Duplicate Merge Tool

Intended Audience

- Administrative Agencies
- Managers and Supervisors
- Technical Leads

Policy Background

What are Duplicate Client Records?

Duplicate client records are created when an agency or agencies register the same client in ARIES using slightly different identifiers. For instance, Robert L. Smith is entered:

- As Robert at Agency A and as Bob at Agency B, or
- At Agency A with his middle initial and at Agency B without his middle initial, or
- At Agency A with his mother's maiden name of Jones, but with no mother's maiden name at Agency B.

Even though Robert decided to share his data, staff at these agencies would never be able to see the shared data because he is actually two separate clients in ARIES.

The Duplicate Merge Tool in ARIES can help resolve this problem. The tool is located on the Agency Utilities tab on the Agency screen. However, access to the Agency Utilities tab is controlled through the user group role permissions and an application process (see "Procedures" below).

What are the Principles for Merging Records?

Merging records makes permanent irreversible changes to client data, and some data may be deleted.

Merging duplicate records involves both longitudinal (historical) records and non-longitudinal records. Examples of longitudinal records are Services, CD4 Tests, Eligibility Documents, and Case Notes. Examples of non-longitudinal records are Contact Info, Demographics, Basic Medical, and Financial. No data is ever lost from longitudinal records because all the records from the two clients are simply transferred intact to the resulting merged client. However, non-longitudinal records for the two clients may contain conflicting information. For example, Robert Smith may have one phone number at Agency A and a different phone number at Agency B. Only one phone number can be used for the resulting merged client, so one of the existing phone numbers must be discarded. When AA users merge clients, they must choose which value to keep. Since merging clients can involve massive changes to many records, ARIES tags all records affected by a duplicate merge with the User ID of the person who executed the merge.

Merging records should not to be taken lightly! Since the Duplicate Merge Tool can technically merge any two unrelated clients, it is imperative that AA users carefully research potential duplicates before merging any records. Merging client records can not be undone. Merging the incorrect clients' records will result in agencies and users having access to data that they have no authority to view. Such mistakes are a serious breach of client confidentiality. Therefore, extreme care must be taken to avoid these risks. Even for clients who are clearly the same person, there are some rules and principles that need to be observed when merging them to insure the accuracy of the data for the resulting client.

Though subjective at times, the steps for determining whether potential duplicate client records belong to the same individual require careful research and collaboration.

1) AA users must compare the six client identifiers (i.e., client first and last name, middle initial, birth date, gender, and mother's maiden name), as well as other data elements such as social security number, phone number, address, and so forth. Medical information is not typically used for this comparison because it changes so often.

2) If the identifying data is significantly different, AA users must involve the agencies in question to confirm whether the records belong to the same client. It is critical that AA users are completely certain that they are merging the correct client records.

3) Once the determination has been made that records belong to the same client, AA users must check the share status for each record. The Duplicate Merge Tool will not merge records with non-matching share status. During the rollout of ARIES, all historical records were imported as non-share, unless they could be matched precisely with existing share records already in ARIES. For example, Robert Smith's historical data was imported as non-share at Agency A. Later, he enrolled at Agency B as a share client under the name Bob Smith. In order for these records to be merged, both records must have the same share status. AA users must work with Agency A to get an updated ARIES Client Share/Non-Share Consent Form for the client and then edit the share status. AA users can do this by asking Agency A directly or by adding a client alert to the Agency Specifics page when editing the client through Agency A's context. It is not acceptable to change one client's share status simply to merge his records. The one known exception to this rule is if AA users can:

   - Verify in ARIES that Robert Smith was a "conversion" client by looking for the word "conversion" or "import" in the Referral Source field on the Agency Specifics page, and
   - Confirm with Agency A that he is no longer an active client, and
   - Then change his share status to share at Agency A and merge his records.

4) In addition to merging known duplicates, the Duplicate Merge Tool can also search for potential duplicates. This search may return potential duplicate matches where one or both clients are enrolled in agencies not managed by the AA. The tool does not permit AA users to merge records outside of their AA. AA users should keep track of such potential duplicate records outside of their AA and periodically report them as a group to the ARIES Help Desk. If there is a complete match, the Help Desk will merge the records. The Help Desk does not currently have resources to investigate records that are not a complete match.

5) AA users can merge the records once they have confirmed that:

   - The duplicates are indeed the same client,

- The share status is the same, and
- The records are within the AA.

Again, merges can not be reversed so proceed with caution.

Special Procedures for On-Going Imports

If an AA manages agencies that have on-going imports, there is an extra step that the AAs must take when merging duplicate records associated with these agencies.

- First, the AA must determine which system(s) has the most correct and complete client identifiers.
- Then the AA needs to update the client identifiers in the other system(s) accordingly. For example, Agency A is importing “Bob Smith” on an on-going basis. However, the AA confirms that this “Bob Smith” is the same “Robert A. Smith” who already exists in ARIES. The AA will need to work with Agency A to revise the client's first name and add his middle initial in the other system.
- Then the AA can perform the merge in ARIES. If the identifiers are not synchronized, the merge will be in vain as a duplicate record with be created with the next Agency A imports data.

Procedures

The Duplicate Merge Tool is available only at the Administrative Agency (AA) level. AAs are those agencies which contract with (“manage”) other agencies in ARIES. Access will not be granted to any managed agency.

Only AA users who are assigned the “Administrative Agency ARIES Administrator (Fiscal Agents/ Counties)” role are eligible to use the Duplicate Merge Tool. Duplicate merge is not for novice users. The tool is not intuitive and does not currently have help screens to assist users. Therefore, users must:

- Submit an ARIES Duplicate Merge Tool User Application to the State Office of AIDS for review and approval,
- Obtain their supervisor’s approval for the application,
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of ARIES, and
- Complete the ARIES Duplicate Merge Demonstration prior to submitting the application.

To obtain an application or access the demonstration, please e-mail karl.halfman@cdph.ca.gov.

Additional Information

Agencies that are in counties with no AA may report potential duplicates directly to the ARIES Help Desk.

Agencies that are managed by an AA should report any potential duplicates to their AA, not to the Help Desk.

The ARIES Help Desk will no longer handle inter-agency duplicate merge requests within AAs. With the AA's approval, the Help Desk will handle intra-agency duplicate merge requests where no other data exists for either client outside the agency in question. AAs with access to the Duplicate Merge Tool should inform the Help Desk of how intra-agency requests should be handled. In addition, AA users should contact the Help Desk when they:

- Have questions about how to use the Duplicate Merge Tool,
- Encounter an error message while attempting to merge records,
- Want a second opinion about whether or not to merge particular records, or
- Need to merge records outside of the AA.

As a reminder, when contacting the Help Desk, it is vitally important to maintain strict confidentiality of client information, regardless of how users contact the Help Desk. Do not include any client identifiers when e-mailing or voice messaging the Help Desk. When speaking directly to the Help Desk, do not volunteer confidential client information. If the Help Desk needs to identify a client, they will ask the caller for the bare minimum of information, usually the ARIES ID (read-only Demographics screen) or the URN (Client Identifiers edit screen). Failure to observe these rules may result in a breach of confidentiality which must be reported to your supervisor and to the State Office of AIDS.

Related Policies

- ARIES Policy Notice No. B1 regarding Security Incident Reporting
- ARIES Policy Notice No. F2 regarding the ARIES Help Desk