Reviewer's report

Title: Data linkage infrastructure for cross-jurisdictional health-related research in Australia.

Version: 2 Date: 18 October 2012

Reviewer: kerina jones

Reviewer's report:

Review of Data linkage infrastructure in Australia

Data linkage infrastructure for cross-jurisdictional health-related research in Australia

The article describes the cross-jurisdictional data linkage infrastructure established by the Centre for Data Linkage in Australia, to enable linkage of inter-state/inter-territory and national datasets. This is an important development in enabling data linkage research.

Minor compulsory revisions

1. The manuscript has been submitted as a Correspondence article, and it has been set out as Background, Methods, Results and Discussion. With all due respect, my view is that the way the information has been organised into these sections doesn’t do justice to the work that has been done, and doesn’t enable the reader to get the best information they can from the work.

Here are some examples:

1a) The sections of the Abstract don’t seem to contain the sort of information one would expect. It begins by stating that ‘The Centre for Data Linkage (CDL) has established a secure data linkage facility to enable national and cross-jurisdictional health-related research in Australia’, whereas this is the conclusion, as the paper sets out to describe ‘the development of the processes and methodology required to create cross-jurisdictional research infrastructure and enable aggregation of State and Territory linkages.’

1b) Strengths and weaknesses of the various aspects of the model would be better placed in the Results & Discussion section as part of putting the work into context, discussing future work and leading towards conclusions.

1c) Similarly for the outcomes of the audit.

1d) There doesn’t appear to be a mention of the software evaluation before the Results & Discussion. The packages had been shortlisted and then further work was done during the proof of concept project. So it should be mentioned in the Background as informing the development at its outset, and the aspects of the evaluation that form part of this work should be described in the Methods, with
the results in the Results.

1e) Similarly, the proof of concept project should be described in the Methods. The authors should make more of the results of the proof of concept project, as these are very important. These should be included in the Results section of the Abstract.

2. The CDL operational model is built on those of WADLS and CHeReL and the authors state that they used wide and open consultation. This piece of work is important and some additional information on the stakeholder consultation would be useful e.g. were there any barriers to acceptance of cross-jurisdictional linkage and how were these overcome, and how were the outcomes from the consultation fed into the model development? Also were any alternative models considered? Some further information on this would be useful to understand reasons for the choice made.

3. In the governance section of the Methods it would be useful to have an explanation the function of the various committees and how they work together to create the governance model.

This is an important piece of work concerning an impressive achievement to enable data linkage between states/territories and nationwide in Australia.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

In November 2010, I was commissioned by the Population Health Research Network to act as a consultant on the extension of the data linkage infrastructure in Australia, and I received payment for this 5-days of work. But this was different to the work described in the manuscript and it was with the PHRN not the CDL. The work I was concerned with was on state/territory level linkage i.e. within the states/territories, whereas this is about cross-jurisdictional data linkage. I have not had any direct input into the work of the Centre for Data Linkage.