

**Integrated Population Health Data (iPHD) Project
Governing Board (GB) Meeting Minutes
June 26, 2026**

1:30 PM-3:00 PM EST

The iPHD Governing Board meeting convened in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act. All participants attended the meeting virtually.

Board Members Present:

Rachel Hammond (Chair and Designee for the Commissioner of Health Data Privacy Officer, NJ Department of Health), Joel Cantor (Ex officio/ Non-voting, Director of Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Francis Baker (Ex officio/Designee for the NJ Attorney General, Deputy Attorney General, NJ Office of the Attorney General), Greg Woods (Ex officio/Designee for the NJ Commissioner of Human Services, Assistant Commissioner and Division Director, Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services Department of Human Services), Kathleen Noonan (Appointed- Chief Executive Officer, Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers), Michele Norin (Ex officio, Senior Vice President & Chief Information Officer- Rutgers University), Rashmi Jain (Appointed- Big Data/Security Expert, Chair of Information Management and Business Analytics, Montclair State University), Elizabeth Litten (Appointed- Legal & Privacy Expert, Partner and Chief Privacy & HIPAA Compliance Officer, Fox Rothschild LLP), and Dennis Zeveloff (Ex officio/Designee for the NJ State Treasurer, Senior Adviser to the Treasurer, New Jersey Department of the Treasury)

Attendees:

Margaret Koller (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Mark McNally (NJ Office of the Attorney General), Suzanne Borys (NJ Department of Human Services), Maria Baron (NJ Department of Health), Barbara Bolden (NJ Department of Health), Kara Unal (NJ Department of Health), Tim Seplaki (NJ Department of Health), Geeta Real (NJ Department of Health), Darrin Goldman (NJ Department of Health), Domenica Cevallos (NJ Department of Health), Stella Tsai (NJ Department of Health), Jasenia Casiano (NJ Department of Health), Michael Toto (NJ Department of Health), Bretta Jacquemin (NJ

Department of Health), Sadaf Shahbaz (NJ Department of Children and Families), Shireena McGee (NJ Department of Children and Families), Jonathan Marsh (NJ Department of Children and Families), Ashley Tanz (NJ Office of the Attorney General), Jose Nova (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Jolene Chou (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Joshua Lue (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Oliver Lontok (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Katherine Kovacs (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Julien Rodriguez (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), and Manisha Agrawal (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy)

Call to Order/Opening Remarks

- R. Hammond called the meeting to order at 1:32 pm with a quorum present.
- R. Hammond acknowledged that the meeting was held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act. Notices were published in the Newark Star Ledger and posted on relevant websites with registration and login instructions.

General Updates/Actions

Meeting Minutes

- R. Hammond requested Board members to review and approve the May 29, 2026, Governing Board meeting minutes.
- R. Jain made a motion to approve the May meeting minutes. E. Litten seconded the motion, and, upon roll call, the minutes were approved unanimously.

FY27 Fee Structure Update

M. Koller reported completion of the FY27 fee review process after approximately six months of collaboration with Rutgers Cost-Accounting staff. The revised fee structure includes an average increase of approximately 20%, effective July 1, 2026. She noted that additional fee adjustments may be necessary within the next 6–12 months as iPHD continues efforts to align fees with operational costs.

Discussion

- D. Zeveloff requested a concise summary of approved fee increases for Board members.
- M. Koller acknowledged mixed reactions to the new fees but emphasized the importance of achieving greater cost recovery and long-term sustainability. She noted that the next step involves the implementation of these fees and effective communication with the research community.

Action Item

- M. Koller and staff will distribute a fee summary to Governing Board members.

Consolidated Data Use and Access Policy

M. Koller reviewed revisions intended to consolidate previously approved Governing Board policies, retire the existing Acceptable Use Guidelines, and align policy language with updated bylaws and Data Use Agreement provisions.

Discussion

- M. Koller reported that a clean version of the revised policy had not been distributed prior to the meeting.
- R. Hammond recommended postponing Board action until members had the opportunity to review the finalized document.

Action Items

- Action deferred to the July 2026 meeting.
- Revised policy to be circulated before the next Governing Board meeting.

Application Review

NIH-Funded CMS Virtual Research Data Center (VRDC) Proposal

M. Koller reminded the Board that this was the first proposal under the expedited pathway of an NIH-funded, approved project that came directly to the board. She thanked M. McNally for sharing input on the application right before the meeting. M. Koller reminded the Board that this was the first proposal under the expedited pathway of an NIH-funded, approved project that came directly to the Board. She thanked M. McNally for providing input on the issues raised in the last meeting.

