

Instructions to Link Geographic-based Contextual Variables to NHATS-CMS Linked Files August 2023

NHATS has developed a process for researchers to apply to link geographic-based contextual data to NHATS-CMS linked files. This option may be useful for researchers who wish to incorporate area-based information (e.g. an Area-Level Deprivation Measures or other policy-relevant measures available for a geographic area) into analyses that also use NHATS-CMS linked files.

This guidance is for researchers interested in linking a variable containing contextual information at the state, county, tract or zip code level. Direct linkage of geographic indicators to NHATS-CMS Linked Files other than through the procedures below is not permitted.

Step 1. Complete your NHATS-CMS Linked Files application. Describe and justify the need for the contextual measure that you plan to link in your application.

Step 2. Apply to use the NHATS Restricted Data Repository (https://nhats.org/researcher/data-access/sensitive-data-files?id=restricted_data_files). Describe in your application the file that you plan to bring into the Repository. *Note: If the contextual variable is at the Block Group level, fill out the “Addendum for Applying for NHATS and NSOC Restricted Block Group Files” and follow disclosure instructions in that document in place of Steps 3-8.*

Step 3. Once you have approval to use the Repository, upload the file you have created with the geographic-based contextual data and link it to the appropriate restricted geographic file.

Step 4. Perform disclosure review on the contextual variable(s) to ensure that no value of the new variable(s) uniquely identifies an NHATS geographic area. For each level of geography at which the linked contextual variables are linked/measured (e.g., state, county, tract, zip code), create a table that shows the count of the number of geographic units at each level of the contextual variable. We require a minimum cell size of 11 units (e.g. county, tract, zip code) for geographic variables linked at areas below state and a minimum cell size of 3 states for geographic variables linked at the state level.

Step 5. Create a file that contains only the contextual variable(s) that you have created, year or round (if applicable), and spid (and opid, if applicable).

Step 6. Request review of the table you have created for disclosure review and the file you wish to take out of the NHATS Restricted Data Repository.

Step 7. After you have received approval to access NHATS-CMS linked files in the Health and Aging Data (HaAD) enclave, request to move the file with your contextual measure from the NHATS Restricted Data Repository to the HaAD enclave.

Step 8. NHATS Staff will move the file for you from the NHATS Restricted Data Repository to the HaAD enclave.

Step 9. Follow all rules about removing tables from the HaAD enclave.