



MHS is committed to providing fair and transparent assessments and solutions

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, recently released “Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment” (referred to as National Guidelines heretofore), a key guide to best practices. In this summary, guidance was given for policymakers and agency administrators in diverse criminal justice settings, as well as for developers of new instruments in the areas of four core pillars: Accuracy, Fairness, Transparency, and Communication and Use.



These guidelines are drawn from empirical research and reflect the perspectives of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who participated in several discussions on key concerns in the development, validation, and implementation of post-conviction risk and needs assessment instruments. These guidelines also consider existing statements and guidance on the use of risk and needs assessment instruments written by diverse groups and for diverse contexts. They presume that the intended use of post-conviction risk and needs assessment instruments is to support accurate, fair, and transparent decision-making regarding a person's risk of recidivism and, ultimately, to promote public safety and positive outcomes for people in the criminal justice system, including habilitation and community reintegration, through the least restrictive means possible.

It is imperative that we have a well-articulated and easy-to-follow Trust Framework that governs how we interact with the data that we are entrusted to protect.



MHS' Trust Framework guides the development and implementation of our assessments and solutions

As providers of risk and needs assessment solutions, MHS policies and practices correspond well with these *National Guidelines*.

MHS is a trusted, global research, neuroscience, and bioinformatics company whose purpose is to provide data-driven insights that predict and improve individual and organizational success. By the very nature of what we do, we are stewards of the personal information our customers provide. We use that data to understand, measure, and assess individual behavior and develop effective interventions. As such, it is imperative that we have a well-articulated and easy-to-follow Trust Framework that governs how we interact with the data that we are entrusted to protect.

We are committed to ensuring that our use of data and the outcomes, predictions, prescriptions, and actions we take based on these insights will always be conducted in an ethical fashion, ensuring rigorous attention is paid to ensure threats of bias (conscious and unconscious) are minimized within our products and services, always with the interest of the individual and their community as the guiding factor.

Here, we have outlined how we strive for our assessments and solutions meet the recommendations as laid out in the *National Guidelines*.



For an assessment to be considered accurate, it should demonstrate reliability and validity. MHS has a high standard when publishing and distributing assessments. When we say that an assessment like the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI™) is “reliable,” this term refers to the consistency or stability of an assessment. A reliable assessment will produce similar results over time for the same person under the same conditions. Evidence of reliability is collected through various studies, and the LS/CMI has strong evidence that changes observed in assessment results are likely due to real changes in development or as a result of intervention, rather than random fluctuations from an imprecise assessment. MHS continues to make its assessment tools available to researchers to conduct independent research and encourages the publication of this research in peer-reviewed journals. Independent validation of our measures is key to ensuring that our clients can trust the assessments across a wide range of settings.

In addition to being reliable, assessments such as the LS/CMI must provide strong evidence of validity in order to be used with confidence. Validity refers to the ability of the instrument to measure what it says it measures, and there are multiple types of validity evidence that can be used to support this claim. These types include, face validity, construct validity, convergent validity, and predictive validity.

The *LS/CMI* predictive validity has been well-established through both internal and peer-reviewed research.



The predictive validity evidence for the LS/CMI has been well-established through both internal and peer-reviewed research. Predictive validity means the score produced by the tool accurately predicts an outcome that is meaningful and relevant to what it is designed to measure. Numerous studies highlight the LS/CMI's ability to inform a variety of outcomes across diverse populations (Olver, Stockdale, & Wormith, 2014). The overall risk score predicts in general how likely someone is to re-offend, and more specifically, the LS/CMI demonstrates predictive validity in institutional misconduct, in-program recidivism, and outcomes while under community-based supervision. By providing their level of risk of re-offending, as well as the needs of the individual, professionals can determine the level of resources an individual requires. This feature is essential for effective case management. They are also able to prioritize the treatments according to how effective they are at reducing risk level. Users of the LS/CMI, such as correctional facilities, can confidently rely on the assessment to inform what level of service and what specific areas of intervention the correctional environment needs to provide the individual to support reduction of recidivism.

While the body of research on the accuracy of the LS/CMI is strong, MHS continuously encourages continued peer-reviewed research focused on improving the fidelity of the measure, examining weights and cutoffs, and isolating officer bias to improve the predictive validity of the instrument, the effectiveness of particularly types of intervention in risk reduction, among others.

