

HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENTS

Build or Buy?

A Guide for Executives &
Population Health Professionals

The choice between **building or buying software** is a decision many executives may have to make. This same question often exists for health risk assessments (HRAs) too. Population health professionals know that HRAs can have a positive impact on their population and on their bottom line. But should their organization buy or build? There are pros and cons to each approach.

In this guide, we look at some of the factors that are typically evaluated when deciding between buying and building an HRA, including development, maintenance, and price.



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:

- ✓ Development Resources ([pg. 2](#))
- ✓ Regulations & Certifications ([pg. 3](#))
- ✓ Data Storage ([pg. 4](#))
- ✓ Data Analysis ([pg. 5](#))
- ✓ Securing and Handling Data ([pg. 6](#))
- ✓ Upfront & Overhead Costs ([pg. 7](#))

DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES



BUILD

When building an HRA, it falls on the organization to create, update, and maintain their HRA and the associated resources and data, and to make

decisions about each step along the way. Factors that need to be taken into consideration include:

- **Delivery formats** such as digital, paper, telephonic, or some combination
- **User interface/design** that is engaging and moves people logically through health and lifestyle questions
- **Content** that is useful, informative, scientifically valid, and meets any certification or regulatory standards that are applicable (and continues to meet those standards, which can often change)
- **Data that is easy to collect and analyze**
- **Data that easily integrates** into their system or tools

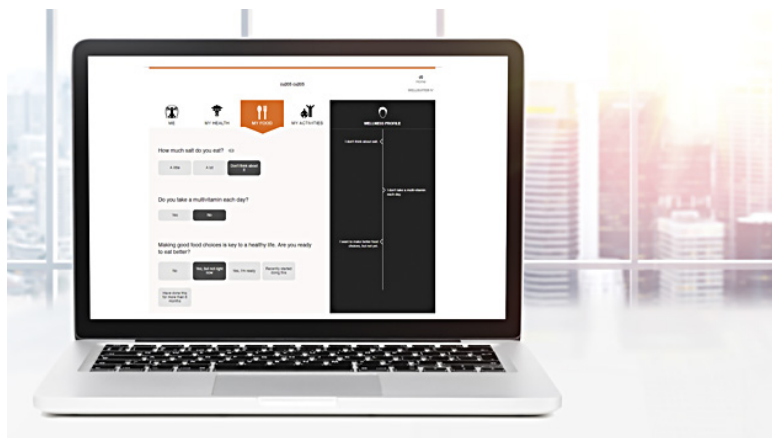
Each of these components can lead to more involved discussions regarding budget, resources, and timing—among other things—which makes it the most important place to kick-off the conversation.

Do you have the in-house expertise to account for:

- ✓ Delivery formats
- ✓ User interface
- ✓ Mobile-first responsive design
- ✓ Scientific validity
- ✓ Scoring algorithms
- ✓ Regulatory standards
- ✓ Data analysis
- ✓ Report designs
- ✓ Systems integration

BUY

Buying an HRA is considerably less arduous on company resources than building one. When buying an HRA, the vast considerations of creating and maintaining the HRA are completely off their plate. Of course, they've got to evaluate the various platforms available to them and assess both quality and scientific soundness. But once they determine which vendor best aligns with their budgetary and population needs, the decision-making is complete.



REGULATIONS & CERTIFICATIONS



BUILD

Many organizations looking to build an HRA are likely consulting quality standards as laid out by institutions such as the

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS) and the **National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)**. Information within an HRA must meet at least the minimum requirements, and be kept current in nearly real-time. An organization shouldn't wait two years from today to make an update if there has been a major change in the scientific data that backs the HRA. Maintaining a single version of an HRA is an on-going, year-round process. Organizations are often denied approval because they simply didn't realize the heavy workload that goes into maintaining an HRA.

Of course, due to the nature of the information collected during an HRA there are other regulations—such as **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** and **Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA)** requirements—that must be met as well. These regulations stipulate how data can be used and stored, and the ramifications for any misuse or violations—some of which can be significant.

