

HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (HMIS) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEWS

US Department of
Housing and Urban
Development



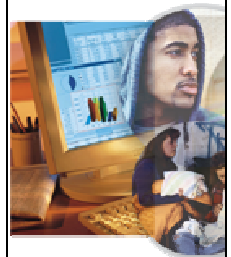
August 2008 HMIS Technical Assistance News

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Revisions to the HMIS Data and Technical Standards

Since their implementation in 2004, the HMIS Data and Technical Standards have helped to promote uniformity in the collection of information on homeless individuals and families nationwide. Since then, however, issues have surfaced that are not adequately covered in the current standards. In 2007, to keep pace with the changing technological and programmatic landscape surrounding HMIS, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development concluded that the time had come to revise the Data and Technical Standards.

Over the past 10 months, HUD has convened a series of specialized workgroups to review the current HMIS Data and Technical Standards and develop a comprehensive set of recommended revisions. As originally discussed in the January HMIS newsletter, HUD organized topic-specific workgroups, each consisting of expert advisors, HMIS practitioners and technical assistance providers. The workgroups covered HMIS security, privacy, data quality, and establishing uniform definitions of episodes of homelessness and household relationships. A final workgroup was convened to align the Data and Technical Standards with concurrent revisions to HUD's Annual Progress Report (APR). Key revisions to the APR include revamped reporting formats for program characteristics, client income, and disabilities and the addition of a section on program performance measurement.

Along with the recommendations of each workgroup, additional topics emerged across the discussions that warranted more explicit consideration in the Standards. In response, HUD developed additional recommendations for HMIS project governance, definitions of key terms (such as "HMIS" and "HMIS participation"), information about programs, and program enrollment data in an HMIS, and standards on HMIS software capabilities. In a parallel process, a workgroup inclusive of domestic violence providers and advocates as well as HMIS experts has been established to discuss domestic violence

provider data and HMIS. The results of these discussions will eventually be incorporated into a separate public notice, as appropriate.

With the initial set of recommendations nearly complete, software-related recommendations from each workgroup are being shared with HMIS software providers for feedback. Representatives from each software service provider were invited to participate in this process to ensure that HUD understands the feasibility of each recommended revision and identifies individual standards that require detailed guidance for implementation. Submitted feedback will be collated and discussed by representatives from each workgroup before the proposed revisions are published for public comment. These revisions will be a central part of the agenda of the HUD 2008 National HMIS Training in September. See article: [HUD 2008 HMIS Training: Setting the Standard](#).

Have You Visited HMIS.INFO Lately? **HMIS.info Introduces New Features**

HMIS.info has a fresh look and new and improved features. The redesigned home page highlights the many tools that HMIS.info has to help CoCs manage their HMIS, including classic features such as logging an "ask the expert" and finding a resource and newer tools such as implementation home pages and the job board. In case you cannot find what you are looking for right away, the search feature has been improved. A single search phrase will now return results sorted by relevance that may include resources, community information, or software products.

The new home page design also combines the most recent content on the site in one place, including announcements, resources, jobs, events, or updates of community pages. These latest updates are also now available as an "RSS" feed. By adding the URL: "<http://www.hmis.info/newsfeed.ashx>" to your RSS feedreader or customizable home page such as iGoogle, the latest HMIS.info content updates are automatically delivered directly to your workstation or homepage.

Collaboratives also have a new home on HMIS.info. If you are participating in a collaborative, you can establish a home page for your group on HMIS.info. You can use this page to showcase your collaborative and its goals, keep collaborative members informed, and share documents.

To obtain direct access to update information about your HMIS Implementation or your collaborative, or to provide any feedback about HMIS.info, go to <http://www.hmis.info/AskExpert.aspx> and choose the topic "HMIS.info issues."

AHAR DATA COLLECTION **MOVING TO THE WEB**

Data for the 2008 AHAR will be collected through a website that is currently in the development stage. HUD anticipates unveiling the website at the 2008 HMIS Training. Participating communities will have the ability to directly add, view, and edit AHAR data. The website will also allow participating communities to interact online with the national AHAR team and view a number of reports based on their data, including reports on validation, total extrapolated counts and raw data entry printouts.

In the future, the site will allow communities to compare data across multiple years and to other communities.

2007 AHAR RELEASED IN JULY

The 2007 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress was released on July 29, 2008. This is the third report in a series of annual reports on homelessness in America and the first to be based on a full year of emergency shelter and transitional housing HMIS data reported by communities across the country. This longitudinal information on homelessness is important to understanding the nature and scope of homelessness. Going forward, this 2007 report will provide a baseline for measuring changes in homelessness from one year to the next.

