Graduate Student Projects at Health Data Nova Scotia (HDNS)

Health Data Nova Scotia (HDNS) is an important resource for a wide range of population-based research using administrative health data. Graduate students can use the HDNS data holdings for their thesis project, and the holdings can also be used for RIM projects, resident projects, and undergraduate projects, but there are important limitations to their use. Students who seek to understand the content of the complex databases and the process of conducting research with administrative data are encouraged to consult HDNS and/or researchers experienced with using the data holdings.

Students interested in using the HDNS data holdings should consider the following:

- **Their research question(s) must be answerable using the HDNS data holdings.** The HDNS holdings are complex – they are sometimes messy, and the information within them can be difficult to ascertain. A thorough investigation of whether the question is answerable is needed before applications are filed.
- **The supervisory committee should have a member that is familiar with HDNS research, ideally as a supervisor or co-supervisor.** Having an experienced committee member should help the student with appropriate and realistic timelines and get them to the point where they can conduct their own research as efficiently as possible.
- **There will be costs incurred to access HDNS data holdings, as HDNS runs on a cost recovery basis. However, HDNS offers a 10% discount to students enrolled in an academic degree granting program and who are the identified PI on their thesis project.** Cost recovery includes the costs for the time to pull the necessary data and any ongoing support or questions about the data or programming. Note that students cannot be added to a project to get a discount on the data; they must be named as the PI from the beginning. Student projects typically cost in the range of $5 to 10K.
- **In general, students are expected to be familiar with the software required for their statistical analyses (R, SAS, Python or Stata) and are expected carry out their own analyses.** The student's committee should be capable of providing all statistical and analytic advice needed to complete the analysis; HDNS staff will not be available beyond basic tech and data access support.
- **It can take up to 9 months (typically 3 to 6 months) from time of first application to receiving data, so students and their supervisors need to plan well ahead in order to meet degree requirements in a timely fashion.** Students typically need 3-6 months minimum for analyzing data and another 3-6 months for reporting it, so ideally the application process should begin during their first two terms of education.

Given the challenges of using the data, timelines for accessing the data and requirements for analyzing it, it is important that supervisors are significantly involved in the HDNS process – the student projects that have succeeded through HDNS have done so when they have been part of a larger program of research with the data platform.

If you have further questions, please contact HDNS Director Dr. Sam Stewart (sam.stewart@dal.ca).