

**Integrated Population Health Data (iPHD) Project
Governing Board (GB) Meeting Minutes
July 24, 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), 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), 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), Janet Currie (Appointed- Human Subjects Research Expert, Professor of Economics and Policy Affairs, Emeritus, Princeton University), and Dennis Zeveloff (Ex officio/Designee for the NJ State Treasurer, Senior Adviser to the Treasurer, New Jersey Department of the Treasury)

Attendees:

Joel Cantor (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Margaret Koller (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Mark McNally (NJ Office of the Attorney General), Jacqueline R D'Alessandro (NJ Office of the Attorney General), Maria Baron (NJ Department of Health), Aras Islam (NJ Department of Health), Kara Unal (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), Michael Toto (NJ Department of Health), Sadaf Shahbaz (NJ Department of Children and Families), Victoria Perez-Zetune (NJ Department of Children and Families), Pamela

Lilleston (NJ Department of Children and Families), Jose Nova (Rutgers Center for State Health Policy), Kate Scotto (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), Joseph Brecht (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 1:31 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

Budget Update

- R. Hammond announced that the iPHD project received an additional \$400,000 in funding in the FY27 state budget. She emphasized the importance of ongoing state investment despite the challenges of a tight budget year. Rutgers and DOH will update the MOA to incorporate the new funding allocation.
- M. Koller Noted that securing this funding is particularly significant given the broader constraints of the state budget and demonstrates strong support for the project.

Meeting Minutes

- R. Hammond requested Board members to review and approve the June 26, 2026, Governing Board meeting minutes.
- J. Currie made a motion to approve the June meeting minutes. R. Jain seconded the motion, and, upon roll call, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Application Review

Cycle 8 Applications

R. Hammond provided a brief overview of the review 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.

1) 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 and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller summarized reviewer comments indicating that the proposal addresses major iPHD research priorities. The research team possesses strong technical, computational, and methodological expertise, and has an established publication record and external research support. However, reviewers raised several concerns including feasibility of conducting planned analyses with available administrative data, the sufficiency of clinical detail in available datasets, whether the findings would meaningfully influence health policy, and a lack of health services research expertise on the team.

She also provided historical background that Dr. Ding submitted a related proposal during Cycle 4, which was not approved. At that time, reviewers expressed concern about lack of health services research expertise. He then attempted to obtain data directly from DOH but was redirected by DOH to continue through the iPHD process. In the revised submission, Dr. Ding included Dr. Mamo, the former NJDOH Center for Health Statistics director and a current NJ Hospital Association researcher. For the current submission, reviewers questioned the ability of the data to support the proposed analyses; however, they did not raise any concerns regarding scientific integrity or the potential for misleading conclusions.

- R. Hammond clarified that the previous attempt to obtain DOH data directly was not viewed as inappropriate. She stated that all resubmissions should come back to iPHD. She added that Dr. Mammo has health services research expertise, which addresses some of the concerns raised by the reviewers.
- G. Woods inquired whether the project would place a significant burden on Rutgers staff. Additionally, if reviewers were concerned about study yielding inconclusive or potentially misleading findings.
- M. Koller responded that reviewers primarily questioned feasibility, not its integrity. They did not characterize the project as "dangerous" or likely to produce invalid conclusions. She also noted that iPHD plans to incorporate "policy impact" and the "risk of release" into the RRC research review criteria.

- J. Currie noted that concerns during last submission were centered on the ability to accurately identify socioeconomic status from administrative datasets. She suggested that this issue highlighted the importance of including health services research expertise in the project.

Motion to approve data release for application 809:

Moved by: R. Jain

Seconded by: G. Woods

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

2) Application 810: Pregnancy Outcomes and Segregation Based on Race and Ethnicity"

Recusal: None

Discussion

M. Koller described the proposal as innovative use of policy dashboards and interactive maps with clearly defined aims. It has the potential to enhance stakeholder engagement and inform policy development. However, the reviewers were unclear how the project will add to existing extensive literature. They noted that the causal inference claims not fully justified and questioned whether the dashboard would be able to deliver all the results outlined in the analysis plan. Despite these methodological concerns, the reviewers identified a low risk associated with releasing the data.

- R. Hammond indicated that the Board has not yet adopted policy relevance as a criterion for review. She noted that this proposal is comparable to other applications that have received approval for data release. The concerns that were raised are manageable and do not justify the withholding of the data.

