
State of Vermont



**Green Mountain Care Board
Data Governance and Stewardship Charter**

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1 Background

Under 18 V.S.A. Sections 9405, 9410, 9453, and 9454, the Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB) has broad authority and responsibilities to maintain a health care database that includes both hospital- and insurer-reported data submitted in uniform formats and has requirements to analyze health care resources, expenditures and utilization. GMCB is the steward of several data resources for the State of Vermont, including the Vermont Health Care Uniform Reporting and Evaluation System (VHCURES) that includes eligibility and claims data for Vermont residents and the Vermont Uniform Hospital Discharge Data Set (VUHDDS) that includes records for residents and non-residents for inpatient, outpatient, and emergency department discharges from Vermont's general acute care hospitals. These data resources support a number of State responsibilities and activities in health care regulation, evaluation, and innovation. Vermont law (18 V.S.A. § 9410) also specifies that, to the extent allowed by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), information from VHCURES is to be made available to a broader public to the extent permissible under federal and state laws addressing protection of privacy of personal and economic information.

The GMCB created a Data Governance Council (hereafter referred to as the Council) with the authority to make and execute decisions and assign resources to identified and prioritized items. This document describes some of the basic approaches that the Council will employ to support data governance and stewardship at the GMCB. In implementing data governance, the Council will make use of existing internal resources addressing aspects of data acquisition and management, data quality and utility, analytics, and related policy considerations. The Council will leverage and continuously improve existing processes and documentation (e.g., VHCURES data use agreements, policies and procedures, file specifications) in furthering data governance practices at the GMCB. The Council will also leverage the expertise of parties outside the GMCB in collaborative efforts to improve the quality and utility of its data resources, ensure financial sustainability of the data programs, manage risk in data security, and ensure appropriate access to the data to support research of benefit to Vermonters and the broader public.

This charter and the data governance efforts at GMCB are primarily focused on the VHCURES data resource. In the future, practices similar to those used for governing VHCURES will be applied to additional data resources at the GMCB, including VUHDDS.

2 Purpose

The GMCB is the steward of VHCURES and several other important data resources. In this role, the GMCB is responsible for a broad set of data management concerns. While not intended as an all-encompassing inventory, these concerns can generally be attributed to the following four categories:

- Data Quality and Utility—Establishing data stewardship practices to monitor the quality and utility of VHCURES and other data resources
- Risk Management—Implementing best practices with regards to protection of privacy and data security
- Finance and Program Sustainability—Ensuring the financial sustainability of VHCURES, VUHDDS and other data resources by evaluating program expenses, developing new use cases for the data of interest to stakeholders and data users, and identifying and leveraging new sources of revenue
- Data Use and Disclosure—Implementing clear and consistent processes evaluating requests for data use and disclosure from Vermont State Agencies and Non-State Entities and monitoring authorized data use and disclosure

By implementing data governance, the GMCB will address each of these four major areas of data management for VHCURES and other data resources. Additionally, the GMCB will work to increase mutual trust both within the agency and across other Vermont state agencies with a stake in GMCB health data resources as data submitters and users.

Data governance and stewardship are intended to help identify and formalize clear procedures for data resource management. In general, these procedures are based on agency policies, which are in turn are influenced by state, federal, and industry policies, procedures, and norms. Many documented policies and procedures related to certain aspects of data management already exist at the GMCB. Neither this charter nor any other single document is intended to provide an exhaustive inventory of all the procedures involved in governing the GMCB's data resources. We anticipate that as new procedures are developed, modifications to this charter and other existing documentation will be required, and additional documentation will need to be created because responsive and effective data governance is an agile process.

3 Components of Governance

3.1 Defining Data Governance and Stewardship

Data governance is often an ambiguous topic, and multiple definitions exist of both the term and the concepts that the term represents¹. The lack of a universal and detailed definition derives in part from the fact that the characteristics of organizations that use data and large-scale data systems show a tremendous amount of variation. At a minimum, data governance at the GMCB is intended to formalize the agency’s approach to the implementation of the Board’s policies in managing VHCURES and other data resources and will be adjusted as the data program continues to evolve. Some experts suggest the following as a broad definition: “data governance is the organization and implementation of policies, procedures, structures, roles, and responsibilities which outline and enforce rules of engagement, decision rights, and accountabilities for the effective management of information assets.”²

Health data stewardship has been defined as “a responsibility, guided by principles and practices, to ensure the knowledgeable and appropriate use of data derived from individuals’ personal health information” pertaining to data collection, viewing, storage, exchange, aggregation, and analysis.³ Within this framework, central concepts include accountability for assuring appropriate use of health data that respects privacy and confidentiality while supporting “the benefits to society of using individuals’ personal health information to improve understanding of health and health care.”⁴

While these definitions and concepts certainly pertain to the utility of data governance and stewardship at the GMCB, the agency has additional considerations with respect to the protection of personal health and medical information including the management of data use agreements; management of external data consolidation vendor(s); oversight of data quality checks and improvement; administration of technical specifications for data collection and analytics; alignment of analytic efforts with State objectives and policy needs; and increasing the utility of maturing data resources in a manner that is both responsive and financially sustainable.