Do you know the regulatory requirements for:

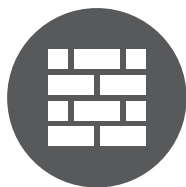
- ✓ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS)
- ✓ National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)
- ✓ Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- ✓ Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- ✓ Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA)
- ✓ Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- ✓ International: General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- ✓ State and local regulations



BUY

For organizations that want to stay current on their accreditation and meet regulatory requirements, purchasing an HRA could simplify the process exponentially—especially when they **purchase an NCQA-certified health risk assessment**. This can help the organization save time otherwise dedicated to the process of creating the assessment and going through the approval process, which can amount to huge time and cost savings down the line.

DATA STORAGE



BUILD

One of the most crucial aspects to consider when determining whether to buy or build a health risk assessment is

understanding what purpose the data will serve and how that data will be stored. Questions to consider include:

- Is it a **digital assessment** that will be stored locally on a server or in the cloud?
- If it's a paper assessment, **will they be stored in a filing cabinet** in an office or at an off-site storage facility?
- How will the information be kept **secure**?
- Are there employee resources and finances to support the separate infrastructure required by **federal security and privacy standards**?
- **Who will have access** to the data and how will they access it?

Can you answer the following security concerns:

- ✓ Can you securely store data in the cloud?
- ✓ Do you have a secure space to store paper HRAs?
- ✓ How will personal health information (PHI) be kept secure?
- ✓ How will the secure infrastructure be staffed and maintained?
- ✓ How will access to data be monitored?



CONFIDENTIAL

BUY

When buying an HRA, the storage components are completely taken care of since most—if not all—HRA providers will store both the actual assessment and the data collected on their servers. Additionally, the data storage is likely to be incredibly secure since the provider is required to comply with various regulations regarding information privacy.

DATA ANALYSIS



BUILD

An organization that chooses to build an HRA also needs to figure out what to do with the data once it's

collected. This is where things often go awry. Creating the appropriate analytics tools and resources that make data easy to consume can be yet another full-time job (or three). Certainly, an HRA should give an end-user a quick snapshot of their risk, but an HRA does the most good when someone reviews the data to examine trends in population health. How will the data inform segmentation and stratification? A process must consider what timeframe will be used for trending and specific data points for aggregate reports. And that's just the start. It's a complicated and time-consuming endeavor that organizations abandon once they realize how involved it can be.

Can you create analytic tools that make it easy to view:

- ✓ High level reports
- ✓ Segmentation and stratification
- ✓ Trending data
- ✓ Aggregate data



Buying an HRA allows organizations to not only administer the assessment but analyze and use the data in a meaningful way, while still keeping brand identity.

BUY

Buying an HRA allows organizations to not only administer the assessment but analyze and use the data in a meaningful way. **A purchased HRA is typically configured with the capability to analyze the data of each submission** and pair it with the appropriate values, assessments, resources, and interventions so that the end-user is provided with actionable steps to improve their health.

Similarly, many HRAs are also created in a way that allows the data to be accessed on the administrative backend so that more personalized interventions and recommendations can be issued if necessary. This data can also be reviewed to identify trends in population health, the best places to implement changes, and/or new wellness initiatives that should be explored.

SECURING AND HANDLING DATA



BUILD

All too often HRAs are created, administered, and then stored away—completely ignoring their actual purpose and full-potential as a wellness improvement tool. **But if you want to use the data, you must consider how you will protect personal health information (PHI).**

Of course, there's the "fear factor." Many organizations don't want to put themselves in a position where they've handled personal health information incorrectly and so they deliberately opt to not look at the information at all. Whatever the reason, the data gets stored away and serves virtually no purpose other than to check a box saying, "we administered the assessment."

Are you able to handle personal health information (PHI) correctly to:

- ✓ Identify highest risks
- ✓ Target interventions
- ✓ Protect the identity of each individual



BUY

By purchasing an HRA, the organization can avoid some of the "fear factor" by essentially putting the onus on the creator of the assessment. The organization won't need to worry about storage since responses and data are automatically stored securely by the administering platform. Additionally, they'll likely have the option to set the assessment to **collect responses anonymously** so that personally identifying information is never shared with the organization. And, they'll have the option to **receive aggregated reports** of the most serious health risks and which interventions have the most promise of accomplishing changed behaviors.

