National Diabetes Audit 2017-18
England, Wales and the Isle of Man
Data Collection Lessons Learned

The National Diabetes Audit (NDA) provides a comprehensive view of diabetes care in England and Wales and measures the effectiveness of diabetes healthcare against NICE Clinical Guidelines and NICE Quality Standards. The 2017-18 NDA collected data on approx. 3.2 million people for the audit period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Throughout August and September 2018, the NDA team undertook a listening exercise to ascertain the experiences of a range of data submitters, specifically from Specialist Diabetic Services and clinics, and asked the following three questions:

- What did we do well?
- What didn’t go well?
- What could we do better for the 2018-19 NDA data collection?

We received responses from a number of users, including those who regularly submit NDA data successfully, and some who seemingly experience various different problems. The focus was on the data submission process itself, the guidance / assistance the NDA team provided, and the communications sent out to users.

What did we do well?

1. The fact that all the NDA Core data required can be collected on one spreadsheet.
2. Easy automated conversion of a single Excel spreadsheet into the required .csv files ready for upload removes a lot of manual burden on submitters.
3. Communications from NDA team were regular and clear (although we also note that a small number of responses contradicted this – we will take steps to ensure that all NDA users receive consistent and clear messaging, and continue to promote the message that the most up to date information will always be available on the NDA website and the Clinical Audit Platform homepage).
4. Online guidance / FAQ / specification documentation was helpful, especially step-by-step guides.
5. Spreadsheet cells change colour if missing or incorrect data entered.
6. Data quality tab alerts users to errors before conversion to csv – removes the need to manually check 1000’s of rows of data.

What didn’t go well?

The Data Landing platform allowed data of poor & inconsistent quality to be submitted, including data with obvious errors.

What can we do better?

- Improve data quality checks at point of submission rather than at point of csv file creation.
- In-built validation in data submission platform.
- Automated rejection of errors / prevention of upload of incorrectly formatted data (with clear and relevant error messages).

What steps are we taking?

We are acutely aware that the data submission platform (Data Landing) that has been used by the NDA for the past couple of years requires updating, and some improvements have already been made for future collections. In 2016-17, all NDA records – including primary care, specialist services and secondary care – came to us through Data Landing. In 2017-18, however, we moved primary care submissions into the automated ‘GPES’ (General Practice Extraction Service) platform. This greatly reduced the burden on the 7,200+ practices that submit data to the NDA.

The next phase of planned improvements will be to move secondary care and specialist service submissions into a full Clinical Audit Platform (CAP) product and away from Data Landing – we’ve been working towards this happening in the autumn of this year. This will introduce a User Interface (UI) collection method, consistent with the method used in the Diabetic Footcare (NDFA), Pregnancy in Diabetes (NPID) and other audits that users may be familiar with.

Most of the 100 or so Trusts that submit to the NDA are comfortable with the current single spreadsheet template (which automatically converts to .csv file) for the upload method and have successfully employed this to submit data to the NDA in the past few years – therefore this will remain available, although we will now be able to build in many more new validation methods into CAP itself to ensure the correct data gets through (e.g. date fields have to contain dates, numerical fields have to contain numbers, etc.). Following feedback received, much clearer warning / failure messages will also be available.

Users will have the choice to use either the UI, or the bulk upload facility, or both. Additionally, we will no longer need to have finite submission windows as CAP is available all year round, a ‘cut off’ date will be introduced – users will therefore be able to input NDA data whenever it suits them locally. The ability to input individual test results (e.g. blood pressure, HbA1c, etc.) at the time of the test may make things much simpler for some centres.

We will continue to provide additional support to data submitters by producing templates, spreadsheets, and extensive guidance documents, etc. We are constantly looking for ways to improve the NDA and whilst the challenges faced by what is one of the biggest ongoing clinical audits in the world are many and varied, we will continue to listen to users’ feedback and make beneficial changes wherever and whenever we can.