2026

Seeing the Whole Person

WHY AKA SCREENING IS CRITICAL TO SAFE, COMPLIANT HIRING



UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND

AKA, “Also Known As” screening

For decades, background screening programs have been built around a comforting assumption: if you have a candidate's Social Security number, you have the keys to their past. One identifier. One clean record. One confident hiring decision. The logic seems sound, but this assumption can create dangerous blind spots.

The truth is that public record systems were never designed to work this way. Criminal courts, sanctions databases, and exclusion lists do not index records by Social Security number. They index by names (the name a person used at the time of arrest, conviction, or sanction) paired most often with a date of birth. That distinction may seem technical, but the consequences can be severe.

When organizations screen only a candidate's current name, they may be screening only a fraction of that individual's history. This is why AKA screening (“Also Known As” screening) has become so critical: it's the systematic process of identifying and searching all known names associated with a candidate, not just the one on their current application.

It's important to understand that AKAs aren't limited to complete former names from marriage or legal name changes. They also include name variations and derivatives that people commonly use. For example, someone legally named "Stephen Jones" might appear in public records as "Steve Jones" or "Stephen Jones III." When public records are searched, if the search doesn't produce an exact name match, a record under a name variation may not be located or reported. This means that both complete name changes (like maiden names) and variations of a legal name (like nicknames or suffixes) fall under the AKA umbrella and need to be searched to achieve comprehensive screening.

The Blind Spot No One Intends to Create



Most hiring teams don't deliberately cut corners. They collect SSNs. They run criminal searches. They feel confident they've done their due diligence.

But consider how easily gaps emerge:

- A nurse applies under her married name
- A caregiver once used a maiden name
- A sanction was recorded under a prior identity that never appears on today's application

None of these scenarios are rare. In fact, they happen routinely, yet when screening programs are configured to search a single name, those records remain invisible, not because they don't exist, but because no one ever looked in the right place.
This is where AKA screening becomes essential, turning identity discovery into actual protection by systematically searching all known names associated with a candidate.

Why SSNs Still Matter (Just Not the Way Most People Think)

Social Security numbers play a vital role in background screening, though not in the way most people assume. Rather than unlocking criminal records directly, SSNs help discover where someone has lived and which names they've used in connection with credit, utilities, or other identity-linked activities.

Tools like an SSN address and alias trace surface patterns that applications alone rarely reveal: prior surnames, alternate spellings, and historical addresses across counties and states. But discovery is only the first step. If those names are identified and then ignored, if searches are still run only under the primary name, the program hasn't meaningfully reduced risk. It has simply collected information without acting on it, which is why AKA screening is what turns identity discovery into actual protection.

AKA Screening: A Compliance Value-Add Across All Industries

The need for comprehensive AKA screening extends across every industry and hiring context. Whether you're screening employees for financial services, education, technology, transportation, or retail, the risk of missing critical records under prior names remains the same. Public record systems work the same way regardless of the role being filled: they index by name, not by Social Security number. Any organization that wants to conduct truly thorough due diligence on candidates needs to account for the multiple names individuals use throughout their lives.

That said, while AKA screening delivers compliance value universally, the consequences of gaps in screening vary significantly by industry. In some sectors, a missed record creates liability exposure or reputational risk. In healthcare, the stakes are fundamentally different.

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Why Healthcare Can't Afford to Get This Wrong

In many industries, a missed record is unfortunate. In healthcare, it can be catastrophic.

