Overview

The HIPDB is a resource to assist health plans and Federal and State Government agencies to conduct law enforcement investigations and reviews of the qualifications of health care practitioners, providers, and suppliers. The primary goals of the HIPDB are to help prevent fraud and abuse in the national health care system and to improve the quality of patient care. In addition, queriers may use HIPDB information in making decisions regarding affiliation, verification, contracting, credentialing, employment, and licensure of practitioners, providers, and suppliers.

The HIPDB collects and disseminates to eligible queriers information on:

- Health care-related civil judgments taken in Federal or State court.

- Health care-related criminal convictions taken in Federal or State court.

- Injunctions.

- Federal or State licensing and certification actions, including revocations; reprimands; censures; probations; suspensions; and any other loss of license, or the right to apply for or renew a license, whether by voluntary surrender, non-renewability, or otherwise.

- Exclusions from participation in Federal and State health care programs.

- Any other adjudicated actions or decisions defined by regulation (see the Reports chapter of this *Guidebook*).

HIPDB Information is available, upon request, to:

- Federal and State Government agencies.

- Health plans.

- Health care practitioners, providers, and suppliers requesting information concerning themselves (self-query).

- Persons or organizations requesting information in a form which does not permit the identification of any particular patient or health care practitioner, provider, or supplier.

The limited access provisions of the Section 1128E do not allow the disclosure of HIPDB information to the general public.

The HIPDB system will not allow entities to submit queries which do not include information in all mandatory fields. The HIPDB suggests that entities include, as part of the application process, information needed to complete mandatory fields for HIPDB queries.

Types of Queriers

Federal and State Government Agencies

Criminal justice authorities, government investigators, and prosecutors may query the HIPDB to further investigations on health care practitioners, providers, and suppliers. Federal and State prosecutors (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Attorney) may also use HIPDB information in making decisions to accept plea agreements or in making sentencing recommendations to the court.

Other governmental organizations may query the HIPDB with respect to credentialing, licensing, or certification of health care practitioners, providers, and suppliers. Some components in this group administer or provide payment for health care items or services, while others audit, evaluate, and review program operations to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. Those organizations responsible for licensing and certification functions may choose to query the database to confirm or collect information during the review of initial or renewal applications. Similarly, other Federal or State agency users (e.g., State Medical Board, Food and Drug Administration) may choose to query the HIPDB to determine a practitioner's, provider's, or supplier's eligibility for participation, or to ensure that subjects have been reported properly.

Health Plans

Health plans may have a variety of reasons for querying the HIPDB, principally in relation to credentialing or contracting with practitioners, providers, and suppliers. Health plans may query on specific subjects who have applied or are being considered for association with the plan.

Health plans also may query the HIPDB to detect and investigate potential fraudulent and abusive activity related to the payment or delivery of health care services. Typically, health plan units develop cases for presentation to Government investigators and prosecutors, who, in turn, take the information and move toward criminal, civil, or administrative actions. HIPDB information may also be used by the health plan's parent organization to pursue civil actions against a specific practitioner, provider, or supplier.

Practitioners, Providers, and Suppliers

Practitioners, providers, and suppliers may request information about themselves (self-query) from the HIPDB at any time, for any purpose.

Submitting a Query to the HIPDB

Eligible entities prepare and submit queries using the NPDB-HIPDB's Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS). Entities may submit single-name or multiple-name (batch) queries electronically to the HIPDB via modem through the Internet. When the HIPDB processes query data submitted via the IQRS, the query response is stored for the querying entity to retrieve through the IQRS.

Equipment Needed to Query Electronically

Eligible entities that wish to query must have Internet access and an Internet browser; either Microsoft Internet Explorer Version 4.01 Service Pack 2 (or higher) or Netscape Communicator Version 4.08 (or higher). In addition, a plug-in or stand-alone program that can read files in Portable Document Format (PDF), such as Adobe Acrobat Reader 4.0, is required. A printer is required to print responses to queries and reports.

Querying Through an Authorized Agent

The HIPDB's response to a query submitted by an Authorized Agent on behalf of an entity will be based upon two eligibility standards: (1) the entity must be entitled to receive the information, and (2) the Agent must be authorized to receive that information on behalf of that entity.

Before an Authorized Agent submits a query on behalf of an entity, the entity must indicate to the HIPDB whether the query responses are to be returned either to the entity or to the Agent; responses may not be returned to both. **The entity must have the capability to receive the response through the IQRS if the response is to be routed back to the entity**.

Authorized Agents must understand that they cannot use a query response for a particular practitioner, provider, or supplier on behalf of more than one entity. The HIPDB regulations specify that information received from the HIPDB must be used solely for the purpose for which it was provided. Therefore, an Authorized Agent that queries on a particular practitioner, provider, or supplier on behalf of one health plan may not use the query response for that practitioner, provider, or supplier for a different health plan.