3.2 Data Governance and Stewardship Goals

The goals of data governance for VHCURES and other data resources include:

- Proactive and timely prevention, management and mitigation of data privacy and security risks;
- Continuous improvement of the quality and utility of the VHCURES and other GMCB data resources;

¹ Alex Berson and Larry Dubov. *Master Data Management and Data Governance*. McGraw Hill. 2011. pp 400.

² Ladley, John. *Data Governance*.

³ Susan Baird and Justine M. Carr, M.D., *Health Data Stewardship: What, Why, Who, How*. National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2009.

⁴ *ibid*

- Effective and efficient data release policies and procedures to ensure appropriate and timely data use and disclosure and prevent unauthorized use and disclosure;
- Improved alignment of data resource management and analytic priorities with policy initiatives within State government;
- Improved financial sustainability of VHCURES and other data resources; and
- Realization of societal benefits through uses of health data that improve the understanding of health and health care.

3.3 Expected Results of Data Governance and Stewardship

Through the work of the Council and the prioritized work items, the following results are expected:

- Continued refinement of existing data use and disclosure policies and procedures to ensure the safeguarding of protected health information and compliance with federal data security standards;
- Creation of well-defined stewardship roles and responsibilities within the Council and within GMCB staff;
- Development and implementation of data governance and stewardship processes including establishment of regular meetings on the Council that adhere to the Vermont Open Meeting Law;
- Establishment of collaborative and transparent processes in interactions between the data consolidation vendor(s) and data users addressing optimization of data quality and utility to support research;
- Consultation and coordination with other state agencies to promote optimization and utility of the GMCB's data resources to meet diverse analytic needs for the development and evaluation of the State's policies and programs;
- A documented quality assurance process with the VHCURES vendor(s), including provisions to engage payers in a mutually agreed upon data validation and reconciliation process and methodology; and
- Periodic evaluation of the GMCB's ability to respond to data requests and users' concerns as part of a continuous improvement effort.

3.4 Implementation of Data Governance and Stewardship

The extent to which organizations may choose to implement data governance and stewardship practices varies widely, with most implementations being non-comprehensive.⁵ This does not imply that any one organization's implementation is incomplete or inadequate, and in fact may often be the result of adapting the scale of data governance to true organizational needs.

Many different frameworks for data governance and stewardship are described in relevant literature. At a minimum, a data governance and stewardship framework addresses the definition of roles, responsibilities, and processes of a data governance and stewardship team.

⁵Very comprehensive frameworks may be considered appropriate for organizations that produce large volumes of complex data, manage and warehouse data internally, conduct analytics and interpretation internally, and modify internal business processes based on analytic results. These comprehensive frameworks may also require substantial resources to implement effectively. Many data-centric organizations have encountered difficulties in achieving effective results from complex data governance and stewardship frameworks. Consequently, many organizations have adopted an agile approach to data governance and stewardship, which borrows the term from agile software development practices that have proliferated since the early 2000s.⁶

In general, the goal of agile data governance and stewardship is to allow organizations to address data management initiatives in increments that are sized according to the specific organization's available resources and rate of project execution. This approach helps to ensure that individual and specific governance results are achieved in the short-term, simultaneously contributing to advances in long-term objectives. The GMCB has adopted an agile approach to data governance which is described further in subsequent sections of this charter.

3.5 Measurement of Successful Data Governance and Stewardship

Measurement of successful data governance and stewardship will be established and reviewed by the Council to ensure there is alignment with data governance and stewardship principles, policies, and procedures. Factors that may contribute to establishing measurements that describe successful data governance and stewardship may include:

- Realization of data governance results as identified in section 3.3 of this charter;
- Acceptable timeframes associated with moving governance and stewardship initiatives from 'active' status to 'substantially complete' or 'suspended' due to changes in goals, objectives and priorities;
- Quantifiable increases in data quality and utility for internal and external data users;
- Increased investment of organizational resources that coincide with gains in efficiency and effectiveness from improved data management policies and procedures; and
- Identification and dissemination of data analyses and reporting that yield societal benefits in improved understanding of health and health care.