The 2007 AHAR is based on two data sources: data provided by all Continuums of Care as part of their 2007 HUD application for funding and HMIS data covering Federal fiscal year 2007 obtained from 98

communities – 61 sites from a nationally representative sample of communities and 37 CoCs that have advanced HMIS systems and were able to contribute high quality data. As a result, the estimates provided in the 2007 report are more precise than previous reports.

The full report is available at: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/3rdHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

HUD 2008 HMIS Training: Setting the Standard
Registration is Open!
September 21-23, 2008
Atlanta, GA

HUD is sponsoring a 2008 HMIS training for HMIS grantees, Continuum of Care (CoC) representatives, and HMIS lead agencies. The training is scheduled for **Sunday, September 21, 2008** through **Tuesday, September 23, 2008** in **Atlanta, Georgia**. Online registration and a draft agenda are available on the HMIS Training website (www.hmistraining.info). Register now!

The goal of the training is to provide HMIS stakeholders with an important opportunity to learn about HUD's evolving vision for HMIS and electronic reporting. The sessions will train participants on the tools necessary to: understand the proposed revisions to HUD's HMIS Data and Technical Standards, prepare for changes to the new HMIS-based APR, successfully participate in the AHAR, and increase local capacity to use HMIS data to measure program- and system-level performance.

The Training will take place in the Westin Peachtree Hotel, located in the heart of downtown Atlanta's convention district and steps from the new Georgia Aquarium – the world's largest aquarium. Participation in the training is free, but requires advance registration.

**NOW ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR
HMIS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**

The nomination period for HMIS achievement awards to be presented at the training has begun! Outstanding Achievements in HMIS can consist of excellence in:

- Increasing HMIS coverage
- Improving data quality
- Using HMIS data to directly improve service delivery or local planning
- Effective project management
- Technological innovations
- Training services or delivery
- Other (must specify)

Go to <http://www.hmis.info/nominate.aspx> to make a nomination today. The deadline for nominations is August 15, 2008.

HMIS XML Schema Version 2.8 Released

In April 2008, HUD released the HMIS XML Schema definition version 2.8. The HMIS XML Schema is a common, vendor-neutral data format that supports integration of HMIS data across multiple systems. This is the first major revision since May 2006. The version's new features, many of which were requested by vendors or community implementers, will enhance interoperability efforts within the HMIS sector and across human services more generally.

Major changes in this revision include the following:

- **AIRS Compatibility:** The HMIS schema is now compatible with the Alliance of Information and Referral Services (AIRS) schema, so that vendors can send a single XML file with both Client data and Resource data.
- **Transmission Protocols:** The schema package proposes new technical methods for transferring data automatically, rather than relying on implementers to determine their own protocols.
- **Customization:** The new version also allows greater flexibility for implementers to extend the schema and add new elements required by particular project.

The new schema also supports more flexibility in grouping household members and adds elements

related to tracking client needs and releases of information (ROIs).

Some have asked why a new version is being released now, when HUD is in the midst of revising the data standards. (See article: [Revisions to the HMIS Data and Technical Standards](#)) Though draft revised standards are expected to be released within the next few months, the final standards are not likely to be complete for a year or longer, with additional time needed to develop and test a new version of the schema. Rather than wait another year, Version 2.8 will keep the field current, and a subsequent version will be released when a Final Notice of the revised standards are complete.

For more information, visit: <http://www.hmis.info/Resources/919/HMIS-XML-Schema-Package-v.-2.8.aspx>.

Report from April NHSDC Conference in Portland, Oregon

NHSDC (www.nhsdc.org), a membership organization focused on developing effective leadership for the best use of information technology to manage human services, convened its spring conference April 22nd and 23rd in Portland, OR. Over 100 participants from throughout the country joined together for the "Impact of Collaboration" conference. Participants represented CoCs and HMIS implementations, including planners, system and agency administrators, and end-users; the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems and 2-1-1 providers; funders, including private, state, and federal; and disaster organizations. The Portland conference also offered a full track dedicated to information integration, as illustrated by the XML, data standards, and Disaster Data Exchange Project sessions.

