

Unlocking the Power of Health Information: How HIM Professionals Strengthen Healthcare Policy, Planning, and Performance

Health systems around the world are undergoing a major digital transformation — already, more than 70 countries rely on DHIS2 at national scale, capturing health data for over 40% of the world's population¹. Yet even as the volume of health data grows, it remains underutilized. And, without skilled health information management (HIM) professionals, the exponential growth in data risks being incomplete, inaccurate, or inaccessible when it's needed most.

HIM professionals ensure that health data is trusted, secure, and usable. They understand clinical workflows, digital systems, reimbursement methodologies, and data standards, and they are trained to connect teams across care, technology, and administration. This broad skill set is recognized internationally by organizations such as the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) in the U.S., Canadian Health Information Management Association (CHIMA), and the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA). These organizations define HIM professionals as experts in coding, documentation, information governance, privacy, and health informatics — making them the **backbone of data-driven healthcare**.

Their work enables:

- **Safe and coordinated patient care** through complete and accurate records
- **Public health programs** that rely on disease surveillance and health statistics
- **Sustainable health financing** through accurate clinical coding, claims, and audits
- **Policy and planning** grounded in reliable data and global standards
- **Research** that depends on well-structured, shareable, high-quality information.

WHAT HIM ENABLES



**Data Stewardship
& Quality**



**Support for
Public Health &
Clinical Decisions**



**Digital Health
Transformation**



**Health Financing
& Accountability**



**Policy,
Governance, and
Compliance**

In many countries, particularly within low and lower-middle income nations and small island developing states (SIDS), HIM professionals continue to be undervalued and underrecognized. In many instances, they are misclassified within outdated administrative categories, limiting their visibility and the strategic value they bring to health systems. Their essential contributions often remain unseen until systems falter. For example, when data misclassification or poor information governance leads to gaps in reporting, undercompensation, or inequitable allocation of health resources. Strengthening the recognition and professional positioning of HIM practitioners is therefore critical to advancing data-driven health planning and resilience, especially in resource-constrained and digitally transitioning settings.

1. <https://dhis2.org/health/hmis/>

Change is gaining momentum. Around the world, ministries of health, health facilities, and development partners are recognizing the need for well-trained HIM professionals to drive:

- Universal Health Coverage (UHC) monitoring
- Maternal and child health reporting
- Health system interoperability and data protection
- Disease-specific registries and public health surveillance
- WHO's Global Strategy on Digital Health (2020–2025)
- How artificial intelligence (AI) is incorporated into healthcare systems and processes.

Global spending on digital health already exceeds US \$67 billion annually and is projected to reach US \$540 billion by 2035². Yet many systems risk falling short because they have overlooked the workforce that transforms data into actionable decisions.

Now is the time to invest in HIM professionals not as an optional resource, but as the cornerstone of a high-performing health system. When these professionals are fully empowered and developed, every part of the health system functions more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably.

What HIM Professionals Do

HIM professionals work at the intersection of healthcare, data, and technology. While their responsibilities vary across settings, they always play a critical role in ensuring that health information is accurate, secure, and usable. HIM professionals make a difference in five key areas:

1. Data Stewardship and Quality

HIM professionals ensure health data is complete, consistent, and reliable — whether for an individual patient or across an entire health system or nation. Their work includes:

- Managing clinical documentation
- Maintaining health records across paper and electronic systems
- Ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and compliance with data protection laws (e.g., HIPAA, GDPR, and Australian Privacy Principles (APPs))
- Leading the governance and effective use of health data and terminology standards such as ICD-10, ICD-11, ICHI, and SNOMED CT

Through their work, they advocate, guide, and monitor the adoption of applicable international data standards including WHO-endorsed classifications like ICD-11 to support interoperability and data quality across health systems.

