



Frequently Asked Questions

Why did CHCF launch this initiative?

The California HealthCare Foundation's Free the Data initiative stems from our commitment to promote transparency in health care delivery as a means to improve quality, increase access, and reduce costs. A key aim of this initiative is to encourage extensive use of public domain health care data for decisionmaking — by policymakers, providers, consumers, and others.

What data is CHCF trying to liberate?

CHCF's focus is on data that already are collected, mostly by government entities, but may not be published in formats that make it easy for wide-ranging audiences to use.

Who will use "freed" health care data and how?

The potential audiences and their uses of health care data are varied:

- Policymakers (federal, state, local): To make informed decisions about health care policy
- Medical providers and insurers: To track performance and improve care delivery
- Researchers and the media: To provide thoughtful analysis of issues
- Advocacy: To support arguments for better health care
- Consumers: To make informed choices about care
- Content editors and developers: To incorporate data into apps and websites

What are CHCF's goals for this initiative?

If successful, Free the Data will achieve these results:

- Improved access to data: More data about California's health care delivery system are publicly reported.
- Increased demand and use for data: Tools are developed and widely used to help experts and non-experts access, interpret, and communicate these health care data.
- Better informed decisionmaking: Health care data are transformed into actionable information that advances the goals of improving quality, increasing efficiency, and lowering costs in health care.

What about private data?

Free the Data is focused on public data — that is, aggregated, de-identified health care data from government agencies and other entities — that rightly belong in the public domain and for which there are no reasonable privacy concerns.

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What are examples of work under this initiative?

Free the Data activities will include:

- Identifying best practices from other efforts to free data, including the federal Health Data Initiative and efforts in other states
- Demonstrating innovative approaches to data visualization and display
- Participating in a national consortium of funders, data developers, and media
- Supporting efforts to integrate health data into websites and mobile apps for consumers, providers, payers, and others
- Encouraging broader use of health care data among the media
- Aiding health policy audiences with tools to use data in their work
- Providing consumers with better access to data about health care quality

Has such an initiative been tried elsewhere?

Even before the concept of “open data” gained currency, foundations nationwide (Annie E. Casey, the Commonwealth Fund, Kaiser Family Foundation) provided web portals for users to access, display, and share government data; such portals are still widely used today. More recently, local, state, and federal government entities have joined the effort to provide better access to data, including through the use of APIs and other tools that enable integration of datasets into applications and services.

Is Free the Data free?

While costs incurred by government agencies to free California health care data can vary, CHCF may be able to help offset these costs through our Free the Data initiative.

What are some examples of available California data online?

Sponsored by a range of institutions, more than [20 portals publish and display health care data](#) for California. CHCF also has assembled a [number of infographics](#) to depict health-related data in new ways.

How can people get involved?

We encourage you to:

- Use the Free the Data logo to show support for data liberation (see www.chcf.org/freethedata).
- Tell us how you use health care data in your work; let us know about health care datasets that rightly belong in the public domain, but are hard to access (contact Andy Krackov, CHCF senior program officer, at akrackov@chcf.org).
- Track the initiative on Twitter (follow @CHCFNews and #freethedata).

Free the Data is an initiative of the California HealthCare Foundation. For more information, visit www.chcf.org/freethedata.
