West Virginia Executive Branch
Privacy Tip

Accuracy of PII

Many people assume that government records are highly accurate. Unfortunately, databases of information are sometimes inaccurate, and it's important to question all assumptions of accuracy. Consider the many reasons why personally identifiable information (PII) may not be accurate:

- The PII may have been incorrect when it was collected. For example, a patient telling a nurse about medications may have misremembered the name of a drug or the prescribed dosage.
- The PII may have been captured incorrectly, such as when a data entry specialist could not distinguish between a "1" and a "7" on a consumer-completed form. Names and numbers are also often transposed.
- The PII may have become out-of-date over time, such as when people change addresses or phone numbers, or when they get married or divorced.
- The PII may have been incorrectly associated, such as when one person's PII is associated with another person who has the same name. Similarly, a person's Social Security number may easily become associated with the person's spouse, if they have joint accounts or shared benefits plans.

Always consider the accuracy of PII that you are using. If it is important that the PII be accurate and current, you may want to take steps to verify the accuracy. For example, if medical decisions are going to be made, you might want to ask a person who is unsure about his meds to call you back with his prescription bottles in hand, so that you can confirm the drug name and dosage for the file. Asking "let me verify those numbers" is also a good way to double-check Social Security numbers, account numbers, driver's license numbers, etc.

The West Virginia Privacy Policy: Individual Rights requires us to take reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of the PII we collect, use and disclose. Given the possible consequences for our citizens if PII is not accurate, we must do our best to ensure the accuracy of the information we use, especially for critical processes.

If you have any concerns about the accuracy of the PII you're using, please contact your Privacy Officer to discuss ways to improve the accuracy and respect individual rights.

Note: Your agency/bureau/department/division may have specific requirements – always check your policies and procedures. If you have questions, contact your Privacy Officer.