Academic Research Transition to HDPBC: Q&A Summary

This document provides a summary of questions related to Academic Research Transition asked during the optional Q&A sessions as well as monthly open house sessions.

Our goal is to ensure clarity, transparency, and support for all research teams during this process.

Transition specific

Q: What should I do if my project in HDPBC feels slower compared to PopData?
A: Performance differences may arise from how data is stored and queried. PopData uses **Flat ASCII files**, whereas HDPBC relies on a **database-driven environment**. These two approaches have distinct characteristics, and performance can vary depending on query optimization and resource allocation.

If you experience slow queries, there are multiple options available to help resolve any issues. These include "How-To" documentation that outlines best practices for better query performance, technical services to assist with improving code efficiency as well as requesting additional computing resources, such as increased RAM, if necessary. Please contact hdpbctransitionsupport@popdata.bc.ca for these requests or any additional questions.

Q: Does this transition apply only to projects using health data?
A: The transition applies to all projects that include health data sets including vital event data, even if they also use other datasets such as ICBC data.

Q: Will PopData continue to support researchers?
A: Yes. PopData will continue to provide Front counter services and support during this transition. HDPBC and PopData team work closely with researchers to support the transition.

Q: Will all interim data tables and codes be transferred to the new platform (TAE-BC)?
A: Yes, all interim data tables and any saved codes can be transferred to TAE-BC. Research team will be responsible for identifying these files. Support will be provided to support the move of these files.

Q: Will my analytical cohort be transferred and available for me to run my models?
A: Yes, all data in the user/working folders in SRE will be transitioned as is and be available in TAE-BC to continue your work.

Q: How will the transition to HDPBC impact project approvals?
A: *For existing projects transitioning from SRE to TAE-BC*: There are no impacts as these are approved projects changing environments.

For New DAR requests: Adjudication and approvals depend on the type of request and datasets included. HDPBC has streamlined the approvals process with setting up Health Data Council that adjudicates request on monthly basis. Health Data Council consists of membership from ALL Health organizations. DARs with multi-org datasets now will be adjudicated by the council without having to reach out to individual Health organizations if applicable for approval. Efforts are underway to reduce backlogs and improve transparency so users can track application status.

Once data access is approved, HDPBC can enable access to data on average in 3-5 days

Q: Will researchers have overlapping access to SRE and TAE-BC during the transition?
A: Yes, if you currently have SRE access, it will continue until your SRE expiry date. We will work to plan as much of an overlap as possible. Researchers can extend access to SRE until March 31, 2027 for an additional fee. However, after the transition, any work in SRE will not be transferred to TAE-BC after the transition cut-off is complete. We encourage users to start new work in TAE after transition and only treat SRE as a back-up.

Q: How can stress for trainees during the transition be alleviated?
A: Trainees or students can continue to submit data access request via a NEW student DAR request to get access to data via HDPBC. They can also continue to submit new requests for a nested student DAR (students/trainees requesting access to existing projects in SRE as a team member). Please NOTE that deadline to submit nested Student DAR requests for existing projects is Mar 2026. Any requests after Mar 2026 will only be able accepted post transition of the project to HDPBC.

Additionally, training and support resources will be essential to ease the transition. Guidance on new workflows, technical assistance, and clear communication about timelines will be provided to support trainees during the transition.

Q: What are the hardware and performance specifications of the new platform?
A: The default compute allocation includes a CPU-based VM with 4 vCPUs (Intel® Xeon® Platinum 8272CL @ 2.60 GHz) and 16 GB of RAM, which is covered under the base project fee. Optional upgrades to 32 GB or 64 GB RAM are available for an additional cost, and each upgrade also increases the number of allocated CPU cores proportionally. GPUs are not currently supported but are planned for future implementation.

Q: How will graduate students be supported during the transition?
A: There is recognition that the transition may impact timelines for trainees. Overlap periods in the SRE and TAE-BC, clear communication of key dates, and technical support are available to help students complete their work on time.

Q: Are REBs okay with using refreshed data without amendments?
A: Projects are allowed to use refreshed data for their approved core datasets without requiring amendments. This is current practice in SRE as well.