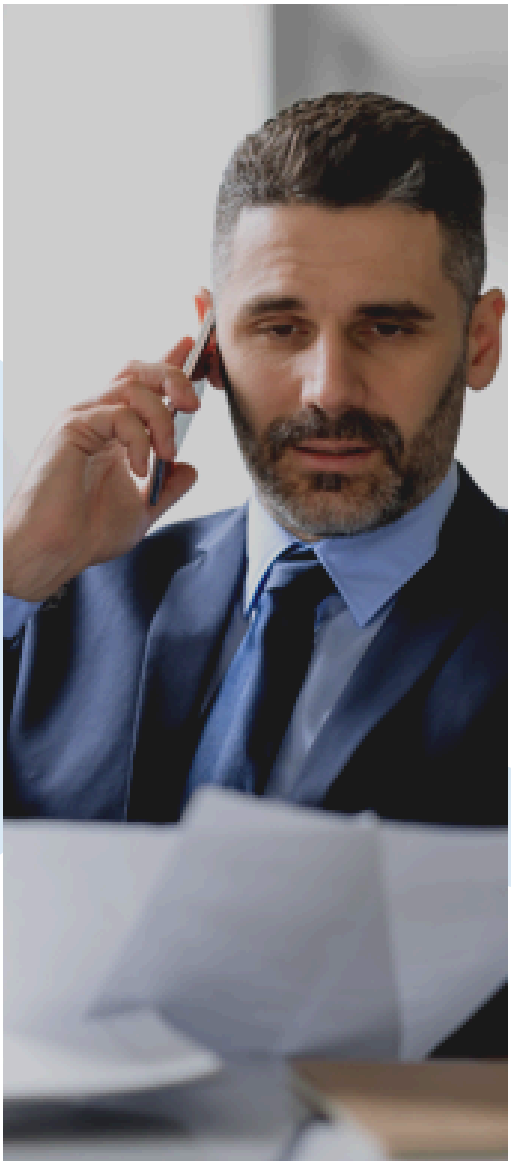


Hospitals, long-term care facilities, home health agencies, and behavioral health providers serve people who are often unable to protect themselves: the elderly, the disabled, the very young, and the medically fragile. Staff members have intimate access to patients' bodies, medications, personal information, and finances, which means the stakes of a hiring mistake extend far beyond typical employment risk.

Layered on top of that human responsibility is intense regulatory scrutiny. Healthcare organizations operate under federal and state oversight that includes sanctions and exclusion enforcement tied directly to Medicare and Medicaid billing privileges. When a sanction or serious conviction is missed because it exists under an unsearched prior name, regulators view that as a failure of diligence, and the consequences reflect that assessment.

When "We Didn't Know" Isn't a Defense

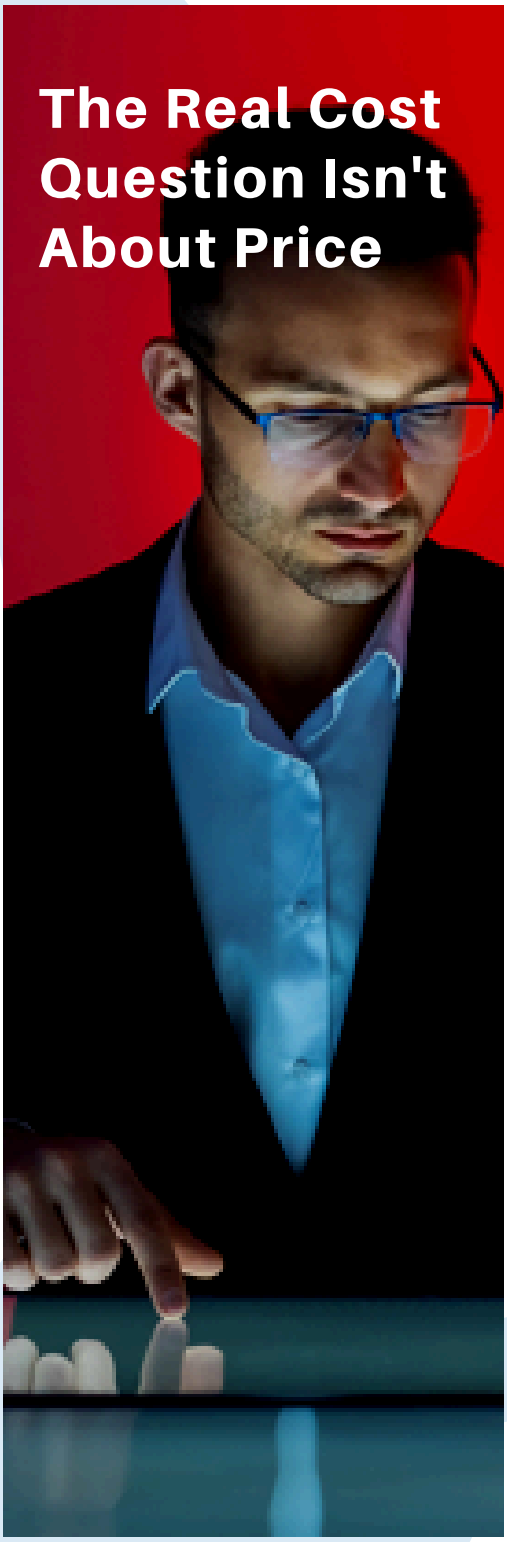
Healthcare leaders often assume that if something was missed, the screening provider must be at fault.