An eligible querier that has designated an Authorized Agent is also permitted to query the HIPDB directly. Responses to queries submitted by the entity will be returned to the entity, regardless of routing designated for queries submitted by the Agent.

Lost Your HIPDB Password?

If you have already registered for the HIPDB and cannot locate your password, call the NPDB-HIPDB

Help Line for assistance. The Help Line will assist you in obtaining a new password for your organization.

Query Processing

When the HIPDB receives a properly completed query, the information is entered into the HIPDB computer system. The computer system performs a validation process that matches subject (i.e., practitioner, provider, or supplier) identifying information submitted in the query with information previously reported to the HIPDB. Information reported about a specific practitioner is released to an eligible querier **only** if the identifying information provided in the query matches the information in a report.

Each query processed by the HIPDB computer system is assigned a unique Document Control Number (DCN). This Document Control Number is used by the HIPDB to locate the query within the computer system. The DCN is prominently displayed in a query response. If a question arises concerning a particular query, the entity must reference the DCN in any correspondence to the HIPDB.

Character Limits

Each field in a query (such as Name, Work Address, and License Number) is limited to a certain number of characters, including spaces and punctuation. The IQRS will not allow the entity to use more than the allotted number of characters. **The HIPDB will not change any information submitted in a query.**

Query Responses

Each time a query is successfully processed by the HIPDB computer system, a query response is stored for the querying entity to retrieve through the IQRS. Practitioners, providers, and suppliers who self-query will receive paper responses sent by First Class U.S. mail.

When there is no information in the HIPDB about a subject practitioner, provider, or supplier, the querier will receive in response only the subject identifying information provided in the query and a notification that no information about the subject practitioner, provider, or supplier is contained in the HIPDB. Query information is not retained on subjects for whom no adverse actions have been reported.

Query Response Times

A query on one practitioner, provider, or supplier is considered a single-name query; a query on more than one practitioner, provider, or supplier is considered a multiple-name query. Each single-name query is assigned a unique DCN. A multiple-name query is assigned a Batch DCN, and each name within the query is assigned an individual DCN.

All queries submitted electronically via the IQRS are normally processed within four to six hours of receipt. However, during periods of high volume, the processing time may be longer.

Ideally, information from the HIPDB will be considered during the credentialing process. However, the HIPDB law does not require querying entities to receive query responses from the HIPDB before proceeding with hiring or the issuance of licenses. Because the HIPDB is one of several resources for the credentials review process, entities may act on applications according to their established criteria and information obtained from other sources.

Missing Query Responses

If you submit a query to the HIPDB via the IQRS and have not received a response within one week, call the NPDB-HIPDB Help Line to request a query status.

Correcting Query Information

If the information you submitted in a query does not accurately identify the practitioner, provider, or supplier on whom you intended to query, your query will not match HIPDB reports submitted with correct identifying information. To query the HIPDB with the proper identifying information on the subject, submit a new, correctly completed query to the HIPDB.

Failure to Query

Querying the HIPDB is optional. There are no mandatory querying requirements placed on eligible queriers.

Questions and Answers

1. **When I register with the HIPDB, am I automatically registered to use the IQRS?**

Yes. Your organization's DBID and password for the IQRS are included on the *Entity Registration*

Verification document mailed to your organization at the time your entity is registered with the HIPDB. If you lose your DBID or password, contact the NPDB-HIPDB Help Line.

2. Can I submit queries to the HIPDB on diskette, as I did for the NPDB?

No. All queries submitted to the HIPDB must be submitted electronically, via the IQRS.

3. If I cannot find, or did not receive, a response to a query, may I request a copy from the HIPDB?

No. The HIPDB currently does not have the capability to produce duplicate responses. If you did not receive a response to a query and were not charged for the query, the query has not been processed by the HIPDB and should be resubmitted. Once processed by the HIPDB, query responses will be maintained on the IQRS for 30 days. After 30 days, the responses will be deleted from the IQRS, and the entity will have to resubmit the query to receive a response.

4. Can I designate more than one Authorized Agent to query for my entity?

Yes. The HIPDB computer system can accommodate multiple Authorized Agents for each querying entity.

5. If I decide to designate an Authorized Agent, or to change from one Agent to another, how long will it take before the Authorized Agent can query for my organization?

If the Agent is already registered with the HIPDB and has been assigned a DBID, the HIPDB will send notification documents to your organization. You should check the document to ensure that all information is correct. Your Authorized Agent will be able to query on your organization's behalf immediately upon your receipt of the notification documents.

If the Agent is not already registered with the HIPDB, the Agent must call the NPDB-HIPDB Help Line to obtain an *Authorized Agent Registration* form. Once the Agent is registered, a DBID and password will be assigned to that Agent, and the entity can designate that Agent to report and/or query on its behalf.