



Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Fact Sheet

What is a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)?

A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a software application designed to record and store client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons throughout a Continuum of Care (CoC)¹ jurisdiction. An HMIS is typically a web-based software application that homeless assistance providers use to coordinate service provision, manage their operations, and better serve their clients.

HMIS implementations can encompass geographic areas ranging from a single county to an entire state. An HMIS knits together homeless assistance providers within a community and creates a more coordinated and effective housing and service delivery system.

How do HUD and Congress use and support HMIS?

Policymakers and planners at the federal, state and local levels use aggregate HMIS data to obtain better information about the extent and nature of homelessness over time. HUD's HMIS initiative is in response to 2001 Congressional direction on the need for data and analysis on the extent of homelessness and the effectiveness of the McKinney-Vento Act² Programs including: developing unduplicated counts of clients served at the local level; analyzing patterns of use of people entering and exiting the homeless assistance system; and evaluating the effectiveness of these systems. Additional information on the Congressional Direction and an annual report to Congress on HUD's Strategy for Homeless Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting can be found at: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/strategy/>.

What data is entered into HMIS and how is it protected?

In 2004, HUD published data and technical standards for the implementation of HMIS. These requirements detail the data collection, participation, privacy, and security requirements for all agencies entering data into or having access to the HMIS. A copy of the HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice can be found at: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/standards/>.

All users of the HMIS must adhere to the privacy protections and security protocols in the Final Notice. Each organization must adopt a privacy notice, post a privacy sign that discloses uses of information, and implement a consent protocol (i.e. inferred, written, oral). Each individual workstation (i.e. computer), network, and server accessing, transmitting, or storing HMIS data must conform with the security standards. Each individual user must have a unique username and password to access the individual workstation and the HMIS application. Each computer must be stored in a secure location with updated virus protection, a locking screen saver, and be protected by an individual or networked firewall. Additional security provisions for system servers and networks include transmission encryption, mechanisms to limit access to the HMIS to previously approved workstations, off-site backup and recovery, proper disposal of storage devices, and system monitoring procedures. Data Standards training modules are available at: <http://www.hmis.info/resources.asp?cvid=235&ccid=1>.

What questions can HMIS help to answer at the local and national level about homelessness?

HMIS is not a national database of homeless people. Data on homeless persons is collected and maintained at the local level. HMIS can help local communities understand how many people are homeless in shelters and on the street; how many people are chronically or episodically homeless; the characteristics and service needs of those served, and which programs are most effective at reducing and ending homelessness.

HMIS can help HUD and Congress understand: how many people are homeless in the United States; who is homeless; where people receive shelter and services and where did they live before they became homeless; the patterns of homeless residential program use; and the nation's capacity for housing homeless people.

¹ For more information on HUD's Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs visit: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/>

² For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act visit: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/rulesandregs/laws/>

Why is HMIS a better alternative than point-in-time counts or aggregate service provider reports for gathering community-wide information on homelessness?

One night counts, commonly referred to as point-in-time counts provide a head count of the number of persons that are homeless in a community on one given night. Point-in-time counts do not usually provide information on whether a person was homeless for one day or a longer period of time and have been shown to under represent those persons who move in and out of homelessness throughout a time period.

Aggregate program level information provides duplicated information on the number of persons served, their characteristics, and needs by adding up program level data across a community about those persons who were served during a given time period. Although aggregate program information may offer broad based knowledge about the population served, the same person is often counted multiple times by the different programs and can lead to a limited understanding of patterns of service use or population size.

HMIS generates unduplicated counts of clients served and is designed to capture information over time (i.e. longitudinal data) about those persons moving in and out of the homeless assistance system, including changes in residential status, family composition, and service use. HMIS provides the most accurate picture of the extent and nature of homelessness within a community.

Who is responsible for implementing the HMIS?

The CoC is at the core of planning and service delivery for homeless individuals and families within any given community or geographic area. Each CoC is responsible for HMIS implementation, including planning, software selection, implementation and management of the database according to HUD's HMIS Data and Technical Standards.

The HMIS administering agency and/or the applicant/sponsor of a SHP dedicated HMIS project are agents of the CoC, manage HMIS operations on behalf of the CoC, and provide HMIS administration functions at the direction of the CoC. The experience of successful HMIS implementations has shown that active participation by CoC members in the management of the HMIS process, including establishing policies, procedures and protocols for privacy, data sharing, data analysis, reporting, and data validity is essential. Additional questions about HMIS grant requirements and funding are available under the Questions and Answers section of the 2006 Notice of Funding Availability at: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/grants/nofa06/grpcoc.cfm>.

What are the requirements regarding data submission by homeless service providers to the CoC?

Homeless assistance providers who participate in the local HMIS are required to submit data to the central server that is maintained by, or on behalf of the CoC's system administrator, at least once a year. With the exception of domestic violence agencies, the standard requires that all HUD McKinney-Vento funded programs that assist homeless persons submit the universal data elements (Name, SSN, DOB, Ethnicity/Race, Gender, Veteran's Status, Disabling Condition, Residence Prior to Program Entry, Zip Code of Last Permanent Address, Program Entry/Exit Date) for each client served annually. In addition, HUD McKinney-Vento programs that complete Annual Progress Reports (APRs)³ are required to submit program-specific data elements (Income and Sources, Education, Physical Disability, Developmental Disability, HIV/AIDS, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, Services Received, Destination and Reasons for Leaving) for each client served.

Given the unique circumstances of their clients, domestic violence shelters are not required to submit personal identifying client-level information to the CoC. In January 2006, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization of 2005⁴ became law and contains provisions that amend the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act relating to the disclosure of data to HMIS by domestic violence providers. HUD is analyzing the legislation to determine the most appropriate instructions and advice to convey to communities and domestic violence programs.

Where can I find additional information on HMIS?

Additional information is available at: HUD's website: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/> or on HUD's HMIS technical assistance website: www.HMIS.info.

³ For more information on HUD's Annual Progress Report visit: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/apr.doc>

⁴ Public Law 109-162 is available at [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:H.R.3402:\(Section 605\)](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:H.R.3402:(Section 605))