The commitment to accuracy through the rigor of our scientific work in the development of our assessments aligns well with the National Guidelines, as well as other industry standards.



FAIRNESS

Historically, the issue of fairness in the development of assessments has lacked attention in research. Fairness was often examined by looking for mean differences in assessment outcomes among nominally defined groups of assessment-takers, an endeavor that usually took place in the late stages of the assessment development process. While this process doesn't directly address issues of bias, it is a useful tool in understanding group differences. However, it is only one tool in the process of gathering fairness evidence for an assessment.

Modern principles of fairness with regards to assessment development emphasize the importance of universal design. Initially emerging in the context of architecture, this philosophy advocated designing the built environment to be accessible to all people, regardless of their physical abilities, rather than adapting it after project completion. That is, fairness considerations that ensure accessibility should be factored in as early in the process as possible. Incorporating universal design to the assessment development process should result in inclusive assessments that consider all possible assessment-takers at each stage of the development process. Critically, this includes the seminal stages of development, such as defining the construct being measured and creating the assessment items being used to measure it.

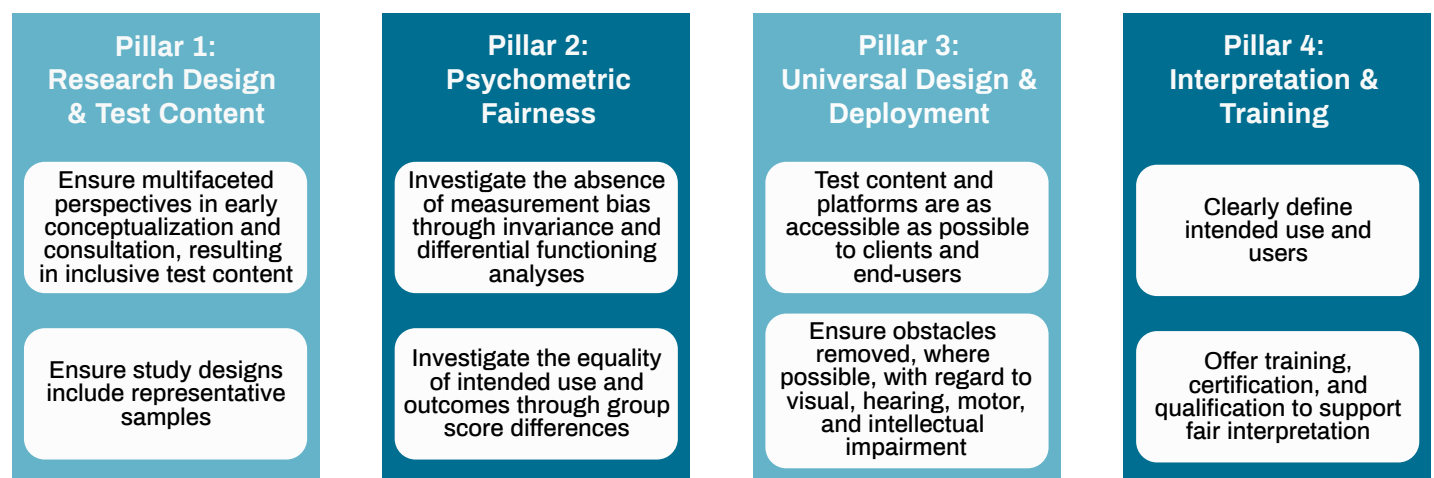
MHS is committed to a Fairness Framework that consists of four pillars. First, we critically examine the research, study design, and assessment content. We rely on international perspectives, subject-matter experts, and cultural sensitivity reviews to help steer the types of questions we ask in an assessment, and the types of people who are recruited to participate in data collection to help develop the assessment. This consideration ensures that the items themselves are not written in a way that creates bias.

Next, we investigate fairness of the items and the assessment overall from a psychometric perspective, looking for any hint of bias or adverse impact. This step ensures that bias is not observed as a property of the test items or the way they are scored.

Then, we design the features of the assessment to be accessible and inclusive, with regards to the types of devices, input, and interaction options available. If certain populations do not have access to the primary ways to interact with the assessment, then bias is introduced in terms of "accessibility." A company that develops tools that work only on desktops, when certain groups may only have access to a mobile phone, may be inherently disadvantaging their clients from an accessibility perspective.