[Your Logo Here] WellSuite® Admin Center

Participants Reports

< Start Over
Create Participant

search by name, username, group name, etc

Include archived participants
Select All 2 Results

	First Name	Last Name	Username	Group Name	Status	DOB	Last HRA Started	Last Login
<input type="checkbox"/>	John	Doe	john.doe	Group A	Active	08/30/1988	08/30/2018	09/11/2018
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jane	Smith	jane.smith	Group B	Active	02/06/1999	02/06/2019	02/20/2019
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mike	Johnson	mike.johnson	Group A	Active	08/30/1988	08/30/2018	09/11/2018
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sarah	Williams	sarah.williams	Group B	Active	02/06/1999	02/06/2019	02/20/2019
<input type="checkbox"/>	David	Brown	david.brown	Group A	Active	08/30/1988	08/30/2018	09/11/2018
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emily	White	emily.white	Group B	Active	02/06/1999	02/06/2019	02/20/2019

UPFRONT & OVERHEAD COSTS



BUILD

It's not uncommon for organizations to undertake handling the logistics and deployment themselves in order

to save money. You may be surprised, then, to find that building an HRA can cost much more over the long run. Many HRA experiments begin with the intent to create a thorough, insightful questionnaire, but planners underestimate the costs. At the conclusion of the project all that's left is a set of questions.

Even if an entirely new team isn't being hired there will still be a time and resource cost associated with the HRA. For example, if five employees are assigned to the HRA project, they'll be unable to complete their usual tasks. This could result in the modification of deadlines and/or resource availability. And you must support the HRA after the build is released, both technological support and scientific support.

Are you accounting for the total cost of ownership, including:

- ✓ Salary and benefits for the individual(s) across research, programming, development and deployment functions
- ✓ Computer software and equipment costs for the entire team
- ✓ Annual cloud storage
- ✓ Subscriptions for each person who needs access to databases

BUY

Some organizations may try to avoid upfront fees or be locked into contracts by building their own. Buying an HRA can mean signing a multi-year agreement based on the number of individuals in your population.

However, when you factor in all the associated costs of building an HRA—personnel, overhead, development, technology, storage, et cetera—they can very quickly add up. Especially since, as we mentioned, an HRA needs to constantly be updated and maintained. When purchasing

an HRA it's true that an organization will need to agree to a contract and fee but those are known costs with a deliverable that's a known entity. And over time—perhaps even in that very first year—the cost of paying the annual fee to an HRA vendor is likely to be much less than maintaining an entire in-house staff dedicated to building the HRA.

CONCLUSION: BUY? OR BUILD?

Choosing whether to buy or build your HRA is a decision that will depend on the needs and capabilities of your unique organization.

For an HRA to provide value to a company and the individual it serves, it needs to:

- Be scientifically valid
- Assess health risk factors
- Provide resources and interventions
- Encourage the participant to take action for better health

Both options — buy and build — have their pros and cons, but the high upfront and overhead costs of creating and maintaining an HRA could knock the “build” option out of the running for many organizations.

Clients and participants will question their results — are you ready to defend your home-grown HRA with solid evidence?

For more information about Wellsource products, please visit www.wellsource.com or connect by email at well@wellsource.com

About Wellsource

Wellsource Inc. has been a premier provider of evidence-based health risk assessments (HRAs) and self-management tools for four decades. With a strong reputation for scientific research and validity, the company offers an innovative family of products that empower wellness companies, health plans, ACOs, and healthcare providers to inspire healthy lifestyles, prevent disease, and reduce unnecessary healthcare costs. Wellsource assessments connect lifestyle choices with healthy outcomes, measure readiness to change for maximum results, and drive informed decisions with actionable data.



Ready to consider HRA vendors? Learn the critical components you should consider when choosing an HRA.

Download our guide: **Choosing the Best Health Risk Assessment.**

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