2. Support for Public Health and Clinical Decisions

HIM professionals enable the use of health data to inform patient care and public health action. Their work supports:

- Disease surveillance and outbreak monitoring
- Maternal, newborn, and child health reporting
- Cancer registries, immunization systems, and other longitudinal datasets
- Population health management and analytics
- Evidence-based clinical guidelines, care protocols, and research

These professionals often generate, curate, and govern the trusted data used in the WHO Global Health Observatory thereby contributing directly to programs such as Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response and maternal and child health monitoring frameworks.

3. Digital Health Transformation

As health systems adopt electronic health records (EHRs) and other digital tools, HIM professionals ensure that information flows are accurate, aligned, and secure. They:

- Design and support clinical workflows in digital platforms, ensuring alignment with real-world care delivery
- Guide data migration and system integration
- Connect teams across clinical, administrative, and IT functions to ensure successful adoption
- Train clinical and administrative staff to use new systems effectively
- Help ensure that systems align with international interoperability and security standards (e.g., HL7 FHIR, ISO)

This work is essential to implementing the WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025, and contributes to alignment with the SMART Guidelines, systems cataloged in WHO’s Digital Health Atlas, and WHO’s recommendations on Artificial Intelligence in Health.

4. Health Financing and Accountability

Health systems can’t fund nor validate their return on investment if they don’t fully understand their data. HIM professionals:

- Assign accurate clinical codes that drive reimbursement and health budgets
- Prepare audit-ready documentation for payers, funders, and ministries
- Ensure and support clinical documentation integrity across the organization, including training clinicians in best practices
- Reduce claim denials and fraud by improving data quality and validation processes
- Enable cost-effective care through data transparency and standardization

Their role underpins health financing reforms such as prospective payment systems, including diagnoses related group (DRG) models and activity based funding, and supports standardized data reporting to the WHO Global Health Expenditure Database — critical for policy alignment, financial accountability, and standardizing health financing information.

5. Policy, Governance, and Compliance

As countries move toward digital, data-driven health systems, HIM professionals support policymaking, monitoring, and regulation by:

- Developing and implementing health data standards and reporting systems
- Participating in audits, accreditation surveys, performance reviews, and compliance checks
- Supporting national health information system planning and evaluation
- Developing, implementing, and maintaining national health information exchange systems and digital platforms to enable standardized, secure, and interoperable data sharing across providers
- Assisting in the development and enforcement of privacy, consent, and security protocols from design to implementation
- Providing governance and leadership across clinical, administrative, and technical domains — including emerging areas such as AI

Their work helps governments operationalize WHO’s Health Data Governance Principles (2023) and contributes to investment and implementation planning through tools like the Digital Implementation Investment Guide (DIIG).

Across countries, the core responsibilities of HIM professionals take different forms depending on health system structure, policy, and digital maturity. For real-world examples of how HIM professionals are making an impact — and where challenges remain — see the country snapshots in the Appendix.

What Needs to Change — Advocacy Priorities

Despite their critical role, HIM professionals are often held back by outdated structures, limited investment, and a lack of clear value placed on their contributions.

Barriers to Realizing the Full Value of HIM	What Needs to Happen
Outdated job titles and classifications HIM professionals are often labeled as clerical or administrative staff, even when managing regional and national systems.	Modernize job descriptions and labor classifications Recognize HIM professionals as part of the skilled digital health and information governance workforce, aligned with the WHO's ILO - International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08/22) and the WHO Health Workforce for Digital Health Framework (2023). Countries may reference best practice models such as AHIMA and IFHIMA global competency frameworks when defining national HIM roles and standards.
Limited training and professional development Curricula often lag behind current digital and data standards, leaving HIM professionals underprepared. In many countries, there is no available HIM education.	Invest in updated education and professional development Initiate and expand university-level programs and short courses to include content on ICD-11, HL7 FHIR, privacy, data quality, informatics, and AI. Align with national digital health goals. Promote lifelong learning amongst the profession.
Under-valued in national health strategies HIM professionals are frequently absent from digital health, UHC, and health financing reforms.	Embed HIM into regional and national planning Include HIMs in digital health task forces, UHC design and monitoring frameworks, and public health reporting systems.
Insufficient staffing and career pathways HIM roles are underfunded, with limited opportunities for advancement or retention—especially in LMICs.	Fund the workforce and build careers Create and budget for dedicated HIM roles at all levels. Define clear pathways for specialization and advancement.
Fragmented data standards and systems Without professional engagement and support, countries struggle to align EHRs, coding systems, and reporting platforms, leading to inconsistent data and interoperability challenges.	Empower HIM professionals to lead and support data and interoperability standards Upskill to strengthen professionals' capacity to interpret, implement, and advocate for standards such as ICD-11, SNOMED CT, LOINC, ICF, DICOM, HL7v2, v3, and FHIR. Use WHO frameworks to drive alignment and credibility.