Q: Will technical documentation be provided to help researchers adapt workflows?
A: Yes, technical documentation and best practices are available to guide researchers in transitioning from flat file structures to relational databases, including examples for SAS and other tools.

Q: Who is the main point of contact for transition-related questions?
A: hdpbctransitionsupport@popdata.bc.ca is the primary way to contact for any transition related questions.

Q: Will there be dedicated technical support available for projects during the transition to HDPBC?
A: Yes, technical support will be available for projects transitioning to HDPBC.

Q: Our current data retention approval with the BC Ministry of Health is valid until September 30, 2028. Will this remain unchanged after transition to TAE-BC? And will it affect the timing or process of our transition in any way?
A: Transition to TAE-BC does NOT impact existing approval/ retention dates and policy for retention.

Q: We get a data extract from PopData in flat files. After derivation we have analytical dataset, can this be reused? How can we still use our analytical dataset in flat files to link to administrative data not transferred? Will analytical datasets be transferred in their current format so they can be used directly in R?
A: Analytical dataset will be transitioned to a drive being created with Read/Write (RW) access and project

teams can continue their work with these analytical datasets in TAE-BC. Additionally, mapping tables will be provided to link these analytical datasets to administrative datasets in the database. The use of these datasets directly in R will depend on the type of analytical datasets and vary on a project by project basis.

Access & Services

Q: Will individuals who currently have data access through SRE continue to have access in TAE-BC?
A: Yes. During the transition period users can continue working in SRE until the transition is complete and for the time already paid. No additional training is required as part of transition to TAE-BC, and self-service resources will be available to support users.

Q: Are there any blackout periods or delays during certain times of the year?
A: There are no blackout periods for service delivery, including file exports, publication reviews, or intake with services available during business hours. TAE-BC uses human reviews with current SLA of 3–5 days depending on output type and # of files per request.

Q: Are there limits on the number of people who can access data for a project?
A: No. There are currently no limits on the number of users who can access data for an individual project.

Q: Are there any changes to the screening process for publication review?
A: No changes are planned to current policies regarding publication review timelines.

Q: What is the current policy on data export formats? Will it be possible to export .docx and .xlsx files from the new platform?
A: .csv, .txt, .jpeg & .png are currently supported data export formats. We are continuously working on expanding these formats and while some formats like .docx, .pdf or .xlsx are not currently supported, they will be in near future.

Q: How will human review of file export requests affect timelines?
A: Human review typically takes 3–5 business days, depending on the request and # of files. Automatic approval systems like those in SRE are not currently planned due to security considerations and data contributor requirements.

Q: Is participant re-consent required for the platform transition?
A: No, REB's has confirmed that participants do not need to re-consent for the move. Please visit healthdataplatformbc.ca website for statement from REBs.

Q: Is there flexibility to delay transition?
A: Many researchers have expressed concerns that the timelines are challenging. We're working diligently to gather the answers needed so we can achieve this date together.

Q: How will amendments be submitted in HDPBC?
A: PopData will continue to provide Front counter services and researchers can follow existing processes to submit amendments to their projects for HDPBC as well

Q: Will all new project submissions from here on be initiated in the TAE?
A: Yes. All new Health research projects are now part of HDPBC program and getting data access via TAE-BC since Aug 2025.

Fees/Cost

Q: What are the costs associated with TAE-BC?
A: Costs remain consistent with current pricing—approximately $12,600 for base project fees. Student cost waivers still apply. Also, there is no additional cost for transitioning from SRE to TAE-BC, and no variable computing costs based on usage or cost to add/remove users

Q: I also had a question regarding fees and invoicing following the transition to HDPBC. Up to now, I have been paying for SRE access in 3-month increments while the transition is underway. Could you please clarify how fees and invoicing will work moving forward, and whether the structure and costs for TAE-BC access are expected to remain similar?
A: Costs remain consistent with current pricing—approximately $12,600 for base project fees. All info is available on the HDPBC website. Fees already paid for projects transitioning will still apply without any additional costs for transition.

Data

Q: Will HDPBC have the same variables I currently have approval and access to in SRE?
A: Yes. No amendments are required for projects that have received approvals to access these in TAE-BC.

