a variety of specific, healthcare related issues
- [HCUP Methods Series Reports](#), which feature a broad array of methodological information on the HCUP databases and software tools
- [HCUP Topical Reports](#), which provide information on various priority populations
- [HCUP Infographics](#), which provide a visual representation of [HCUP Statistical Briefs](#) and other data
- [HCUP Data Visualizations](#) provide access to interactive visual displays of select HCUP data.
- [HCUP Findings-At-A-Glance](#) provides snapshots covering a broad range of health policy issues related to hospital use and costs.

## SECURELY STORE AND USE AHRQ HCUP DATABASES

### *Data Use Agreement for the Secure Storage and Use of HCUP Databases*

The AHRQ HCUP Nationwide and State Data Use Agreements (DUA) define the rules and limitations under which any HCUP data may be used. All individual users of HCUP data are required to complete the web-based [AHRQ HCUP Data Use Agreement \(DUA\) Training](#). The training takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. Make note of your certification code and completion date for proof of training, which is required when establishing an account on the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#), placing an order for HCUP data or submitting HCUP Data Use Agreements.

AHRQ HCUP DUA Training is required every two years for active users of HCUP data. **All individuals using HCUP databases, regardless of the nature of the project, must review, sign and adhere to the AHRQ HCUP DUA.** Protecting the privacy and security of individuals and institutions and safe handling of the data is critical to the success of AHRQ's Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP). AHRQ HCUP DUAs are embedded in the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#).

- HCUP DUA for the Nationwide Databases ([PDF](#) file, 260 KB; [HTML](#))
- HCUP DUA for the State Databases ([PDF](#) file, 251 KB; [HTML](#))
- HCUP Responsibilities of the Data Purchaser ([PDF](#) file, 107 KB; [HTML](#))



**IMPORTANT:** The AHRQ HCUP DUA is an extension of the agreements that AHRQ holds with each of the HCUP State Partners. Individuals, not organizations, are responsible for adhering to the requirements specified in the HCUP DUA. As a policy, HCUP does not make modifications to the DUAs. Individuals need to sign the AHRQ HCUP DUA, but a second signature from an organizational representative is acceptable, if needed.

### ***Responsibilities of Data Purchasers***

Unless otherwise designated and agreed upon by AHRQ, the data purchaser is considered the "data custodian" of HCUP data. **The data custodian is responsible for ensuring that the HCUP data are kept secured, that only authorized users have access to the data, and that HCUP data are used in a way that is consistent with the DUA.**

- The data custodian is responsible for verifying proof of DUA training and signed HCUP DUAs from anyone who has access to the data or output that contains small cell sizes, individual records, or identifies hospitals.
- Training completion certificates must be entered into the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) and DUAs must be acknowledged before using HCUP databases.
- The data custodian is held accountable for the proper use of the HCUP data that they have purchased, even by other individuals to whom they have given access. As a result, the data custodian is also responsible for any possible misuse of the data (unintended or otherwise) along with the data user. The data custodian is also expected to practice good password management.



**NOTE:** The data custodian is also expected to practice good password management. Upon receiving data, please make sure that the associated passwords are able to successfully unencrypt files and keep the passwords in a secure location. The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Team does not re-issue lost passwords, as it is the data custodian responsibility to ensure the secure storage and use of the HCUP data.

Data purchasers are required to acknowledge two additional agreements as part of the application process to purchase data.

*[Responsibilities of the Data Purchaser \(PDF file, 108 KB; HTML\)](#)*

Being an HCUP data purchaser carries additional responsibilities beyond those of a data user, including being responsible for data users secure use of the data, submitting statements of intended use for initial purchases, re-use requests for previously purchased HCUP state databases, adhering to the restrictions of the of student-priced data, and ensuring the secure storage and use of the data.

### *Indemnification Clause* ([PDF file, 122 KB](#); [HTML](#))

The indemnification clause states that the data purchaser shall not hold AHRQ HCUP contractors liable for the Purchaser's unauthorized use, sharing or other disposition of HCUP data. This agreement explicitly states that the agreement is authorized only **to the extent permitted by Federal and State law.**

### ***Publishing with AHRQ HCUP data***

Before publishing results based on HCUP databases, confirm that the manuscript follows the requirements of the HCUP DUA. For publications using the NIS, KID, NASS, NEDS, and/or NRD, refer to the [HCUP DUA for Nationwide Databases](#); for publications using the SID, SEDD, and/or SASD, refer to the [HCUP DUA for State Databases](#). Both DUAs are available on the [DUA Training](#) page.

