

A series of questions posed by the moderator and audience provided the framework for a lively discussion of the challenge of balancing accessibility with confidentiality.

- Describe the confidentiality requirements mandated by your agencies and how those requirements have affected information sharing initiatives.
- At times, the state's closed records policy hinders criminal justice agencies' ability to deal with cases in the most effective and efficient manner.
- Social service agencies have specific rules that protect clients' confidential information. These issues are still being worked on in the Homeless Information
- State agencies often need access to data in other agency systems, but there is no uniform policy on information sharing in New York State. One of the major blocks in trying to share information between organizations is that the rules are mandated by higher state and federal authorities. The rules should be written by program officials and policy makers who have in-depth knowledge of the specific needs and concerns of the policy areas.

State your fears about information sharing among agencies.

- When developing HIMS, the BHS team encountered homeless shelter service providers that thought they'd be unfavorably compared to one another if they contributed their information to the system. The agency overcame this hurdle by making the providers part of the process and assuring them, through their active participation, that they would have a voice in the development and outcome of the system.
- Agencies need to clearly state how they'll share and distribute data. Rules need to be agency-wide in order to ensure their uniform application.
- Some agencies fear their data will be misunderstood if it is used out of context and that inaccurate data will be passed on without being corrected.
- Another fear is that agencies won't have control over how individual employees handle sensitive data.

What rights do government contractors have to keep their information confidential from the state?

- The state has no interest in knowing some of their information, while other information has to be shared with the state because the organization receives money from the state. If private sector organizations accept state funding, then they have to accept the information sharing rules that go along with it.

What measures are in place to ensure that individuals from both internal and external entities use information responsibly?

- There are an abundance of federal and state requirements, and agencies are audited by outside authorities.
- Rules designating who has access to what data under which circumstances are crucial.
- Audit trails are an effective way to determine if data is being used for legitimate reasons.
- Auditing is also useful for monitoring who is looking at certain information.

What legislation needs to be passed in order to comply with agency privacy agreements?

- Legislation needs to be more comprehensive, broad-based, and proactive.
- The legislation often comes after data has been used or misused resulting in privacy concerns. In order for it to be fully effective, the legislation should be passed earlier in the process to avoid such problems.