Finally, we ensure that our customers are informed and trained about appropriate use and users so that they can administer, score, and interpret the assessment in the fairest way possible. This last pillar is particularly important for tools where an individual is being rated or assessed by others. There is strong evidence to suggest that both implicit and explicit bias can influence ratings, creating bias that otherwise does not exist within the tool.

MHS' FAIRNESS AND BIAS REDUCTION PILLARS





TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is a fundamental component of trust. In the digital world, transparency applies to how organizations operate in a digital environment, gaining consent, being open about data collection and use policies, sharing information freely on topics such as security, privacy, and compliance, and responding effectively and appropriately to customer concerns and questions. A fundamental part of MHS's commitment to transparency is ensuring that our clients and users know what information is collected, why it is being collected, and how it is used. Our MHS Trust Framework is the base for our employees and customers to appropriately manage the collection, storage, and processing of data.

When people understand what factors are risks for recidivism and are motivated to improve their outcomes and reduce that risk, it not only benefits them, but it benefits society at large.



In terms of the Level of Service Inventory (LSI, LS/CMI), MHS is always transparent with our clients on how scores are generated: there is no black box or mysterious scoring algorithm that is inaccessible to clients. Further, we allow those affected by the tools and their advocates to understand the overall principles and scoring algorithms behind them. In fact, when people understand what factors are risks for recidivism and are motivated to improve their outcomes and reduce that risk, it not only benefits them, but it benefits society at large. An individual who completes a high school diploma or GED while incarcerated improves their chances of getting a job post-release, which, in turn, reduces their risk of recidivism, a notable benefit to both the individual and society.



COMMUNICATION AND USE

As stewards of confidential and sensitive data, MHS ensures the intention, method (process and practice), and outcomes of data use, including how individual assessment results are communicated, is always transparent in intent, understood, and approved by all parties. The encompassing responsibility we have to our customers, and their customers, with regards to the careful and responsible management of all data entrusted to us, covers all aspects of data stewardship—security, privacy, processing, administration, and reporting.

A best practice that MHS incorporates is the inclusion of both a real-time scale risk calculator and a real-time total score calculator in our risk assessment portal, GEARS. To provide an overview of how each domain is progressing, the real-time scale risk calculator updates automatically as responses are provided, showing assessors how the item scores and responses inform the total scale risk score. The calculators, and graphical display, automatically update as the assessment proceeds, allowing for immediate insights into what attitudes and behaviors drive the assessment's scale and total scores, and in turn, actual understanding of risks and needs necessary to drive effective treatment planning. This visualization provides transparency into how risk scores are calculated, providing clear communication for correctional staff to derive insights and make informed decisions.

Items requiring further review are flagged in red text so that assessors can easily notice what requires attention prior to submission. An open-text field for general notes is available to capture any additional information to be considered.

The calculators automatically update as the assessment proceeds, allowing for real-time insights into what attitudes and behaviors drive the assessment's scale and total scores. This generates the understanding of risks and needs that is necessary to drive effective treatment planning.

In addition to using data gathered from national samples across our portfolios of assessments, MHS includes the capability to create localized comparisons and risk/needs analyses to create decision-making tools specific to different populations and applications, such as drug courts and family courts. Streamlining the assessment process in this way increases the effectiveness of our assessments for specific applications while also reducing time to complete assessments by automating scoring and reporting. To ensure best practices are followed, reference text is available to systematically guide users through the official scoring guidelines in a user-friendly fashion. An open-text field is available for certain items for further specification relevant to the response being captured.

Once an assessment has been completed, assessors are provided templated PDF reports. MHS ensures that the structure and format in which assessment results generated via our cloud-based APIs and portals are presented clearly and concisely.



MHS CONTINUES TO BE A GLOBAL LEADER IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY ON FAIRNESS AND BIAS REDUCTION

MHS employs the Trust Framework to support the needs of our customers to arrive at actionable insights. We conduct sophisticated research to ensure our tools are accurate, and development of new products is subjected to our Fairness Framework to ensure bias reduction is a clear priority from the onset. We provide documentation that transparently articulates the development of our assessments, along with recommendations for responsible and fair use. We are committed to providing certified training on the use of our assessments, facilitating webinars and sessions that inform users about accuracy, transparency, and fairness to mitigate misuse of the instrument.

Learn more about MHS' comprehensive Trust Framework and Fairness principles.