To build resilient, data-driven health systems, countries must **recognize, train, and resource** HIM professionals as essential infrastructure. Each challenge above has a proven, scalable solution. IFHIMA stands ready to support implementation.

HIM professionals are not just data experts — they are connectors. Their ability to bridge clinical, technical, and administrative systems makes them essential to the success of data-driven healthcare everywhere.

IFHIMA's Role in Advancing the Profession

The International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA) is the only global organization dedicated to advancing the HIM profession across all six WHO regions. With members in more than 63 countries, IFHIMA serves as a strategic partner to governments, academic institutions, and national associations working to modernize health data systems and strengthen workforce capacity.

One of IFHIMA's core contributions is in **education and workforce development**. Through congresses, webinars, white papers, and continuing education initiatives, IFHIMA helps ensure that training keeps pace with rapid changes in digital health, clinical coding, and information governance.

At IFHIMA, we support countries in adopting and aligning international health information standards, offering guidance and peer collaboration for implementing systems such as ICD-10 and ICD-11, HL7 FHIR interoperability frameworks, and WHO's Health Data Governance Principles. By helping national leaders integrate HIM roles with global digital health strategies, including the WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health, we strengthen workforce credibility and enhance the coherence, reliability, and impact of health information systems.

Just as importantly, IFHIMA fosters **global collaboration and knowledge exchange**. Its Communities of Practice and strategic workgroups allow HIM professionals to share solutions, surface innovations, and learn from peers tackling similar challenges in different contexts. From national policy implementation to grassroots capacity building, IFHIMA offers a unique platform for visibility, advocacy, and global connection.

As countries confront the urgent need for accurate, secure, and usable health information, IFHIMA stands ready and able to support — not only as a thought leader, but as an active partner in ensuring that health data is trusted, secure, and usable. Our vision, “A healthy world enabled by quality health information³,” remains the cornerstone of IFHIMA activities.

Related Reading

[IFHIMA Endorses the Implementation of ICD-11 for Improved Global Health](#)

[A Global Perspective on the Value of HIM Certifications](#)

[Examining Today's HIM Workforce with Recommendations for Elevating the Profession](#)

[Ensuring Responsible Use of AI in Healthcare Information Collection and Use](#)

About IFHIMA

The International Federation of Health Information Management Associations (IFHIMA) is an NGO affiliated with the World Health Organization (WHO) for over 45 years. Its Board includes representatives from each of the six WHO regions, and its members include Health Information (HI) professionals from 63 countries.

IFHIMA advocates for the profession by promoting education, high-quality data, and privacy to improve health outcomes worldwide.

3. <https://ifhima.org/about-ifhima/>

Appendix

HIM professionals play essential roles in healthcare systems around the world. However, the structure, recognition, and support for the profession vary widely. The following country snapshots illustrate how HIM professionals are contributing to national priorities such as digital transformation, public health reporting, financing, and UHC. Each example highlights both the progress made and the unique challenges faced in strengthening the HIM workforce. Together, they demonstrate the global value of investing in this often overlooked — but foundational — profession.

AU Australia

A well-established profession working to future-proof itself

In Australia, health information management professionals and clinical coders are integral to the functioning of the health system, playing vital roles in data quality, coding, analytics, regulatory compliance, and health service planning. While small in number, the profession has deep roots and broad scope.