In reality, investigations frequently uncover a more uncomfortable truth: the provider delivered exactly what the organization asked for. The record existed, just under a different name that was never searched.

In one large healthcare system, a newly onboarded employee was found to have a serious issue that never appeared in their background check. The system initially blamed the screening process, but a deeper review showed that the conviction had been recorded under a prior name, and the organization's configuration simply did not include AKA screening.

In another case, a respected hospital system faced government penalties after employing an individual with a healthcare sanction tied to a maiden name. The sanction had never been flagged because the program was not set to search AKAs, not even on the sanctions product itself. In both cases, the lesson was clear: regulators do not accept "we didn't search that name" as an excuse.



The Real Cost Question Isn't About Price

This is where many organizations hesitate.

AKA screening isn't free. Every additional name can trigger additional searches, additional jurisdictions, and additional pass-through fees.

On paper, those costs feel tangible and immediate, while the risks feel hypothetical until something goes wrong.

A single missed sanction can lead to:

- Fines that exceed an employee's annual salary many times over
- Corrective action plans that drain internal resources for months or years
- Medicare and Medicaid eligibility placed under scrutiny
- Permanent damage to trust with patients and the public

Against that backdrop, the question shifts from "Is AKA screening expensive?" to "What are we willing to risk by not doing it?"

Why Pricing Models Matter More Than Most People Realize



One reason AKA screening has such a fraught reputation is the way it's traditionally priced.

Legacy models often advertise low base package prices, then layer on a la carte fees for every additional name, county, and product.

What begins as a modestly priced background check can balloon into a four-figure invoice when complexity arises, creating volatility that frustrates customers and discourages good risk management.

A more mature approach acknowledges reality upfront: people have multiple names, and comprehensive screening should account for that. By bundling anticipated AKA costs into package pricing, organizations gain the predictability they need. Finance teams can budget accurately, HR teams avoid invoice shock, and compliance leaders can enable the screening they know is necessary without fearing financial surprises.

Doing the Right Thing, Deliberately



Not every role carries the same level of risk, and thoughtful programs recognize that.

Many healthcare organizations begin by enabling AKA screening on their most regulated and high-impact searches (particularly healthcare sanctions) and then expand coverage as leadership buy-in and budget allow.

What matters most is intentionality.

Organizations should be able to clearly articulate:

- Where AKA screening is required
- Why it matters
- How it aligns with their mission to protect patients, staff, and the integrity of care

Because at the end of the day, the decision to implement thorough AKA screening goes beyond compliance to touch on the moral responsibility healthcare organizations hold. If this were your parent in a skilled nursing facility, or your child in a hospital bed, how confident would you want to be in the diligence of the hiring process?

About Universal Background Screening (UBS)



Universal Background Screening (UBS) partners with organizations across healthcare, financial services, education, transportation, and other regulated industries to design screening programs that reflect how public records actually work, not how people assume they work.

With deep expertise in healthcare screening, sanctions and exclusion searches, and identity discovery tools such as address and alias tracing, UBS helps organizations move beyond checkbox compliance to meaningful risk reduction. Their approach emphasizes transparency, configurability, and pricing models that support comprehensive screening without budget volatility.

If your organization is reassessing its approach to AKA screening or wants to better understand where hidden gaps may exist in your current program, UBS can help.

To learn more or speak with a screening expert, contact UBS at www.universalbackground.com/contact-universal