

Considerations for Students Interested in Requesting APAC Data

Introduction

The APAC team aims to support students in using APAC data for academic research purposes. While most of this guidance applies to data requests in general, students often have shorter timelines and are requesting APAC data for the first time compared to other data requestors. Thus, students may particularly benefit from these considerations.

The APAC team highly recommends that students **and** their advisors review this document as well as the [APAC Overview](#) and [APAC Data Request FAQs](#) before scheduling a consultation and submitting an APAC application. These documents will help students decide if APAC is a good fit for their projects and understand the potential risks and drawbacks to requesting APAC compared to other datasets.

General considerations

Successful APAC applications include precise research questions and provide a list of the exact data elements necessary to answer those research questions. This expectation differs from many other data request processes, in which you may have to provide your research questions and analysis plan but then receive a standard extract of data with many additional variables. Since APAC follows the [HIPAA standard of “minimum necessary”](#) based on Oregon Department of Justice (ODOJ) guidance, an APAC analyst creates a unique dataset for each data requestor with only the minimum necessary data elements required to answer precise research questions. The APAC team will scrutinize each requested data element individually to ensure that the level of detail is necessary for a given project and will send back your application for revision if the request is too broad. This is an important way that the APAC team protects the data – by limiting the amount of data we share and reducing the risk that someone could be re-identified.

This level of advanced planning and specificity does not always align with student needs. With other data sources, students may be able to hone their research questions throughout the

process of cleaning and getting familiar with the data. Working with APAC data requires that the student already have a fully developed plan.

The APAC data request timeline varies and can be long. Students can expect the APAC data request process to take several months at minimum and up to a year. There are several steps within the application process. See the Data User Guide for more information. Factors impacting timeline:

- **How quickly a student can submit an application with acceptable research question specificity and alignment with requested data elements**

Each time the APAC team must send back an application to ask for more detail or for the student to narrow their research questions and data elements, additional delays are likely.

- **Project complexity**

Projects in which APAC analysts construct new variables, link data, or build an especially complex dataset tend to take longer to review and process.

- **APAC team capacity**

APAC analysts have limited capacity to fulfill research-related data requests and sometimes have unforeseen workload impacts which cause delays.

- **Academic institutions signing the data use agreement**

Sometimes, it takes several months for the student's academic institution to review and approve the data use agreement.

Insurance claims data are challenging and time-consuming to clean and analyze.

Claims data, like any administrative data, present additional challenges compared to survey data or other datasets developed primarily for research. APAC includes a regularly updated Data User Guide, but there are many challenges, such as deduplicating records, addressing missing data and the size of the data set, that the researcher is responsible for addressing and that are not fully documented within the APAC resources. The APAC team highly recommends that students already have significant experience cleaning and analyzing claims data before they consider using APAC for their thesis or dissertation. APAC research analysts can provide some minimal analytic support, but students and researchers are responsible for the vast majority of the cleaning and analysis.

Recommendations for requesting data elements

This table provides recommendations for data elements that are more likely to meet APAC's standard of 'minimum necessary' and reduce the risk of reidentification of individuals. APAC

offers cost waivers to students on a case-by-case basis. APAC is more likely to approve a cost waiver if data elements meet these recommendations.

Recommended	Requires additional justification
Service-related dates in months and years , such as: • Service dates • Hospital admission and discharge dates • Prescription fill dates	Full dates for any of the following: • Service dates • Hospital admission and discharge dates • Prescription fill dates
Age as a categorical variable (ex: 20-24, 25-29, 30-34)	Age in years as a continuous variable
Diagnoses and procedures rolled up to categories using a grouper such as the Clinical Classifications Software Refined (CCSR)	Individual diagnosis and/or procedure codes
Only APAC data with no linkages	APAC data linked to other datasets
No geographic information below the state level	County or zip code – [Note: if these are necessary for linking purposes, we generally require that the requestor send us the linking data, and we link the data via geographic element, then scrub the dataset of the actual geographic element]
Five or fewer years of data [Note: Any additional years of data require justification such as a longitudinal study design]	More than five years of data
No provider information (location, name, NPI)	Provider information

Populations that require additional justification:

- **Rare diagnoses or procedures** due to increased risk of re-identification

For more information, review the information on APAC's [Data Request webpage](#)

- **Children** as a protected group
- **People over 89** due to increased risk of re-identification with population size (fewer than 4 percent of Oregon population)
- **Substance Use Disorder data** due to special protections under federal and state law