Healthix

Healthix Data Helps Locate Missing Persons Due to COVID-19

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City, fear and turmoil abounded. Among the challenges, the frustration many experienced in finding missing loved ones, particularly given the quarantine and self-isolation orders that curtailed routine, in-person checkups on our most vulnerable residents.

With more than 70 hospitals in New York City, finding missing friends and relatives can be difficult. But with the assistance of hospital admission and discharge data from two New York City HIEs, Healthix and the Bronx RHIO, city officials were able to locate many individuals.
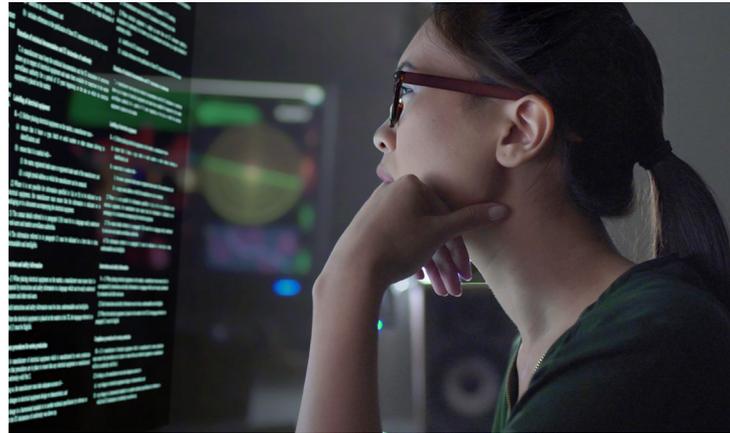
In mid-April 2020, New York activated their Unified Victim Identification System (UVIS) to capture missing persons reports. This system allowed New Yorkers to file reports, via 311 or online. City officials tapped into the Healthix and Bronx RHIO portals for additional data such as next of kin, patient demographic information and real-time hospital admission/discharge alerts.

Tamer Hadi, Senior Director of Technology, Data and Communications for the Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response (OEPR) with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, explained the process:

"Health department staff scanned the Healthix and Bronx RHIO portals for hospital encounter data of those reported missing. When a match was found, they entered notes in UVIS for police handling."

Once detectives verified the location and status of missing persons, they contacted family members. HIE data helped find 62 missing persons in hospitals and identify 38 who were expired.

The HIEs will continue to work with the Health Department and Office of Chief Medical Examiner to automate access to HIE data for future family reunification efforts, should they be needed.

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