**Avoid common errors and pitfalls** related to the use of the HCUP Nationwide data by reviewing the relevant Checklist as each manuscript is prepared for publication.

- [Checklist for Working with the NIS](#)
- [Checklist for Working With the KID](#)
- [Checklist for Working with the NEDS](#)
- [Checklist for Working with the NRD](#)
- [Checklist for Working with the NASS](#)

### **Privacy Protections**

Verify the following privacy protections:

- No individual persons in the publication have been identified, either directly or indirectly.
- No hospitals in the publication have been identified, either directly or indirectly. All aggregate statistical reporting has at least two hospitals in any individual cell.
- No cell sizes contain counts less than or equal to 10.

### **HCUP Citations**

The AHRQ HCUP DUAs also require citation of HCUP and the specific databases. Verify that the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) and the HCUP database(s) are correctly cited in the abstract and manuscript. Review [citation examples](#) for specific details.

### **Acknowledgement of HCUP Data Partners**

- AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases ([NIS](#), [KID](#), [NRD](#), [NEDS](#), and [NASS](#))
  - If space allows in the manuscript, please acknowledge all the AHRQ HCUP Data Partners that contribute to HCUP. A current list of the HCUP Data Partners is provided ([Word](#) file, 30 KB; [PDF](#) file, 71 KB; [HTML](#)). As an alternative, include in the manuscript a link to the HCUP-US web page that contains the list of State organizations ([www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/hcupdatapartners.jsp](http://www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/hcupdatapartners.jsp)).
- AHRQ HCUP State databases ([SID](#), [SEDD](#) and [SASD](#))



- At a minimum, reference the State name(s) and the AHRQ HCUP databases used. If space allows in the manuscript, please acknowledge the HCUP Data Partner(s) by name. A list of HCUP Data Partners for reference in publications is provided ([Word](#) file, 30 KB; [PDF](#) file, 71 KB; [HTML](#)).

### ***Destruction of HCUP Databases***

Please remember that individuals, not entities, are responsible for the use and security of the HCUP data, so the data purchaser remains responsible for any use or potential misuse unless and until custody is formally transferred to another individual or the data are destroyed. If data is no longer needed and the data are not being transferred to another individual, physically destroy the data and dispose of the CD/DVDs and remove it from laptop and/or servers. Please send an email to the HCUP Central Distributor Team at [HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.hhs.gov) to confirm that the data are destroyed, the data custodian is no longer custodian of the data and that no one else has access to the data.

## **PURCHASE AND RECEIVE AHRQ HCUP DATA**

AHRQ HCUP Databases may be purchased online through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) at <https://cdors.ahrq.gov/>.



**NOTE:** On rare occasions, a manual application to purchase data may need to be completed. Please see Applications under Quick References on the [HCUP-US Request Data](#) page, complete the application and Excel database catalog and submit it to [HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov)

### ***Application to Purchase Nationwide Databases***

Restricted-access public release versions of the AHRQ HCUP Nationwide Databases are available for purchase through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). They are offered at a regular and a discounted student price.

#### **Student-Priced Data Requirements and Restrictions**

##### ***Eligibility for Student Priced Data***

To be eligible for student pricing, the purchaser must provide proof of current enrollment in a degree-seeking program at an institution of higher learning or proof of appointment as a medical resident or postdoctoral fellow.

1. Acceptable forms of proof include documents that demonstrate current enrollment dates, institution, and student name (e.g., letter from professor advisor, registrar's office, or program director).
2. **Any sensitive personal information (e.g., student account number, SSN, birthdate, phone, etc.) must be masked or redacted prior to sending.** The system has not been approved to take this kind of information.

### *Restrictions on Use of Student-Priced Data*

HCUP data purchased at student pricing may only be used for projects led by the student purchaser.

- Student-priced Nationwide HCUP data may be re-used for multiple projects, but the student purchaser must be the lead on each project.
- Collaboration with other authorized individuals using student-priced Nationwide data is permitted, but the student purchaser would need to be the lead on the collaboration.

Student-priced data may not be transferred to another individual for any other projects. Student-priced data may be retained by the student purchaser for personal use on other projects upon completion of training, but the data may not be left with any entity or institution.

