



HIPAA and Confidentiality Requirements: Please Read!

2023 Minnesota Homeless Study

1. A federal law affects interviewers working on this study

In 2003, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) went into effect. It provides guidelines for the collection and use of personal information for research. It also establishes privacy safeguards that Wilder Research must follow when working with protected health information such as the information about physical and mental health needs that are part of the Homeless Study interview. The law requires that people who collect or have access to this information take steps to protect the privacy of each respondent.

2. What the HIPAA law means to respondents

Wilder Research has always taken steps to protect the rights of research subjects. The law establishes specific rules for this, most of which are the same as our current practices. They include the following:

- Adopted written privacy procedures
- Training for all staff and volunteers in privacy procedures (you will receive this training when you are trained to conduct the interview)
- No use of individually identifiable data in any report or publication
- Specific information provided to all research subjects regarding privacy rights
- Both civil and criminal penalties for violating the law (interviewers can avoid any problems by simply following the procedures for the study)

3. What the HIPAA law means to volunteer interviewers

The privacy information for respondents is printed in the introduction to the interview and includes the following:

- Informing respondents that the study is voluntary and that any services they may be receiving will not be affected by whether or not they choose to take part in the study
- Informing respondents that the information they provide is private and confidential and that it will never be released in a way that would allow others to identify them

In addition, we ask that **you** act to safeguard the privacy of respondents by:

- Turning in completed interviews to site leaders only
- Not leaving interviews in locations where others might see them
- Not talking with others about the people you have interviewed, including information about the backgrounds or circumstances of respondents

4. Other important information

- The HIPAA law protects privacy, but it allows for the release of health information in some special circumstances, like in the event of a medical emergency.
- You are one of the most important links in our commitment to the privacy of study respondents.
- You can call the Homeless Study volunteer coordinator, Christin Lindberg at 651-280-2728, or toll free 1-800-328-2972, if you have questions about the law or the responsibilities of interviewers.