J. Nova provided follow-up information regarding the NIH-funded CMS VRDC project previously deferred by the Governing Board. The proposal would require transmission of a finder file containing identifiers to facilitate linkage between iPHD birth records and CMS data. CMS would perform the matching process and return only de-identified data to researchers. Finder files would be retained for up to 90 days and subsequently destroyed. Researchers would not have access to personally identifiable information. Additionally, California and Massachusetts are included primarily for sensitivity analysis, and discussions are ongoing with these two states regarding the approval for data release.

Discussion

- G. Woods noted no Medicaid concerns, as iPHD is not providing any Medicaid data. He inquired about the next potential steps from both a legal and data perspective.
- R. Hammond requested additional information regarding legal protections, contractual safeguards, and future uses of linked data. She specifically asked for clarification on the definition of the finder file, the specific data that will be retained, and how this data may be used in the future. She noted that the information shared by the PI is policy-based and not legally binding.
- R. Jain asked why finder files are retained for 90 days rather than being immediately destroyed after matching.
- J. Nova explained that the retention period reflects standard CMS operating procedures.
- E. Litten recommended considering exclusion of records for individuals over age 89 to reduce potential re-identification risks. J. Cantor explained that it is possible, but it may decrease the quality of the linkage.

Action Items

- Obtain additional information regarding CMS legal safeguards and contractual requirements.
- Evaluate implications of excluding records for people over the age of 89.
- Proposal deferred pending additional legal and governance review.
- Return the proposal for Governing Board consideration in July.

Cycle 8 Applications

R. Hammond provided a brief overview of the process. She outlined the criteria for releasing data, which include: alignment with one or more of the research priorities, it's grounded in good science, well written, presents a feasible analytics plan, and an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

M. Koller indicated that each application underwent a thorough review by two Research Review Committee (RRC) reviewers. The RRC met on May 28th and recommended the release of data for the eleven applications submitted for Cycle 8. The RRC's recommendations were included in the summary sheet. She noted that the applications were presented as one project per slide in chronological order, allowing each application to be evaluated on its own merits rather than being grouped according to the RRC's recommendations. Additionally, supplementary notes were included where appropriate to provide essential context that may support the decision-making process.

R. Hammond expressed her appreciation for the new approach, indicating that recusals will be recorded on a case-by-case basis rather than applying a blanket recusal. M. Koller noted that the applications do not compete against one another for data release. However, J. Cantor pointed out that they do compete during discussions about fee awards.

1) Application 801: Longitudinal Analysis of Birth Settings and Prenatal Care Utilization in New Jersey

Recusals: E. Litten, R. Jain

Discussion

M. Koller shared RRC's concerns regarding methodological limitations. Board members discussed the balance between scientific rigor and policy relevance.

- K. Noonan emphasized that policy relevance is central to the statutory mission of iPHD and questioned whether methodological limitations alone should prevent approval.
- M. Koller indicated that it may be beneficial to re-educate the RRC on the data release process. If it can be established that releasing the data presents no greater risk than minimal risk, and if the research demonstrates merit while aligning with one of the key research priorities, the application may be eligible to move forward for data release.
- K. Noonan suggested adding CSHP capacity limit as one of the approval criteria.
- J. Cantor stated that methodological limitations in a study may lead to misleading policy conclusions, which should be considered. He suggested adding a non-academic policy-oriented person to the review panel.
- M. Norin questioned whether methodological concerns should be evaluated solely at the data-release stage, noting that research projects typically undergo additional scrutiny through peer review and publication processes. She suggested this could help guide decisions on applications where methodological concerns exist but do not rise to the level of disqualifying the project.
- R. Hammond questioned how the Board should handle studies that may have methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, and whether researchers should be expected to acknowledge those limitations when interpreting results.
- R. Hammond raised concerns about what responsibility the Governing Board has if an approved study ultimately produces findings that are unreliable, misleading, or not useful for informing policy. She emphasized the Governing Board's responsibility to support research that advances the statutory mission of improving health outcomes and informing policy in New Jersey. She suggested exploring whether the

Board could approve data release contingent upon applicants addressing scientific and methodological concerns identified by the RRC, noting that such an approach would provide greater comfort when privacy, security, and feasibility requirements have otherwise been satisfied.