### **Application to Purchase State Databases**

#### **Statement of Intended Use for State Databases**

A [Statement of Intended Use](#) (SIU) is required if State databases or supplemental files applicable to state databases are requested from the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). AHRQ and the HCUP Central Distributor Team facilitate access to the State-level HCUP data (i.e., SID, SEDD and SASD), which are governed by the individual Data Organizations participating in HCUP. Under AHRQ's agreements with these Data Organizations, AHRQ reviews and approves all intended uses of the State-level data on behalf of the [HCUP Partners](#). In some cases, the HCUP Partners also review the Statement of Intended Use before approval is granted, and in all cases, orders that include State databases are provided in full to the respective data organizations. The AHRQ reviewers will place the user's application on hold and request clarification from them if the Statement of Intended Use is insufficient for review and approval. Reviews of Statements of Intended Use (SIU) can take 1-2 weeks (or longer if revisions need to be made or if additional input from HCUP Partners is necessary).

The Statement of Intended Use defines the user's specific project plans. It should include enough information for reviewers to understand the subject area of interest, how the data will be used, level of analysis, intended audiences, and anticipated end products (e.g., tables and charts, internal reports, peer-reviewed journal articles), as well as to demonstrate understanding of and compliance with the HCUP DUA.

#### **Special Requirements for Some State Databases**

##### *California*

The purchase of California databases comes with special eligibility requirements and other restrictions beginning with data year 2018, as defined in the Additional Requirements from the State of California ([PDF file](#), 112 KB; [HTML](#)). Beginning with 2018, **applicants must be academic researchers employed by a college or University located in the United States or a US territory whose project has undergone review by their academic institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB)**. In addition, the data has a "single-use" project requirement:

- The data may *only* be used for the project described in the application. This project must have undergone review by the user's academic institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to application submission.
- The approved use of these files expires three years after the order was submitted. At the end of the three years, the user will be required to certify the destruction of the databases or obtain an extension from the HCAI. Please refer to the Additional Requirements from the State of California document for details and contact information for the HCAI.



**NOTE: California files must be ordered separately** to facilitate collection of the acknowledged Additional Requirements document and management of the "Single Use" file expiration.

Further limitations on the project and intended use apply; refer to the Additional Requirements from the State of California for the full terms. For questions about these California-specific data use restrictions, please contact [DataandReports@HCAI.CA.gov](mailto:DataandReports@HCAI.CA.gov).

### *Colorado*

Colorado data are **only available for purchase by not-for-profit researchers**. For-profit affiliated users may contact the [Colorado Hospital Association](#).

### *Georgia*

Georgia data are **only available for purchase by not-for-profit researchers**. Georgia data are **not** available for purchase by **for-profit entities or by students**.

Following AHRQ review of all applications that include any Georgia database, the application is forwarded to the Georgia Hospital Association for review. **The Georgia Hospital Association reviews and must approve any request for Georgia HCUP files.**



**NOTE:** The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor cannot partially fill or split orders, so if an order includes Georgia data, the entire order will be put on hold until the Georgia Partner provides guidance to AHRQ. If a project involves data from additional States and is particularly large or time-sensitive, it is recommended to submit a separate order for the Georgia files.

### *AHA Linkage Files for Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota*

HCUP Partners control the availability of American Hospital Association (AHA) Linkage Files for their State data. Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota restrict the distribution of AHA Linkage Files to purchasers whose organizational affiliation and intended use meet the Partner's eligibility criteria. To be eligible to receive these files with an order, **the data purchaser's primary organizational affiliation must be college/university/government and the intended use of the data may NOT involve product development, market research, or commercial applications.**

The AHA Linkage Files for Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota are available through the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) for certain approved purchasers whose use of the data is consistent with the Partner organization's requirements.

If the state-specific AHA Linkage Files were not ordered at the time of the state databases order, an HCUP purchaser meeting eligibility criteria can submit a separate order in the system.

The Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota AHA Linkage Files are constructed using discharge records rather than hospitals as the unit, and there is a match for every record in the data file. For these four States, the AHA Linkage Files can be linked directly to the SID, SEDD, and SASD Core Files using the HCUP record identifier (data element KEY).



**NOTE:** For Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Dakota SID and SEDD databases, the supplemental AHA Linkage File consists of the AHA Linkage File packaged with a separate CCR File. AHA Linkage Files for SASD databases for these states do not come with CCR Files.

All other available AHA Linkage Files for all other State databases are able to be downloaded from the [AHA Linkage Files](#) page.

## Student-Priced Data Requirements and Restrictions

### *Eligibility for Student Priced Data*

To be eligible for student pricing, the purchaser must provide proof of current enrollment in a degree-seeking program at an institution of higher learning or proof of appointment as a medical resident or postdoctoral fellow.

