

The Importance of Patient Address

for Health Information Professionals

Having the correct address for patients is critical to the safety and efficiency of health care. Correct, complete patient addresses support accurate and timely delivery of medications, medical supplies, and insurance claims. It also ensures that providers' computer systems can easily manage health records safely and securely.



What is Patient Matching?

Patient matching refers to the processes that determine whether records—both those held within a single healthcare organization and across different healthcare organizations—correctly refer to a specific patient. Accuracy in patient matching is foundational to ensuring patient safety, improving operational and administrative efficiencies, and the interoperability of patient records.

What about the Postal Service?

Without a doubt, the USPS is the nation's authority on addresses, and many health IT systems apply USPS postal standards designed for improved mailability. Through Project US@, we leveraged the expertise of the USPS and their existing standards to improve patient matching.



What is Project US@?

Project US@ is a federal initiative seeking to issue a unified, healthcare industry-wide specification for representing patient address. Our goal is to improve patient matching across a range of clinical and administrative transactions through improved address data quality.

Potential Risks of Inaccurate Patient Matching



Lapses in Critical
Clinical Information



Hindered Data
Aggregation



Population Health
Approaches
Deterred



Inefficient, Delayed
or Duplicate Care



Limited Public
Health Reporting



Reduced Utility of
Data for Research



Missing or Delayed
Prior Authorization
for Care



Billing Errors &
Administrative
Inefficiencies

How Does It Work?

The Project US@ Technical Specification and Project US@ AHIMA Companion Guide are designed to standardize patient address data. Standardizing improves the quality and uniformity of the data used by patient matching algorithms when determining if two or more records represent the same patient.

Develop Scripts for Staff

Cultural, linguistic, or other differences may lead to challenges in the communication of address information. Scripts (used at the point of registration) are useful tools that can remind and assist staff to capture all available addresses in addition to providing guidance on approaching sensitive circumstances.

I have a question.
Can you ask your grandmother if there is a different address where she would like her bills to be sent?



Apply Best Practices to All Patient Addresses

The Project US@ AHIMA Companion Guide will assist health information professionals in determining best practices for a range of unique circumstances. Homeless patients, active or retired military, children in foster care, incarcerated patients, or patients residing in Puerto Rico are only a few of the scenarios where special handling of patient addresses may be needed.

No problem, I can help you with that.
If you're in-between homes I can add a temporary address.



Get Comfortable with the Project US@ AHIMA Companion Guide

Ensure guidance and best practices from the AHIMA Companion Guide are incorporated into end user trainings and support, integrated into existing data quality improvement, patient identity management, and patient financial services workflows, included in staff policies and procedures, and are easily accessible to new and existing staff.

I need to ask this every visit:
Would you like to provide us with any other address that we may not have on file?



How does the Project US@ Companion Guide help Health Information Professionals?



Protects Patient Safety

Inaccurate patient matching leads to incomplete medical information available to providers when they need it, or clinical information from two different patients may be comingled in the same record. Both of these scenarios place patients at risk for adverse events, including missed or delayed diagnoses or missed allergies.



Protects Patient Privacy

Privacy is at risk when technology, people, or processes cannot accurately match patient data to the correct record; systems may expose patient information to the wrong person or may leave the patient at risk for fraud or identity theft.



Supports Administrative Efficiencies

Standardized data and processes can reduce administrative burdens in several ways, including but not limited to time and energy invested in deduplicating records and investigating and correcting comingled records (i.e., overlays).

Uniformity of practice, in combination with standards, works to improve the accuracy of patient data. More accurate data will decrease work in error queues, alleviate downstream issues and delays in the revenue cycle including coding and billing, release of information, and clinical documentation integrity (CDI).



Resources Available Now!

- Review and adopt the Project US@ AHIMA Companion Guide.
- Review and share the Project US@ Technical Specification with your IT colleagues and decision makers.
- Don't wait until your EHR vendor has adopted the Project US@ Technical Specification – start improving patient addresses now!

Project
US@

**Unified
Specification**
*for Address
in health care*

The optimal solution to accurately matching patient records will always be a combination of technology, processes, and people.

Learn more about our Patient Matching efforts at [HealthIT.gov](https://www.healthit.gov) and [AHIMA.org](https://www.ahima.org).