
Report to Congress:

**HUD's Strategy For Homeless Data
Collection, Analysis and Reporting**

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HUD's Strategy For Homeless Data Collection, Reporting and Analysis

I. Introduction

This report is in response to Congressional direction in the Conference Report (H.R. Report 106-988) on the FY 2001 HUD Appropriations Act requiring HUD to report to the Appropriations Committees on its strategy for collecting data on homelessness. The Conference Report states:

The conferees reiterate and endorse language included in the Senate report regarding the need for data and analysis on the extent of homelessness and the effectiveness of McKinney Act programs.... The conferees concur with the importance of developing unduplicated counts of the homeless at the local level, as well as taking whatever steps are possible to draw inferences from this data about the extent and nature of homelessness in the nation as a whole.

Likewise, the conferees agree that local jurisdictions should be collecting an array of data on homelessness in order to prevent duplicate counting of homeless persons, and to analyze their patterns of use of assistance, including how they enter and exit the homeless assistance system and the effectiveness of the systems. HUD is directed to take the lead in working with communities toward this end, and to analyze jurisdictional data within three years. Implementation and operation of Management Information Systems (MIS), and collection and analysis of MIS data, have been made eligible uses of Supportive Housing Program funds. The conferees direct HUD to report to the Committees within six months after the date of enactment of this Act on its strategy for achieving this goal, including details on financing, implementing, and maintaining the effort.

As stipulated above, the goal is that jurisdictions collect an array of homeless data including an unduplicated count. In order to accomplish this goal, HUD will assist communities by: (1) flexibly implementing the new Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) eligible activity under the Supportive Housing Program in the 2001 McKinney-Vento competition; (2) initiating a comprehensive technical assistance program to help local jurisdictions collect unduplicated client-level data by 2004; (3) developing an approach to obtaining meaningful data for an Annual Homeless Assessment Report from a nationally representative sample of jurisdictions, and (4) analyzing the most viable approaches to obtaining homeless client-level reporting.

II. Implementing the New Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Eligible Activity and Initiative

Background

To assist jurisdictions and providers in collecting local homeless data and achieving the above stated goal, in the FY 2001 HUD Appropriations Act, Congress made the cost of implementing and operating a HMIS and analyzing its data a new eligible activity under the Supportive Housing Program (SHP):

Section 423 (a)(7) Management Information System. A grant for the costs of implementing and operating management information systems for purposes of collecting unduplicated counts of homeless people and analyzing patterns of use of assistance funded under this Act.

Congress also directed HUD take the lead in requiring every jurisdiction to have unduplicated client-level data within three years. The reasons for the emphasis and specific directives on encouraging these systems were stated in the FY 2001 Senate Report 106-410:

The Committee believes that HUD must collect data on the extent of homelessness in America as well as the effectiveness of the McKinney homeless assistance programs in addressing this condition. These programs have been in existence for some 15 years and there has never been an overall review or comprehensive analysis on the extent of homelessness or how to address it. The Committee believes that it is essential to develop an unduplicated count of homeless people, and an analysis of their patterns of use of assistance (HUD McKinney homeless assistance as well as other assistance both targeted and not targeted to homeless people), including how they enter and exit the homeless assistance system and the effectiveness of assistance.

Implementing the HMIS/Homeless Data Strategy in the 2001 McKinney -Vento Competition

HUD implemented the HMIS initiative in the 2001 homeless competition by instituting changes in the application: 1) asking for information on the community's HMIS activities in the comprehensive homeless plan section; 2) adding HMIS activities as eligible costs in the SHP; and 3) allowing single-purpose and any other SHP project to request funding for the HMIS activities. Moreover, HUD added a new section on HMIS to the Questions and Answers (Q&A) Supplement to the application to provide guidance on requesting funds for HMIS activities. The new HMIS eligibility was highlighted and fully described in national SuperNOFA training broadcasts for applicants on March 16 and April 18, 2001.

1. Comprehensive Homeless Plan

While not required by Congress, HUD included the following Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) section (section 7) in the comprehensive homeless plan narrative in Exhibit 1, which is completed by every applying jurisdiction.

7. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). (Non-scoring section) *[Your response to this item will not count towards your 25 page limitation.]*

a. HMIS can enable homeless service providers to collect uniform information about clients over time. This information can help to improve services and planning as well as to more accurately determine the size, characteristics and needs of a community's homeless population. Please inform us about efforts of your continuum to implement an HMIS, by checking which one of the following best reflects the status of your CoC in having a continuum-wide, client-based HMIS (see Section P of the "Questions and Answers" supplement to the application before completing):

- The CoC has not yet considered implementing a HMIS.
- The CoC has been meeting and is considering implementing a HMIS.
- The CoC has decided to implement a HMIS and is selecting needed software and hardware.
- The CoC has implemented a continuum-wide HMIS.
- The CoC is seeking to update or change its current HMIS.
- The CoC is seeking to expand the coverage of the current system.

b. **If your CoC has already implemented a HMIS**, identify in the table below how many of the Current Inventory Beds/Units listed on your Gaps Analysis chart are included in the CoC's HMIS:

	Current Inventory Beds/Units in HMIS	
	Families	Individuals
Emergency Shelter	_____	_____
Transitional Housing	_____	_____
Permanent Supportive Housing	_____	_____

HUD will use this data to assess the current number of HMISs in the nation and their coverage of residential units for the homeless. This information will assist HUD in identifying and working toward a nationally representative sample of jurisdictions having comprehensive homeless data for the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. In addition, this information will form the basis for a comprehensive technical assistance program to communities starting a new HMIS or expanding an existing one.

2. HMIS as a New SHP Activity

The law specifies that the costs of **implementing and operating** a HMIS are eligible activity costs in the Supportive Housing Program. The Q&A Supplement provides guidance to applicants on the categories of activities that are and are not an eligible HMIS cost. The three major eligible HMIS costs are: 1) purchasing HMIS software; 2) leasing or purchasing needed computer equipment for providers and the central server; and 3) staffing associated with operating the HMIS, including training of providers, day-to-day administration of the HMIS, analyzing HMIS data and preparing reports for providers, the community and HUD, using HMIS data.

The Q&A also specified that the costs of **planning and development** of HMIS systems are **not** eligible. Planning includes all costs incurred prior to implementation. In addition to planning activities, SHP funds may not be spent on the development of entirely new software systems. HUD believes there are now sufficient vendors in the marketplace with quality software so that individual communities do not need to finance the development of new software. Finally, SHP funds may not be used to **replace State and local government funding** for an existing HMIS.

3. Using 2001 McKinney-Vento Competitive Funds to Implement and Operate a Community-wide HMIS

SHP supportive services funds can be used for a HMIS. Two approaches are available: a) a **single dedicated HMIS project** or b) a **cost-sharing or levy approach** across some or all new or renewal SHP projects that are applying in the 2001 competition. HUD developed the cost-sharing/levy approach because most, if not all new non-permanent housing projects, including new HMIS projects, might be passed over in order for HUD to meet the 30 percent permanent housing requirement.

Dedicated HMIS project. A jurisdiction can decide to have an eligible applicant submit a Supportive Services Only (SSO) project for the sole purpose of implementing and operating the jurisdiction's HMIS. In this case the applicant would complete a project summary and respond to the following section:

7. Homeless Management Information System. Describe the following:

- a. How the CoC's homeless needs will be assessed, resources allocated and services coordinated more efficiently and effectively through the introduction of a new or expanded CoC-wide HMIS.
- b. Demonstrate the level of participation in the proposed New or Expanded HMIS project below:
New HMIS. Demonstrate that at least 50 percent of the beds/units (emergency, transitional and McKinney-Vento permanent housing) currently in place in the continuum will be included in a CoC-wide HMIS.

Expansion and/or update of existing HMIS. Describe the current level of participation in the HMIS of operating residential homeless assistance projects. List the names of additional projects which will participate in an expanded HMIS.

- c. Identify the lead agency designated to oversee the HMIS project.
- d. Provide the timetable for implementing the new or expanded HMIS as proposed in the application.
- e. Demonstrate that no State or local government funds would be replaced with the funding being requested of HUD for this project.

Shared HMIS Funding. Alternatively, a jurisdiction can decide to spread the cost of a community-wide HMIS across multiple SHP projects. In this approach, all or some of the new and renewal SHP projects that a community will be including on its priority list would add to each individual project's request its share of the community-wide HMIS cost. If the project is a SHP renewal it could only request the supportive services funding for HMIS activities if its current grant already includes supportive services in its budget. Finally, an SHP renewal's total project request, including its share of the cost of the HMIS, is limited, as are all SHP renewals, to the final year amount of its existing grant plus a reasonable increase of up to 5 percent.

Supportive Services Chart. The Dedicated HMIS project and all new and renewal projects using the Shared HMIS approach would complete the following Project Application's Supportive Services budget (Section F: Chart 3), detailing the specific HMIS costs being requested.