3. Acceptable forms of proof include documents that demonstrate current enrollment dates, institution, and student name (e.g., letter from professor advisor, registrar's office, or program director).
4. **Any sensitive personal information (e.g., student account number, SSN, birthdate, phone, etc.) must be masked or redacted prior to sending.** The system has not been approved to take this kind of information.

### *Restrictions on Use of Student-Priced Data*

HCUP data purchased at student pricing may only be used for projects led by the student purchaser.

- Student-priced State-level data may be re-used by the student purchaser for other projects as long as the standard re-use request process is followed. The student purchaser must be the lead on any data re-use requests.
- Collaboration with other authorized individuals using student-priced data is permitted, but the student purchaser would need to be the lead on the collaboration.

Student-priced data may not be transferred to another individual for any other projects. Student-priced data may be retained by the student purchaser for personal use on other projects upon completion of training, but the data may not be left with any entity or institution.

## Payment Methods

There are three methods of payment for HCUP databases: 1) credit card, 2) ACH or 3) Direct payment.

The vendor that processes payments for the AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor is NORC at the University of Chicago.

### Credit Card

The [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) accepts payments by American Express®, Discover®, MasterCard®, and Visa® credit cards issued by **US banks**,

The [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) does not retain credit card information. [Authorize.net](#) is used as the payment gateway for processing credit card transactions. Authorize.net is on Visa's Global Registry of Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) [Validated Service Providers](#). For credit card processing, only the Transaction ID and Authorization Code from Authorize.net are stored. When the payment is processed, the credit card charge will list NORC as the merchant.

### ACH

ACH is available via Authorize.net through the CDORS website. Users can enter their own banking information to use ACH on CDORS.

The [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) does not retain ACH information; only the authorization information is saved. [Authorize.net](#) is used as the payment gateway for processing ACH transactions. Authorize.net is on Visa's Global Registry of Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) [Validated Service Providers](#).

### Direct Payment

For users who want to pay outside of the electronic automated system, select Direct Payment for purchase orders, ACH or wire transfer.

For purchase orders, please send the purchase order document and the invoice to the payment processing contractor (NORC) at [HCUP@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP@ahrq.gov). Please be sure to include the order number in the subject line of the email.

The payment processing vendor (NORC) will provide a W-9 form upon request, please email [HCUP@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP@ahrq.gov). Before NORC can fulfill more extensive vendor set-up requests, prospective HCUP data purchasers will need to create an order and receive an invoice during check-out in the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#). Once the invoice is created, please send an email with the invoice attached, along with any additional forms or instructions to [HCUP@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP@ahrq.gov) to request vendor set-up.

### Timing of Payment Processing

Credit card payments generally take 1-2 business days to process, while other direct payment methods can take up to 5 business days to process. Databases will not be shipped or activated for download until

payment is received and processed. Detailed payment instructions will be included in order status emails, if applicable.

### ***Timing of Receipt of Databases***

AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases (NIS, KID, NASS, NEDS, and NRD) and related supplemental files are available via digital download within a business day of processing payment.

AHRQ HCUP State databases are delivered on a DVD and sent via the United Parcel Service (UPS) within 5 business days after the application has met all requirements including processing payment and when required the application has been approved by AHRQ.

### ***Method of Shipment of Databases***

#### **Nationwide databases and related Supplemental Files**

AHRQ HCUP Nationwide databases (NIS, KID, NASS, NEDS, and NRD) and related supplemental files are delivered in compressed, password-encrypted "zip" or "exe" format via digital download. The site uses secure socket layer (SSL) protocol; therefore, as long as a secure network at work or home to log in is being used, the download is secure. Data purchasers will receive detailed instructions, including passwords, via email.



**NOTE:** Download links are active for only seven (7) days and downloads are limited to three (3) attempts. Please make every effort to seek assistance before the download link expires.

If the download link has expired, an error message indicating there was a problem with the download was received, or any other problem preventing successful download of the products has occurred, please review the following troubleshooting steps, and if needed, contact [HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov](mailto:HCUP-RequestData@ahrq.gov) for assistance in identifying and resolving the problem.

- Ensure you have a stable, high-speed internet connection while downloading. Avoid refreshing the page, locking your screen, or working on other tasks during the download (indicated by a spinning circle), especially for the 2GB main file.
- Check and ensure you have sufficient amount of disk space availability in your hard drive before trying to download.
- Clear the cache memory on your browser before you start downloading the files
- Try using other browsers such as Safari, Firefox, etc

The length of time to download the Nationwide databases can vary. Download performance depends on several highly variable factors including the following:

1. internet connection speed and bandwidth,
2. global and regional internet traffic demand at the time of your download,
3. other users' demand on your network or internet service provider (ISP) resources at the time of your download, and

4. the size of the file to be downloaded (some files are ~2GB that take around 4 minutes to complete on a stable and fast internet).