Australian HIMs have pioneered classification systems like ICD-10-AM and contribute to national initiatives in interoperability, data governance, and AI integration. Their skills span everything from record integrity and privacy to research, financial planning, and regulatory reporting.

Despite their critical role, HIMs and coders are often misclassified or overlooked in national workforce policy. Many face workforce shortages and limited visibility, even as hospital admissions and data complexity increase.

To stay future-ready, the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA) has launched initiatives to modernize professional identity, competencies, and education pathways. National summits and position papers have helped reframe HIM as a core digital health profession, one that is poised to lead in an era of AI, big data, and patient-centered analytics.

BB Barbados

Modernizing roles and systems to support digital transformation

Barbados is undergoing a national shift toward digital health, supported by the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The Information Systems for Health (IS4H) initiative is helping to modernize infrastructure, data standards, and health information workflows across hospitals, polyclinics, and community care.

HIM professionals are central to this effort. They manage patient registration, diagnostic coding, surveillance data, and mortality reporting that ensure the accuracy and integrity of health information across the care continuum. Their work directly supports evidence-based policy, public health response, and system accountability.

As roles expand, Barbados is actively revising job classifications and role titles to reflect HIM's evolving responsibilities in data stewardship, digital system support, and interdisciplinary collaboration. These updates aim to strengthen professional identity while aligning with international standards and national digital health goals.

Sustained investment in workforce development, systems reform, and recognition of HIM professionals as digital health enablers will be key to Barbados' long-term success.

IN India

New legislation elevates HIM into a nationally recognized profession

HIM professionals in India have long supported accurate recordkeeping, reporting, and disease tracking in hospitals and public health programs. However, the field has historically lacked national recognition, standardized education, or workforce regulation, especially amid uneven digital progress across states.

That changed with the 2021 passage of the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Act. For the first time, HIM and health informatics were formally recognized as professional categories, setting the stage for standardized curricula, licensing, and stronger professional identity.

The Act promises to unify fragmented training efforts, raise the visibility of HIM professionals in both public and private sectors, and position them as strategic contributors to national digital health initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission.

India's challenge now is to implement this reform equitably to ensure that HIM professionals in all states gain access to structured education, credentials, and career pathways that match the country's digital health ambitions.

IR Iran

Digital infrastructure is advancing — but HIM workforce support lags behind

Iran has made major strides in digital health, launching national platforms like SEPAS (electronic health records) and SIB (primary care integration) to improve care quality and coordination. HIM professionals play a critical role in supporting these systems by ensuring that data is accurate, secure, and actionable.

Across hospital and public health settings, HIM professionals connect clinical, technical, and administrative teams. They manage data quality, interpret standards, support analytics, and train staff to use national systems effectively. As digital infrastructure expands, their expertise becomes increasingly indispensable.

Yet policy gaps, limited training, weak professional identity, and workforce shortages threaten to undermine this progress. Many HIM roles remain undefined or unsupported, and curriculum reform has not kept pace with system demands like interoperability and cybersecurity.

A coordinated national agenda is urgently needed, and it must focus on education, policy reform, professional governance, and HIM integration into digital health planning. Without targeted investment, Iran risks underutilizing a critical workforce just as global health systems accelerate their digital transformations.

JM Jamaica

Health records professionals are vital in the shift to digital records, but under-recognized

Jamaica's health system is gradually transitioning from paper-based to digital records, with support from initiatives like the National Health Information System (NHIS) and the Smart Hospital Project. However, this progress has been uneven, and many facilities still rely on hybrid systems. This makes the role of health records professionals (HRPs) more critical than ever.

HRPs ensure that patient records are accurate, complete, and accessible for diagnosis, treatment, disease surveillance, financing, and public health reporting. Their work connects clinical teams, supports data-driven policy, and ensures compliance with national privacy laws.

Despite their importance, HRPs often lack adequate resources, training opportunities, and formal recognition. Many face daily pressures to maintain data quality while navigating outdated systems and increasing demands without matching investment or career pathways.