Important issues affecting HMIS implementations identified at the conference include:

- Achieving compliance with the HUD HMIS Data and Technical Standards and how to advance beyond compliance, including utilization of HMIS for measuring 10-Year Plan goals;
- Obtaining full HMIS participation by all homeless service providers in a community and achieving data quality thresholds;
- Increasing capacity to generate needed reports for funders, including the AHAR;
- Addressing costs to maintain a system, including system support, on-going End-user trainings, and Policy and Procedures updates;
- Balancing the benefits and limitations of a closed versus open system;
- Building data integration capacities between HMIS and other human service applications;
- Supporting collaboration between homeless service providers and disaster planning and response organizations to enhance the provision of care and use of data during and post disaster;
- Implementing and managing data warehousing; and
- Identifying innovative uses of HMIS, including incorporating Geographical Information Systems (GIS) with HMIS data, generation of a Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) from HMIS, and harnessing HMIS for use in Point in Time (PIT) counts.

The next NHSDC Conference is September 24, 2008 in Atlanta, GA, following the 2008 HMIS training.

HUD Advanced Homeless Data Users Meeting

For the past two years, HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPs) has sponsored a peer-to-peer Advanced Homeless Data Users Meeting to highlight advanced uses of homeless data, often generated from HMIS, for purposes of planning, evaluation, system analysis, and advanced program operations. The Advanced Homeless Data Users Meeting is held in conjunction with the NHSDC spring meeting to promote peer-to-peer learning and cross pollination of ideas and advanced uses of HMIS data.

The meeting, convened in Portland, Oregon this past spring, brings together administrators, researchers, solutions providers, national technical assistance providers, and HUD staff to share and learn best practices. Presentations included: evaluating the effectiveness of transitional housing programs, uses of GIS technology for program planning, integrating human service planning throughout a county geography, a comprehensive evaluation of efforts to end chronic homelessness, and

integrating homeless data across an eleven-county region.

Each presentation demonstrated how communities use data from HMIS to more fully understand the extent and nature of homelessness in their own community. Later this fall HUD will publish a best practices document comprised of the eight case studies presented at the meeting. The final presentation document and a sampling of presentations will be available at the national HMIS Training in September. Last year's report can be found at <http://www.hmis.info/Resources/899/Demonstrating-the-Uses-of-Homeless-Data-at-the-Local-Level.aspx>.

Community Spotlight: Missouri Balance of State Remote HMIS Training

The Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care currently covers the 101 Missouri counties not covered in smaller, more urban continuums, and includes 50 agencies. This extensive area makes consistent comprehensive training of providers and staff in the HMIS difficult. The Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW), which houses the Missouri Balance of State Homeless Missourians Information System (HMIS) Project, has chosen to tackle this problem by introducing a schedule of remote trainings, using Go To Meetings software to connect to staff. Go To Meetings allow the trainees to communicate with the trainers and ask questions in real time. The trainings are coordinated with Missouri Balance of State HMIS Project staff and the staff at MISI, their HMIS system administrator, with MISI conducting the training sessions.

To help accommodate the different skill levels around the state, two different trainings are offered on a regular basis. All staff requiring training can sign up for the Basic training, which is offered one to two times a month. The basic training covers logging on to the HMIS, searching clients, intake, required fields, referrals, updating records, as well as several other actions. Training participants are required to take a short test covering what they learned after the basic training before they are issued an HMIS username to ensure that users are properly trained before they begin to work with the system.

The Advanced Training is offered every other month and covers recording a no show, changing family size during a shelter/housing stay, case management, financial assistance, exiting a client from the program, individual case plans, and various reports, including APR and ESG reports.

These online trainings are not a substitute for one-on-one compliance checks and additional training. Missouri Balance of State HMIS Staff still offers one-on-one training for agencies that request it, or those whose risk assessment monitoring has shown to need it. The staff also recommends that long-time users take the basic training on an as-needed basis to brush-up their skills.

If you have any questions about Missouri Balance of State's remote HMIS training, please contact Sandy Wilson at wilson@masw.org or John Robertson jrobertson@masw.org.

Want to see your community featured in the HMIS.info newsletter? Email Louise Rothschild Louise_Rothschild@abtassoc.com.

NEW HMIS BED UTILIZATION TOOL AVAILABLE

A new and improved [bed utilization tool](#) is now available for download from at: <http://www.hmis.info/Resources/908/HMIS-Bed-Utilization-Tool.aspx>. The new tool has been simplified to make it easier to use, while still allowing communities to track HMIS bed utilization rates for each of their providers. HMIS bed utilization rates are a significant indicator of provider data quality and monthly monitoring can help communities assess their own data before submitting it in reports. Utilization rates are also used in assessing a community's data for the AHAR. Once data quality are verified, the bed utilization tool also provides invaluable data for the CoC on point-in-time utilization trends for specific programs and the homeless system as a whole. The new tool comes with instructions and additional support is provided through the "[Ask the Expert](#)" function on www.HMIS.info.