### State databases and related Supplemental Files

AHRQ HCUP State databases (SID, SEDD, and SASD) and related supplemental files are delivered only in compressed, password-encrypted "zip" or "exe" format on a DVD and sent via the United Parcel Service (UPS) to the shipping address specified in the application to purchase data (US addresses only). For security reasons, the packages are tracked, and require an adult signature. The HCUP data may only be delivered to the data purchaser who also signed the HCUP DUA that accompanied the data order.

### Unzipping Files

To extract the zipped files, please follow these steps using 7-Zip (PC) or Keka (Mac):

1. Right-click the compressed file (the outer layer, e.g., KID\_YYYY).
2. Open with "7-Zip" from the context menu.
3. Choose "Extract to "outer layer/"".
4. Enter the password for specific file.
5. Then, extract the second layer using the same way as above.

## RE-USE THE AHRQ HCUP STATE DATABASES FOR ANOTHER PROJECT

### AHRQ HCUP Nationwide Databases

A data re-use request is **not required** for AHRQ HCUP **Nationwide databases**.

Student-priced Nationwide data may be re-used by the student purchaser for other projects as long as the student purchaser is the lead investigator.

### AHRQ HCUP State Databases

A data re-use request **is required** for AHRQ HCUP **State databases**.

Each application and approval for **State-level data** is **project-specific**. If a data user has State-level HCUP data from a previous project and wishes to use the data for a purpose other than that originally approved, or as concrete projects emerge from approved exploratory work, the data custodian must submit a "State Data Re-Use Request" within the [AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Online Reporting System \(CDORS\)](#) for review and approval before work may begin on the new project.

### Statement of Intended (Re-)Use for HCUP State databases

A [Statement of Intended \(Re-\)Use](#) (SIU) is required to re-use the previously purchased SID, SEDD, and/or SASD databases. Consistent with AHRQ's agreements with HCUP Data Organizations, AHRQ reviews and approves all intended re-uses of the State-level data on behalf of the [HCUP Partners](#). In some cases, the HCUP Partners also review the Statement of Intended Re-Use before approval is granted, and in all

cases, the SIUs are provided in full to the respective data organizations once the data is approved for re-use. The AHRQ reviewers will place the user's application for re-use of the state databases on hold and request clarification from them if the SIU is insufficient for review and approval. Reviews of Statements of Intended (Re-)Use can take 1-2 weeks (or longer if revisions need to be made or if additional input from HCUP Partners is necessary).

The Statement of Intended (Re-)Use defines the user's specific project plans. It should include enough information for reviewers to understand the subject area of interest, how the data will be used, level of analysis, intended audiences, and anticipated end products (e.g., tables and charts, internal reports, peer-reviewed journal articles), as well as to demonstrate understanding of and compliance with the HCUP DUA.

### Restrictions on State database re-use requests

- California data from 2018 and beyond is not eligible for re-use.
- Student-priced data cannot be re-used if the data custodian (student purchaser) is not the principal investigator on the project).

## TRANSFER THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE DATA TO ANOTHER PERSON

An HCUP user is the custodian for all data they purchase. Please remember that individuals, not entities, are responsible for the use and security of the HCUP data, so the data custodian remains responsible for any use or potential misuse unless and until custody is formally transferred to another individual or the data are destroyed. The individual who is designated as the new data custodian must also complete DUA training, and agree to be responsible for the use and security of the HCUP data, before the transfer can be approved. Once the old and new data custodian have acknowledged the DUA, AHRQ staff will review and approve the transfer request, which takes about 1-2 weeks.

It is the responsibility of the original data custodian to provide the new data custodian with the relevant information regarding the secure transfer of all data files. Data custodians must indicate which databases (including years) are being transferred before initiating the transfer.



**NOTE:** The AHRQ HCUP Central Distributor Team does not reissue passwords nor does the team provide copies of missing files.

### Restrictions on Custody Transfers

- As a general rule, all restrictions that applied to the original purchase of the databases apply to the transfer of the databases. See Section on the Special Requirements for Some Databases.
- Student-priced data may not be transferred to any other individual.
- California databases for data years 2018 and beyond are not eligible for custody transfer.