- M. Koller said that these are short applications and we currently don't have revise and resubmit option.
- J. Cantor said that CSHP doesn't have the capacity to review products prior to release. He suggested a potential middle-ground approach for applications with methodological concerns. He proposed allowing applicants to submit a written response to the RRC, which would then be shared with the RRC for their review. With this approach, the Governing Board could delegate the authority to approve applications to the RRC, provided that the applicants satisfactorily address the RRC's concerns. He noted that this approach is common in research funding and grant-review settings, where applicants are frequently asked to respond to reviewer comments before a final decision is made.
- G. Woods expressed concerns about adding conditions or additional review requirements to data release approvals. He noted that researchers are already subject to multiple layers of review through funding, peer-review, and publication processes. He stated that applications should generally be approved unless they present a significant burden on iPHD resources or are likely to produce actively misleading results.
- M. Koller clarified that the RRC's concerns regarding the application reflected methodological weaknesses rather than concerns about misconduct, misuse, or misleading research.
- G. Woods noted that there is a lot of interest in birth centers among policymakers, and the utilization of birth centers remains an important policy issue, despite relatively small sample sizes. J. Cantor emphasized that this is an important context.
- K. Noonan stated that the iPHD statute places substantial importance on generating information that is useful for policy development. She indicated that the review process may have evolved in a direction that prioritizes scientific review over assessment of policy usefulness and public impact.

Motion to approve data release for application 801:

Moved by: K. Noonan.

Seconded by: M. Norin.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

2) **Application 802: Patterns of Hospitalization and Healthcare Utilization among New Jersey Persons Exposed to the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center Disaster who are Enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Registry**

Recusal: E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller summarized reviewer comments indicating that the proposal was highly novel, scientifically rigorous, policy relevant, and likely to provide valuable insight into long-term disaster-related health impacts. It takes advantage of longstanding registry cohort that's been established for the last 20 years, and the findings could provide valuable insights into disaster impacts and inform policy development.

Motion to approve data release for application 802:

Moved by: M. Norin.

Seconded by: R. Jain.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

3) **Application 803: Investigating Multi-Level Risk Factors of Stillbirth in New Jersey**

Recusals: M. Norin, J. Cantor, and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller described the proposal as addressing an important and understudied public health issue focused on stillbirths in New Jersey. Reviewers noted strong policy relevance and potential value for future maternal health initiatives. Findings may generate hypothesis to inform future NIH grant proposals.

Public Comments

- M. Baron noted that fetal death records are maintained separately from birth files and that researchers would not find stillbirth records within the birth file alone.
- J. Nova confirmed that efforts are underway to obtain fetal death data for future linkage.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 803:

Moved by: R. Jain.

Seconded by: K. Noonan.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

4) Application 804: Evaluation of a Multi-Entry Point Addiction Care Model Integrating Emergency Department Peer Navigation, EMS Outreach, and Community-Based Medications for Opioid Use Disorder

Recusals: M. Norin, J. Cantor, and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller and J. Nova described the proposal as the first planned iPHD linkage involving EHR data. The linkage would utilize University Hospital program records and electronic health record data. Reviewers endorsed the proposal as methodologically strong, policy relevant, and scalable. iPHD will use the finder file from the PI to identify individuals that they have consent for in the data sets.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 804:

Moved by: R. Jain.

Seconded by: F. Baker.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

5) Application 805: Pathways to Acute Care – Understanding Emergency and In-Patient Service Use Among Youth Involved in New Jersey’s Children’s System of Care (CSOC)

Recusal: E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller described the project as an important milestone involving Department of Children and Families data and noted strong reviewer support for the study's feasibility, policy relevance, and analytic approach. If approved, this would be the first attempt to transfer data to another state agency. She noted that the DCF datasets had been transferred to iPHD and would soon be made available to researchers.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 805:

Moved by: R. Jain.

Seconded by: K. Noonan.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

6) Application 806: Pathways to Acute Care – Geographic Disparities in Mortality and Hospital-Based Health Care Utilization Among Low-Income Older Adults with Dementia

Recusal: E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller stated that this application received mixed reviews. Reviewers acknowledged the importance of addressing a vulnerable population, including older adults with dementia. However, concerns were raised regarding the project's scientific merit, particularly the proposed ZIP code analysis, which would rely on approximately 15,000 individuals distributed across more than 500 New Jersey ZIP codes, potentially limiting the strength of the analyses. Reviewers also noted that it was unclear how the findings would translate into specific, actionable policy changes. Overall, the panel concluded that while the project addresses an important population, it does not pose significant risk and offers limited potential for meaningful policy impact.

- G. Woods asked if the findings would be misleading. J. Cantor responded that it is possible that the findings may not be meaningful.
- R. Jain raised concerns regarding generalizability and policy implications of findings given the relatively small target population. She emphasized that generalizability is an important consideration because it determines both the broader research value and the extent to which results can inform policy decisions.
- K. Noonan said that the current review criteria do not explicitly address the likelihood that research findings can be used by policymakers. She added that the RRC's committee's role may be more appropriately focused on evaluating the scientific validity of the research and whether findings could be misleading from a policy perspective, while a separate review process could assess broader policy relevance. She recommended further discussion regarding how policy relevance should be incorporated into future review criteria.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 806:

Moved by: M. Norin.

