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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VA Privacy Service

Privacy in Action Speaker Series Event Resource Guide

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Privacy Service, thank you for participating in the *Privacy in Action* Speaker Series event, “Privacy Considerations in the Digital Age”. We hope you found the information presented by our panelists insightful and meaningful to your daily work. Below is a recap of the main topics discussed today with links to additional information.

Data Privacy vs. Data Security

Data security is the process of protecting data such as Veterans’ Personal Health Information (PHI) across all applications and platforms. The VA implements the following tools and procedures to ensure the security of Veteran and Employee data:

- [E-RISK Portal](#)
 - Portal for any VA employee to submit enterprise risk concerns.
 - Once submitted, employees will receive follow-up communication from the Risk Management Directorate (RMD) and be informed on how their observed risk is being addressed.
- Risk Management Framework (RMF)
 - Disciplined and structured process that combines information security/risk management activities into the system development life cycle.
- Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) Tools
 - Management of the agency’s overall governance, enterprise risk management, and compliance with regulations.
- Continuous Diagnostic and Mitigation (CDM)
 - VA has leveraged the DHS CDM program to implement additional technologies and enhance existing capabilities. This will improve security posture by ensuring systems connected to VA infrastructure are compliant with security policies. It will improve system performance and reliability by ensuring all systems meet VA standards, all software is authorized on endpoints.

Data privacy is the proper handling of sensitive and personally identifiable information. It covers providing proper notice of information use, stakeholder consent, and compliance with regulations. VA Administers programs in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, E-Government Act of 2002, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and NIST 800-53, Revision 4, Security and Privacy Controls for Information Systems and Organizations. The VA has implemented the following initiatives to enhance the privacy of Veterans and employees:



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- Social Security Number (SSN) Reduction
 - VA's SSN Reduction Initiative is an ongoing program, initiated by OMB Memorandum 07-16.
 - The *Social Security Number Reduction (SSNR) Usage Tool* was created to reduce or eliminate SSN usage in the VA SSN inventory database. SSNR captures all of the data necessary for VA to adequately assess the use of SSNs throughout the organization, by creating a database of the reported SSN occurrences.
 - Implemented the Integrated Control Number (ICN) which is a unique identifier for Veterans, dependents, and beneficiaries. It serves as an alternative to using SSN's.
- PO Professionalization Training Program (POPT)
 - Through training and learning opportunities on a variety of privacy topics, POPT builds knowledge, facilitates learning and development, and promotes cohesion in privacy practices across VA.
 - VA POPT, is designed to support Privacy Officers by defining knowledge, skills, and abilities required to implement and ensure local compliance with VA privacy policies and procedures.
 - The POPT program standardizes the knowledge base and training curriculum that is critical to all VA Privacy Officers. Trainings include, Privacy Officer Role, PTA/PIA Processing and Privacy Controls

The Impacts of New Technology

New technologies are rapidly changing the amount of information we have available to us. In the healthcare space, the deployment of Electronic Health Records (EHR) has brought many efficiencies to both patients and doctors. Some efficiencies include faster transfer of patient information between health care providers, accurately diagnosing medical conditions, and a reduction of prescription errors. In general, new technologies impact people, processes, and security.

- **People:** Increased training tempo in response to new technology as well as new threats to privacy and security.
- **Processes:** VA ensures that processes address security and privacy at the enterprise level and have instituted the ECSP to manage cybersecurity processes.
- **Security:** VA has instituted two-factor authentication and enhanced data encryption to keep information private and secure.



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How You Can Protect Sensitive Information at VA

- Understand how to employ “minimum necessary” and “need to know” in daily work-life.
- Use encryption when sending sensitive information.
- Maintain a clean desk.
- Keep sensitive information locked and stored. Shred and securely dispose of sensitive information when not used.
- Before sharing personally identifiable information, ask why it is needed.
- Be wary of suspicious emails.
- Report privacy incidents immediately.

More Information

Articles

- **International Data Privacy Day 2020**
 - <https://staysafeonline.org/data-privacy-day/>

Videos

- **VA Privacy Service Promo Video**
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLT-HOUwbh4>
- **Hearing on: Protecting Consumer Privacy in the Era of Big Data**
 - <https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/hearing-on-protecting-consumer-privacy-in-the-era-of-big-data>
- **Protecting Privacy with MATH**
 - <https://www.census.gov/library/video/2019/protecting-privacy.html>
- **A conversation with the CIA’s privacy and civil liberties officer: Balancing transparency and secrecy in a digital age**
 - <https://www.brookings.edu/events/a-conversation-with-the-cias-privacy-and-civil-liberties-officer-balancing-transparency-and-secrecy-in-a-digital-age/>
- **Ethics In The Digital Age: Protect Others' Data As You Would Your Own**
 - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffthomson/2019/07/01/ethics-in-the-digital-age-protect-others-data-as-you-would-your-own/#44edd70854e1>



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