



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**OFFICE FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS**

## HIPAA Helps Caregiving Connections

**If you experience a substance use disorder, including opioid abuse, or a mental health crisis, HIPAA helps your doctors, nurses, and social workers to reconnect you with family, friends, and caregivers**

If something has happened to you—an accident, injury, or overdose—HIPAA allows the EMTs, doctors, nurses, and social workers who help you, by notifying family, friends, or other caregivers about your location and general condition. First, your health care providers will determine whether you are able to agree to share this information or may have a personal representative to contact. If you are not able to make decisions or communicate due to incapacity (for example, if, following an opioid overdose, you are unconscious, delirious, or sedated), then your providers may use their professional judgment to determine that sharing certain information about your health condition is in your best interests. For example, if the health care providers know that your family, friends, or caregivers have been involved in your health care and you have not objected to the sharing of information with them in the past, your health care providers may contact those individuals and provide information that is needed for the purpose of notification (such as your location and general condition) or that is directly related to their involvement in your care or payment for care.

As another example, if you pass out while driving alone and are injured in a car accident, emergency medical personnel can use your identification and other personal information to find your family and notify them that you have been injured and are being transported to a nearby hospital. If you are conscious at the time of notification, they need tell you that's what they plan to do and give you the chance to object. On the other hand, if you are unconscious, they can make the notification without your permission, if they determine that it is in your best interests.

In another example, if you have a mental health condition and become disoriented or confused, so you are unaware of your surroundings or who you are, a police officer could contact the nearest hospital and the staff may call someone who has been your helping companion; or, if you are so disoriented that you are unable to make decisions, the medical staff may decide to check their records to find someone to contact on your behalf to find out more about your needs or health conditions, if they need the information to be able to care for you.

Being hurt or lost and unable to make decisions or communicate your needs is a difficult situation, and so is losing a sense of privacy about your personal health information, so HIPAA helps doctors, nurses, and social workers by allowing them to do what they do best: use their professional skill and judgment to find out what you want and need, and help reconnect you with those you know and trust—your family, friends, and others involved in your health.