Seconded by: F. Baker.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

7) Application 807: Structural Correlates of Substance-Related EMS Activations, Hospital Discharges, and Mortality in New Jersey: A Spatial Analysis

Recusals: M. Norin, J. Cantor, and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller said that reviewers viewed this proposal favorably overall, particularly its use of a multi-substance framework that extends beyond an opioid-only focus. The emphasis on structural factors influencing treatment availability was considered a strength and was seen as having the potential to generate insights relevant to substance use treatment across communities. At the same time, reviewers noted that the analytic approach was described at a relatively high level and lacked sufficient detail regarding model specifications. Concerns were also raised about the potential for ecological fallacy, a limitation that had been identified in other proposals reviewed by the committee. Despite these methodological concerns, reviewers expressed confidence in the research team's expertise and ability to execute the project successfully, and the results could provide valuable information to guide geographic targeting and allocation of resources. The release of data does not present any risk greater than minimal risk for releasing data.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 807:

Moved by: R. Jain.

Seconded by: K. Noonan.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

8) Application 808: Project Connect Evaluation: Exploring Youth Suicide Readmissions Post-Intervention

Recusals: E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller said that reviewers found the proposal scientifically strong, methodologically sound, and highly relevant to policy and service delivery.

Motion: Approve data release for Application 808:

Moved by: R. Jain.

Seconded by: F. Baker.

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

9) Application 809: Racial and Socioeconomic Disparities in High- vs. Low-Value Health Service Use Among Emergency Medical Services-Transported Patients in New Jersey

Recusals: M. Norin, J. Cantor, and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller noted that this application is a resubmission from an investigator with recognized expertise in supply chain research and has a strong publication record. Reviewers acknowledged the scientific importance of the topic and highlighted the team's substantial computational and analytical expertise. The proposal had been revised including methodological changes and the addition of collaborators such as Abate Mamo, formerly with the New Jersey Department of Health and now affiliated with the New Jersey Hospital Association. The project also has funding support in place. The primary concern articulated by reviewers was the lack of methodological clarity, as well as the absence of a health services researcher on the investigative team. This feedback is consistent with the observations provided during the previous review cycle.

Additionally, the investigator had actively pursued access to the data through multiple avenues after not receiving approval in previous rounds, including direct engagement with DOH, demonstrating sustained commitment to the research. Given the revisions made to the proposal and the investigator's continued efforts to address prior concerns, she suggested that the Board consider whether the lack of a health services research perspective alone should be sufficient grounds to restrict data access.

- R. Jain raised significant concerns regarding the methodological rigor of the proposal, noting that the RRC had explicitly questioned whether the available data could adequately support the proposed analyses. She suggested that these shortcomings may reflect the investigators' limited experience working with complex health datasets. Despite the investigators' technical expertise, she pointed out that critical questions remain regarding the feasibility and validity of the proposed analyses within a healthcare research context.
- K. Kovacs said that after establishing their preliminary results, they plan to pursue external support from AHRQ and the RWJ Foundation. She shared reviewer concerns regarding methodological assumptions and expertise.

- K. Kovacs inquired whether having a health services researcher was a requirement for obtaining the data. R. Hammond clarified that it is not a criterion established by the Governing Board.

Outcome

Discussion concluded before a motion could be entertained due to loss of quorum.

Application deferred to the July 2026 Governing Board meeting.

Summary of Board Actions

Item	Outcome
Consolidated Data Use and Access Policy	Deferred
CMS VRDC Proposal	Deferred
Applications 801-808	Approved for data release
Applications 809–811	Deferred
Fee Award Requests	Deferred

Action Items

- Distribute FY27 fee schedule
- Circulate revised Data Use and Access Policy
- Obtain CMS legal and governance documentation
- Return deferred items for July Board consideration

Adjournment

The meeting concluded following discussion of Application 809. Due to loss of quorum, the remaining applications and fee awards requests were deferred to the July 2026 Governing Board meeting.

R. Hammond indicated that the executive session is not needed. R. Hammond asked if anyone would like to make a public comment. She added that each commentor has a maximum of three minutes to share their comments.

There were no public comments, and the open session of the Governing Board meeting was adjourned at 3: 07 pm.

- R. Jain made a motion to adjourn the open session of the meeting.
- E. Litten offered a second.
- Unanimous vote to adjourn the meeting.