MEDICAL EXAMINER AND CORONER PROJECT PLANNING AND GUIDANCE

Overview: The purpose of this document is to detail key elements of building, staffing and managing data modernization or interoperability workflow projects for medical examiners or coroners (MECs) working in medicolegal death investigation (MDI) offices. This guidance is intended for medical examiners, coroners, MDI office managers or directors and other agency leadership who will be implementing data modernization efforts.

This document can be used as a companion to the workflow tools created for medical examiner and coroner use cases. The workflow tools are not designed to be a "one size fits all" solution to data modernization or interoperability. Each MDI office should approach efforts to modernize data exchange according to their unique resources, capabilities, case management systems, strengths and challenges.

Primary Team: Roles and Responsibilties

The Project Team consists of the MDI office and their project lead, a partner agency with whom data will be shared, and the information technology (IT) vendors for the systems of each entity (case management system vendor and data exchange vendor).

The Project Lead is responsible for the day-to-day management of the project and working with external partners. The project lead will organize and motivate others on the project team to complete the project objectives, identify and prioritize technical assistance requests and coordinate communications and reporting to leadership, external partners, funders and others.

The Partner Agency is a partner that the MDI office normally exchanges a high volume of data with on a regular basis. Some examples include Vital Records Office (VRO) and toxicology laboratories. Data with the partner can be exchanged uni- or bi-directionally. Responsibilities include providing guidance and resources from their agency to support the project.

The MDI Case Management System (CMS) Vendor may include an IT analyst, IT specialist, Cloud Architect, Systems Administrator, Application Developer or other personnel whose key responsibilities will include creation, implementation, operation and maintenance of the current systems applications and tools according to project specifications.

The Data Exchange Vendor will be exchanging data with the MDI CMS vendor. They may also include an IT analyst, IT specialist, Cloud Architect, Systems Administrator, Application Developer or other personnel whose key responsibilities will include creation, implementation, operation and maintenance of systems applications and tools according to project specifications.

Other Partners / Interested Parties

Legal /Data Governance oversight of projects may be necessary when exchanging sensitive data electronically depending on the project or the jurisdiction. Their responsibility is to develop and implement policies for data access, data privacy, data use, data sharing and, if necessary, data retention.

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Data End Users are subject matter experts, such as forensic epidemiologists, public health practitioners or others who may use the data to carry out accreditation, research or public health functions. Data end users may be part of the MEC office, the data exchange partner agency or other public health agencies.

Available Project Workflows

The Health Level Seven Medicolegal Death Investigation Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources Implementation Guide (HL7® MDI FHIR® IG) provides US-specific guidance on the exchange of information to and from MDI systems. It supports interoperability between the MDI case management system (MDI CMS) used by medical examiner and coroner offices, forensic toxicology and other laboratory information management systems (LIMS), electronic death registration systems (EDRS) of jurisdictional VROs and ancillary workflows whose systems have the capability of using FHIR. The HL7® MDI FHIR® IG provides MDI CMS developers with the technical details and best practices to standardize MDI fields and interfaces. The following MDI use cases are published in the HL7® MDI FHIR® IG and have a workflow tool available as an additional project implementation resource:

- Death Case Record Creation and Update for Death Certificate
- Transmission of Forensic Toxicology Diagnostic Findings from LIMS to MDI CMS
- Transmission of a Death Certificate for Review/Approval

Project Considerations

Choosing a Workflow or Use Case will depend on a variety of factors, including whether the project is sponsored by a data exchange partner agency. Some factors to consider when choosing a use case or workflow may include volume or frequency of data exchanged, staff capacity, skills and capabilities, budget/cost, timeline, risks and the results expected at the completion of the project.

A **Use Case** is a specific scenario or application where FHIR® is implemented to enable the exchange of healthcare, public health or patient data between different systems. For MEC offices, death certificate and toxicology data are the primary data sources for exchange.

A **Workplan** is a document used in project management where you can break down the goals of the project into objectives, assign activities to each objective and determine the resources in terms of personnel, budget and timeline required to meet each activity.

Outcomes are the changes that occur as a result of your activities. For example, in interoperability projects, this might be reduced time, reduced duplication of effort or improved data quality.

Assumptions are the conditions you are relying on to achieve successful project outcomes. For example, having an electronic MDI CMS is an assumption for completing a successful FHIR project.

Scope defines the objectives and deliverables of the project and creates a boundary for the project in terms of what the project will and will not address.

Constraints are the limits within which the project must operate. The main ones to consider, which were mentioned when choosing a use case, are timeline, budget/cost, resources (staff capacity, skills, capabilities), risks and scope.

Risk is the potential occurrence of uncertain events or conditions that can positively or negatively affect project objectives.

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