The Council will work on an ongoing basis to refine a set of program metrics to measure the success of the GMCB's data governance and stewardship program, as well as the timing and delivery method of metrics and reporting.

4 Agile Methodology

The agile approach for data governance and stewardship is derived from agile software development methodologies, which were developed in response to the known shortcomings of static, comprehensive, and process-oriented development methods. The overarching intent of the Council's agile approach is to deliver completed work items that result in benefits to the GMCB, the State, and the broader public through use of its data resources, while simultaneously maintaining a prioritized inventory of the work items that the Council may choose to address depending on resource availability, typically referred to in agile methodology as a "backlog". The backlog of work items will be maintained by GMCB in an electronic format that is clearly organized and accessible to the Council, which will be reviewed regularly by the Council. Depending on resource availability, typically only the highest priority items will be addressed at any one time. This review process will allow the full attention of the parties assigned to high priority tasks to ensure action and completion in a timely manner. The agile approach for data governance and stewardship will also take into account that the priorities of the GMCB may change over time. Decisions made by the Council and proposed actions supporting data governance and stewardship may change and be re-prioritized accordingly.

The following steps should be implemented by the Council to organize work specific to data governance and stewardship in an efficient and effective manner:

- GMCB data governance and stewardship program staff (program staff) will consult with the Council to identify and organize the current priorities and the items that will be placed in a backlog of activities;
- Between Council meetings, program staff will take action on priority items and review and revise the backlog in order to keep the Council informed in a timely manner between and during Council meetings;
- At each Council meeting, program staff will review the status of priority items, identify and discuss new emergent priorities, and time permitting, review future activities that address the backlog to evaluate the relevance and priority level for these items; and
- Clarify and update the resources required to support work on current priorities for data governance, as selected by the Council as follow:
 - Determine the individuals or workgroup(s) needed to support the current priorities;
 - Estimate the resource commitment for individuals and workgroup(s) needed to support each priority;
 - Estimate appropriate target dates for completion of priority items;
 - Determine how success for each priority item will be measured; and
 - Track progress on each activity through an electronic format that is clearly organized and accessible to GMCB program staff and the Council.

- At Council meetings, assess how responsive and timely the agile approach is and how to improve the approach.

5 Organizational Framework

5.1 Board Sponsorship and Vermont Open Meeting Law

On September 4, 2014, the Board approved the development of a data governance program and the formation of the Council to implement the program. With this approval, the Council will act as a public body within the definition of Vermont Open Meeting Law, since it is a committee of the Board. All meetings of the Council will comply with the Open Meeting Law requirements and will be open to the public. To meet these requirements, the Council will ensure:

- Advance public notice of all meetings. The schedule of meetings (with details on meeting date, time and location, etc.) will be made available to the public on the GMCB and Vermont Department of Libraries websites;
- Any gathering of a quorum of the voting members of the Council, for the purpose of discussing the business of the Council or taking action, will be held as a publicly noticed open meeting;
- The same procedures that guide how internal communications are conducted with the Board apply to the voting members of the Data Governance Council;
- Agendas are posted 48 hours in advance for all meetings;
- Special meetings will be announced at least 24 hours before the meeting;
- To the extent possible, the meeting agenda will indicate if the Council will be taking action on a particular topic;
- Minutes taken at meetings are made available five (5) days after each meeting;
- The opportunity for public comment (subject to reasonable rules, 1 V.S.A. § 312(h)) is made available at each meeting;
- Responses to alleged violations of the law are made in a timely manner 1 V.S.A. § 314(b);
- Documents created by and for the Council should be marked “For Discussion Only” while the document is being developed, or if the intent of the document is solely to support a discussion during a Council meeting. As the document approaches a draft for review by the Council, it should then be marked as “Draft”. Documents that are final should not contain either of the aforementioned watermarks;
- Only final versions of documents are posted to the GMCB website. Other documents may be made available to the public upon request; and
- Working documents created for discussion by the Council will be maintained according to the Green Mountain Care Board records retention schedule.

The Council may assign tasks to its members or individuals outside its membership, to be performed outside of a public meeting, just as the Board assigns work to its staff.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Voting Membership of the Council

The voting membership of the Council will be comprised of three distinct roles.