Motion to approve data release for application 810:

Moved by: M. Norin

Seconded by: R. Jain

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

3) **Application 811: Evaluating the Impact of Racial Aggregation on Identifying Disparities in Healthcare Access and Hospitalization Among Asian Subgroups**

Recusals: M. Norin and E. Litten

Discussion

M. Koller said that reviewers identified major issues with this proposal, including their failure to identify specific Asian subgroups for their proposed analysis, the lack of denominator population data, an inadequately developed analytical plan, and the absence of sample-size and power analyses. There were also concerns about whether statistically valid subgroup analyses could be performed as proposed.

- R. Hammond suggested encouraging the investigators to revise and resubmit in a future cycle.
- J. Currie noted that valid rates cannot be calculated without denominator populations. She added that the methodological concerns are serious and necessitate more than minor revisions.
- G. Woods asked whether reviewer concerns had already been communicated to investigators. Rutgers confirmed that feedback had not yet been provided but will be shared following the Board meeting.

Motion to deny data release for application 811:

Moved by: J. Currie

Seconded by: R. Jain

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

Fee Waiver Awards

Recusals: R. Jain, M. Norin, and E. Litten

- Rachel Hammond reviewed fee-waiver eligibility criteria and noted that only two fee awards are available for this cycle.

- R. Hammond identified four applications (801, 803, 804, and 807) without alternative funding sources. She noted that applications 803 and 804 received higher scores compared to 801 and 807 and had not previously received iPHD funding.
- M. Koller said that selecting applications 803 and 804 for fee awards is consistent with RRC recommendations.

Motion to approve fee awards for application 803 and 804:

Moved by: J. Currie

Seconded by: F. Baker

Public Comments: None

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

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

- M. Koller updated the Board on a previously approved NIH-funded study that aims to link with CMS Medicaid data through the VRDC. Rutgers has investigated privacy and data handling concerns raised by the Board and shared a memo with R. Hammond and M. McNally. The primary unresolved issue relates to the protections in place for identifiers during the 90-day period following the transfer of the Finder File to CMS, before the file is destroyed.
- R. Hammond noted that federal privacy protections are inadequate in preventing the use of shared data for civil, criminal, or administrative enforcement purposes. She expressed her concerns about sharing New Jersey resident data without stronger safeguards in place.
- To address these concerns, M. Koller proposed an alternative strategy that involves obtaining New Jersey Medicaid data directly from the Department of Human Services. This approach would facilitate data sharing exclusively within New Jersey government agencies, thereby eliminating the need for transfer to CMS.
- J. Currie referenced ongoing federal litigation regarding data-sharing issues and recommended a cautious approach to sharing identifiers with the CMS.
- E. Litten said that, regardless of broader political debates, the information provided lacks the necessary safeguards and assurances to approve data release from a privacy standpoint.

Next Steps

- Rutgers will explore a New Jersey Medicaid linkage pathway through DHS rather than CMS and return to the Board with an update.

Data Use and Access Policy

M. Koller provided a comprehensive overview of the new consolidated policy. Major revisions include:

- Integration of all prior Governing Board policies.
- Incorporation of third-party linkage policy.
- Incorporation of expedited review procedures.
- Alignment with bylaws and data-use agreements.

Motion to approve Data Use and Access Policy:

Moved by: E. Litten

Seconded by: R. Jain

Vote: Motion carried unanimously among voting members.

Adjournment

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.

Public Comment

P. Lilleston (NJ Department of Children and Families)

- Thanked the Governing Board for supporting DCF research projects and requested additional clarification regarding fee waiver prioritization criteria. Additionally, she suggested considering whether agencies contributing data to iPHD should receive priority for fee awards.
- R. Hammond reviewed current fee-waiver criteria and indicated that her suggestion, along with a few other factors such as Rutgers' capacity and data release risks, would be added for discussion at the next Board meeting.

The Governing Board meeting was adjourned at 2:27 pm.

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

Action Items:

1. Provide detailed reviewer feedback to all applicants.
2. Pursue alternative NJ Medicaid linkage strategy for the NIH-funded project and engage both researchers and Medicaid leadership regarding feasibility.
3. Develop additional guidance for the Research Review Committee to better distinguish methodological concerns from actual risk associated with data release decisions.
4. Continue reviewing fee waiver criteria, including consideration of whether agencies contributing data to iPHD should receive additional priority.