For Jamaica's digital transition to succeed, HRPs must be fully integrated into system design, implementation, and evaluation. Investments in training, job modernization, and workforce infrastructure will help unlock their full potential as health data stewards.

JP Japan

A credentialed profession at the intersection of safety, analytics, and hospital management

Japan has built a strong national framework for medical record managers through structured education, certification, and career progression. With over 47,000 certified professionals, the role is well-defined and respected for being rooted in patient safety, data accuracy, and hospital efficiency.

Medical record managers in Japan play a central role in reducing clinical risk, managing hospital data systems, optimizing reimbursement processes, and contributing to health system performance. They also ensure the quality of cancer registries and other public health datasets essential for national planning.

The Japan Society of Health Information Management and allied institutions continue to advance the profession's scope, particularly in response to digital transformation and artificial intelligence. As data volumes grow and risk environments shift, HIM professionals are increasingly called on to lead in areas such as data at the point of care management, data analytics, and regulatory oversight.

Japan offers a strong example of how formal certification, continuing education, and integration into hospital strategy can elevate HIM from a technical role to a strategic leadership function.

KE Kenya

A growing digital health workforce supporting UHC and national data systems

Kenya has made significant investments in digital platforms such as the Kenya Health Information System (KHIS), electronic community health information systems, and a range of electronic medical records to support UHC. HIM professionals are at the center of this transformation, ensuring that data is accurate, timely, and actionable from the facility to national level.

Kenya's HIM workforce supports clinical documentation, coding, surveillance, and data governance. Their roles span from maintaining patient records at the facility level to informing health financing and public health policy at the national level.

However, training gaps, uneven staffing, and a lack of standardized roles across counties limit the profession's potential. Many professionals lack access to tools, mentorship, and continuing education aligned with modern health IT systems.

Kenya is addressing these gaps through competency frameworks, continuing professional development programs, and stronger professional governance. With targeted investment in workforce development, HIM professionals will continue to be instrumental in advancing UHC and improving data use across the health system.

ES Spain

Expanding roles, new technologies, and a profession at a crossroads

In Spain's publicly funded health system, HIM professionals play a central role in coordinating patient flows, managing hospital admissions and discharges, and overseeing medical record systems. Their responsibilities include classification, coding, EHR development, and waiting list management for hospital procedures.

Historically drawn from medical graduates, the HIM workforce has diversified in recent decades to include health documentation technicians, nurses, and graduates from other health disciplines. Training pathways are evolving to meet new system demands, but challenges remain.

As Spain prepares for the adoption of ICD-11 for mortality coding (planned no earlier than 2030), HIM professionals are navigating new priorities such as interoperability, privacy regulation, and the rise of AI in health services. A critical next step will be updating Spain's case-mix and reimbursement models to include a procedure classification system that aligns with ICD-11's morbidity data.

To meet these challenges, HIM professionals in Spain will need not only updated technical competencies, but also recognition as leaders in data governance and health system strategy. Their ability to connect clinical, administrative, and digital priorities positions them to lead Spain's next phase of digital health transformation.

US United States

A mature profession critical to compliance, reimbursement, and analytics

In the United States, HIM professionals play an essential and well-established role in both clinical and administrative settings. They oversee patient data across the care continuum by ensuring that documentation is complete, coding is accurate, and privacy laws are upheld.

HIM professionals support clinical documentation improvement, reimbursement accuracy, quality reporting, and regulatory compliance for institutions ranging from small practices to national health systems. They also guide system design and analytics adoption, helping organizations integrate EHRs, decision support tools, and interoperability frameworks.

The U.S. HIM workforce operates within a structured credentialing and professional development ecosystem, supported by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) and aligned with federal mandates such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services reporting.

While the profession is well established, it continues to evolve in response to AI, value-based care, and advanced analytics. Ongoing investment in workforce development, informatics training, and governance leadership will ensure that HIM professionals remain vital to data-driven healthcare delivery.