1. Council Chair: The role of the chair will be held by the Executive Director of the GMCB. The chair of the Council is responsible for overseeing the data governance and stewardship work during and between Council meetings including:
 - Appointing and recruiting voting members of the Council as needed to address vacancies or changes to the structure for Council membership;
 - By delegation of the Council, making decisions on requests for use and disclosure of data including whether to defer any decisions on data use and disclosure or other issues of data governance and stewardship to the Board;
 - Addressing priorities identified by the Council including delegation of work to GMCB staff as needed to support addressing priority areas;
 - Working with GMCB data program staff to develop meeting agendas and activities;
 - Leading Council meetings; and
 - Facilitating the decision-making process of the Council.

2. Voting Council Members from the Board: The Council shall include at least one Board member(s) in its membership. Their role is to provide the perspective of the board and to communicate with other board members about the work of the Council.

2.3. Voting Council Members from the GMCB Staff: The Council will include executive-level GMCB staff members designated by the Council chair to:

- Provide a high-level perspective on the alignment of data stewardship, management, and analytical activities with the policy and program initiatives of the GMCB and
- Support the Council in decision-making.

3.4. Voting Council Member(s) from Other Vermont State Agencies or Organizations: The Council may recruit voting member(s) from other Vermont state agencies and other organizations who may be data contributors, data users, technical experts, or policy leaders to share their expertise.

The voting membership of the Council will be composed at a minimum of five (5) individuals including the Council chair. For a voting membership of five (5) members, four voting members of the Council shall constitute a quorum, except that three members shall constitute a quorum at any meeting upon the written authorization of the Council chair issued in connection with that meeting. The Council chair may refer items to the Board as deemed necessary and appropriate for a final vote.

A key responsibility of the Council chair is to make decisions on applications for data use agreements (DUA) and other issues pertaining to the use and disclosure of the data as identified by GMCB staff. In this role, the Executive Director may, by delegation of the Council,

approve or disapprove DUA applications and other requests pertaining to use and disclosure of the data; request that applicants and requestors clarify or file additional information; or defer decision-making on DUA applications and other requests to the Board. Additional details on policies and procedures pertaining to data use, release, and re-disclosures are included in the GMCB Data Use and Disclosure Guide.

Other key responsibilities of the Council chair include identifying and queuing up issues for the Council pertaining to the other areas of data governance and stewardship including Risk Management, Finance and Program Sustainability, and Data Quality and Utility.

Review of the voting membership of the Council will be conducted on an ongoing basis, and when necessary, changes to the composition of voting membership will be made by the Council chair to support the objectives of the Council. [Any changes to the initial composition of the Council shall be subject to approval by the voting membership of the Council.](#)

GMCB Staff Support Functions

Council chair may directly designate GMCB staff to provide technical, legal, and administrative support to the Council or delegate the designations to a staff lead. GMCB support staff will include a GMCB staff attorney and staff members with data management, analytical and administrative roles in the data program, and other capabilities as needed by the Council. The Council chair may designate a staff lead to coordinate the activities of the support staff.

GMCB staff will be responsible for processing, reviewing, and making recommendations on DUA applications and requests and issues pertaining to data use and disclosure. This support role includes working with the Council chair, Council, the Board, DUA applicants, and internal and external parties who file requests and identify issues requiring clarification or decisions. Support staff will coordinate requests for information and clarification, gather and organize additional information, and schedule applicants to testify at meetings as requested by the Council or the Board.

Designated staff will also support the Council chair, the Council, and the Board with activities and research pertaining to other areas of data governance and stewardship including Risk Management, Finance and Program Sustainability, Data Quality and Utility, and other areas as requested.

Support staff will assist the Council during and between meetings performing activities related to:

- Addressing and making decisions on prioritized and backlogged items;
- Supporting the ED's and Council's decision-making process on DUA applications and other requests pertaining to data use and disclosure;
- Researching topics as requested;
- Planning and supporting meeting logistics and documentation;
- Posting materials and notifications on the GMCB website; and

- Supporting workgroups as assigned by the Executive Director or the GMCB or the support staff lead.

5.3 Workgroups

The Executive Director and the Council may create workgroups composed of individuals with expertise in targeted subject areas to support GMCB data governance and stewardship activities. Standing workgroups may provide guidance and advice on particular areas of data governance including, but not necessarily limited to Data Quality and Utility, Risk Management, Finance and Program Sustainability, and Data Use and Disclosure. Workgroups addressing targeted issues may be assigned a specific role over an expected timeframe. Workgroups are not intended to be policy-making bodies but will inform the Council on matters related to the management of the GMCB's data and information resources. To ensure efficient and effective management of group process, each workgroup will have a GMCB lead member responsible for scheduling, planning, facilitating workgroup meetings, and coordinating research and reporting for the Council and the Board as needed.

5.4 Effective Date

Revisions to this Charter shall take effect upon the first meeting of members appointed thereunder.