NHS
Greater Glasgow
and Clyde

WEST OF SCOTLAND
Safe Haven
FAQ NOVEMBER 2023

APPLICATIONS TO THE SAFE HAVEN

I am thinking about doing a project. Will I get access to your Safe Haven datasets?

Safe Haven projects are assessed and approved on a case-by-case basis. Until we know more about the research question and the characteristics of the data you may require, we cannot offer guarantees that we can grant access. We may not hold the NHS data you need, or there may be ethical barriers to approving your project. Speak to the Safe Haven team early to discuss your needs.

What is the application process?

Applicants must discuss their data requirements with the Safe Haven before any application. We will help your prepare your documents, draft your cohort, and identify the data you may need. We will need information about how you will fund your project, and any existing ethical approvals. Applications then pass through an approvals process and, if successful, your project is passed to a Data Manager so the process of extracting the data you need can begin.

How are new Safe Haven projects approved?

Projects can be approved by our internal Safe Haven route called the Local Privacy Advisory Committee or, less commonly, by the Public Benefit and Privacy Panel.

Do you work with commercial partners?

Yes we do. Industry research partners are welcome to discuss their data requirements with the Safe Haven. Our governance and security means we have mechanisms in place to help commercial ventures access non-identifiable extracts of NHS patient within our Secure Data Environment, to facilitate research that will benefit NHS services and new treatments.

Can students use the Safe Haven service?

Students may apply to access the Safe Haven, subject to appropriate academic supervision and the proper approvals.

I want to run a clinical trial, can the Safe Haven help me find patients?

Yes, we can help create cohort searches and provide aggregate number reports for patients that we think are living in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area. The Safe Haven will never share identifiers about these patients though.

What happens after my project has been approved?

Once approved, you will be introduced to a Safe Haven Data Manager, and we will work with you to design your cohort specifications. We will then link any data you bring to these patients, anonymise the resulting data extracts, and grant access to our analytics platform where you can conduct your statistical work. You can output charts and tables for your publications or reports, provided they do not carry any risk of re-identifying patients.

How do I contact the Safe Haven?

See the [Safe Haven contact page](#) – email is preferred, or you can call us to discuss a project.

ABOUT SAFE HAVEN DATASETS

What data do you have available?

See our [Glasgow Safe Haven Dataset Catalogue](#). In short, we have large datasets of NHS encounters in secondary care, demographics and death data for Glasgow populations, prescribing information dating back many years, and a large number of more specialised, thematic datasets drawn from various NHS and patient research sources.

How fresh is the data?

It depends. If you have a particular requirement for data covering a particular date range, do ask us for more information about a dataset.

Can I share my NHS dataset on the Safe Haven platform?

The Safe Haven can bring your patient datasets for linkage to other NHS data, and facilitate re-use, provided they fit our scope, and are accompanied with appropriate supporting documentation and dictionaries.

Have patients consented to the usage of their personal health data?

Most of the Safe Haven datasets represent unconsented, patient data derived from NHS sources. Legislative and governance provisions exist for the re-use of this data under very specific, controlled circumstances for the purposes of research to benefit the public. Given the source of this data, very strict regulations exist to make sure the data is used respectfully and kept private.

Do I need to get Caldicott approval for the datasets I require?

Usually not, although very large data requests or new data processes may be referred to the Caldicott Guardian for review and advice.

How is the Safe Haven data kept secure?

Safe Haven data is stored securely according to standard NHS principles. No identifiable patient information is allowed to be exported from the secure platform. All researchers are subject to legal, governance and ethical controls. Data extracts to the Robertson Centre for Biostatistics platform are processed and secured to specialised ISO-accredited standards.

Can't I get a copy of the Safe Haven data and use it how I want?

No.

Do I need ethical approval before accessing Safe Haven data?

Yes, and approval by our Local Privacy and Advisory Committee can act as this ethical approval for your project.

Do you keep my research data forever?

Project files, cohort queries and extracted data are archived at the end of a project, but are not stored forever. If you have special requirements to archive your project data beyond the normal periods expected for academic research, please discuss this with Safe Haven team.

RUNNING A SAFE HAVEN PROJECT

How do you build cohorts for my Safe Haven project?

Each project will usually have what Safe Haven calls a 'cohort'. Your cohort will be composed of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for your data linkage. A data analyst will build your cohort with you at the start of your project.

How long does it take to get access to Safe Haven data?

It depends. Simple feasibility reports may take a few days, whereas complex data builds with multiple extracts may take many weeks.

Can I put Safe Haven data on my own analytics platform?

No.

Is the Safe Haven service free?

No, we recover costs for hosting and extracting data for projects.

Can I link datasets from my own studies?

Yes, but the Safe Haven will anonymise fields first, removing identifier columns, and then linking between datasets based on a consistent Safe Haven ID that replaces the CHI.

Will Safe Haven analysts help me do my study?

Yes, new extracts get support for a limited period from Safe Haven analysts. Ongoing support for large projects, or repeated data changes and refreshes, will incur fees at the standard Safe Haven rates.

What applications are available on the Safe Haven analytical platform?

R and others, plus you can request installs of specific software

What can I do when I finish my Safe Haven project analysis?

You've received your data extracts, accessed the analytics platform and produced your results tables. You can now export the results from the platform. Safe Haven will check your outputs for any re-identification risks, and you can then use these outputs in reports and publications.

Can I extend the access period for my Safe Haven project?

Maybe, if there is a justification and, in certain cases, you are prepared to pay a renewal fee to meet the cost of continued access and support.

Why did you reject my Safe Haven data output?

It contained data that carried a high re-identification risk, and failed the usual standards for Statistical Disclosure Controls.

How do I amend people with access rights to an existing Safe Haven project?

Contact the Safe Haven, make a Safe Haven Project Amendment and we will liaise with the Robertson Centre for Biostatistics to update any folder permissions.