Q: Will data be transitioned as-is from SRE to TAE?
A: Health data provisioned in SRE are available in TAE database, there are some differences in data structure but most of it is the same. If TAE doesn't have the dataset to provision, the data will be transferred from SRE. Interim data tables can be transferred to TAE as part of the transition process. For health data, users must update queries to read the new data structure. User data remain as-is in the transition. If a data is not a regular dataset in the HDPBC, the data is transitioned as-is from SRE, as long as they are approved.

Q: What is the status of data agreements for IRCC, WorkSafeBC, CANUE, MECC, and income band datasets?
A: Discussions are underway to include MECC and IRCC data in core holdings in early 2026. WorksafeBC, CANUE, HELP income band, and longitudinal aging datasets are currently supported as Bring Your Own Data Service while we work to include them in our regular holdings.

Q: How will data refreshes be managed, and will this affect ongoing projects?
A: Core datasets will be automatically refreshed for all projects. Refreshes will be communicated to project teams, and queries can be written to limit date ranges to maintain consistency in analysis. For externally managed project specific datasets, support will be provided to complete refreshes as directed by the research team.

Q: What is the rationale for transitioning academic projects to TAE-BC?
A: The transition is designed to enhance infrastructure, improve scalability, and provide a secure and efficient environment for research. For information, please visit https://healthdataplatformbc.ca/research-transition-hdpbc.

Q: Is there a template for data sharing agreements when bringing external datasets to TAE-BC?
A: Yes, templates are available and can be shared upon request to facilitate data sharing agreements.

Q: Could you clarify the dataset update frequency in TAE-BC?
A: It varies based on the dataset. The data assets page on HDPBC website can tell you what is updated and when.

Q: Our project requires periodic updates to the study cohort. Previously, we would submit updated PHNs to PopData, and they would extract and link the corresponding administrative data. After transition to TAE-BC (HDP), how will this process work?

A: Projects can update cohorts with new PHNs and link to the administrative data in TAE-BC on their own. The administrative data is refreshed on a regular basis and projects will automatically receive refreshed data for the approved datasets for their project.

Tools

Q: What is the timeline for STATA availability, and will this impact transition? What statistical and GIS tools will TAE-BC support?

A: Timelines for STATA or any other tools availability are still being finalized. We are working to make identified tools or transition services available as soon as possible to meet transition timelines as well as develop a strategic approach to ensure scalability and sustainability

Q: What software can be used to access relational databases?

A: The relational database is SQL-backed, and users can work with R, Python, or SAS. Additional packages can be leveraged.

Q: Will SQL be required, and what support is available for users unfamiliar with it?

A: The database is SQL-based, which may require learning new skills. Support from HDPBC technicians and best practices will be provided. Automated scripts and R packages (e.g., dbplyr) can help convert workflows to SQL for better performance.

Q: How often will R or RStudio be updated on the new platform?

A: Updates for R and RStudio will follow standard maintenance schedules. Additional packages can be requested as needed.

Q: Can SAS access the SQL server?

A: Yes, SAS can connect to the SQL-backed database, allowing integration with existing workflows.

Q: Will researchers need to rewrite existing code for SQL or SAS workflows?

A: Existing workflows may require adjustments, and tools and guidance will be provided to support the transition. Packages like dbplyr can help integrate SQL operations into R workflows.

Q: Will I be able to install additional R or Python packages?

A: Yes. You will be able to install packages just as you would in a local environment. TAE-BC uses Nexus as a proxy for PyPI for Python packages, conda-forge for Anaconda workflows, and r-CRAN for official R packages. If a package or repository is not available through these defaults, it can be added upon request as long as it is publicly accessible (e.g., on GitHub) and passes review.

Q: Is there an AI tool (like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) available inside TAE-BC?

A: No. Currently there are no AI tools available inside the environment. However, users can use these tools outside the environment to write code and then submit a file in to bring the code inside TAE-BC.

Q: Are these guides you described (efficient use of the TAE-BC, etc.) only available in the TAE-BC? Or can they be accessed before my team has access to the TAE-BC?

A: These guides are only accessible inside TAE-BC.