Chart 3: Supportive Services

Supportive Services	SHP Dollars Requested (up to 3 yrs.)	Estimated No. of Persons Served (point in time)	Estimated No. of Persons Served (up to 3 yrs.)
Outreach			
Case management			
>>>>11 Other Supportive Services Lines Not Shown>>>>			
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS):			
• Software			
• Hardware			
• Staffing			
• Other			
• Subtotal HMIS Dollars Requested			
Total SHP Dollars Requested*			

(emphasis added)

4. Flexible Policy Responses to Assisting the Funding of HMIS

HUD has and will continue to adopt a flexible approach in administering the new HMIS eligible activity in order to encourage the collection of reliable homeless data locally and nationally. Specifically, HUD has adopted the following policies to ensure comprehensive and cost effective approaches to implementing and operating HMISs:

- HUD will permit existing projects to amend their budgets to permit funding in a cost-sharing approach.
- A single dedicated HMIS project can be included under one of the state's CoCs yet provide HMIS coverage for an entire state.
- SHP HMIS funds can be used for data collection, reporting and analysis of projects not otherwise receiving HUD McKinney-Vento funds or not receiving any Federal funds to help ensure a community has an unduplicated count.
- Emergency Shelter Grants may support the implementation and operation of a HMIS under essential services.

III. Implementing a Comprehensive Technical Assistance Program to Assist Communities

Current HMIS Technical Assistance

In response to the Congressionally-required study of local HMISs data in a report on the 1999 HUD Appropriation Act, HUD contracted for two Technical Assistance (TA) assessments regarding the methods for implementing HMIS systems and an assessment of existing public and private HMIS software. The following are two valuable reports on Homeless Management Information Systems (HMISs) prepared by the Center for Social Policy, McCormack Institute, University of Massachusetts-Boston. The "HMIS In-Depth Look" report was funded through a HUD TA contract, and the "Implementation Guide" was funded through a Massachusetts State Office/Community Planning and Development Division TA contract.

Homeless Management Information Systems An In-Depth Look. The report includes a technical review of various HMIS software products, an analysis of the costs involved in operating these systems, and a review of the data elements they can collect.

Homeless Services Tracking System Implementation Guide. The guide is designed to assist communities in developing homeless services tracking systems. It discusses the benefits of implementing a tracking system, the types of information available, and the elements to consider in designing a system. The guide provides four potential models for homeless tracking system design and includes a list of resources and sample forms and procedures from some of the programs.

Both reports were discussed in HUD's national McKinney-Vento 2001 competition telecasts and are referenced as resources in HUD's 2001 homeless competition website. These reports are available for downloading through the HUD website at:

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/nofa2001/homeis.cfm>

As of April 2, 2000, the reports site has had 14,000 "hits" since its initiation in January 2001.

Future HMIS Technical Assistance

HUD is finalizing a comprehensive TA initiative. HUD plans to have peer-to-peer assistance provided by staff from communities that have already successfully gone through an extensive HMIS planning and implementation process. Moreover, the TA contract will be used to keep the above referenced documents current.

III. Implementing an Annual Homeless Assessment Report

Background: The Growth of Local HMISs

A number of cities have long-standing comprehensive HMISs that permit the tracking of client use of shelter and supportive services over time. Many other communities are in the process of implementing such systems, either developing their own unique tracking systems, or adapting free share-ware or one of various commercially-developed software products for local use. The sophistication of HMIS software has grown at the same time that the costs of such systems have declined due to consumer knowledge, collective bargaining consortiums and vendor competition. It is notable that these new systems also have developed very stringent confidentiality protections on consumer data use, a keen interest for providers and communities.

A community's decision to collect uniform client information over time can improve client services, homeless service program management, and policy making in the following ways:

- The homeless consumer benefits from streamlined referrals, coordinated case management, and reduction of duplicative intakes and assessments.
- Service agencies gain management and reporting tools and mechanisms for internal and external service coordination.
- Service providers, policy makers, and advocates can use the unduplicated counts of homeless persons, population characteristics and other HMIS data for more efficient and effective responses to homelessness.
- Community analysis of HMIS data is critical to accurately calculating the size and needs of the homeless population, as well as the outcomes of specific interventions and programs.

Congressional Direction on Local HMIS Research

Congress recognized the promise of these systems in the FY 1999 HUD Appropriations Act by calling upon HUD to collect data from a representative sample of existing local HMISs. Specific directives on the scope and nature of the local information that should be collected are stated in House Report 105-610:

Finally, HUD is directed to work with a representative sample of jurisdictions to collect, at a minimum, the following data: the unduplicated count of clients served; client characteristics such as age, race, sex, disability status; units (days) and type of housing received (shelter, transitional, permanent) and services rendered.

Outcome information such as housing stability, income and health status should be collected as well.

Armed with information like this, HUD's ability to assess the success of homeless programs and grantees will be vastly improved. If funds are necessary to implement this directive with new tracking systems, HUD may use the funds requested for technical assistance.

The Department made a competitive award in December 1999 to Aspen Systems, Inc. to collect information for the above directive and to analyze local HMIS efforts through a subcontract with the University of Pennsylvania.

Congressional Direction on an Annual Homeless Assessment Report

In the FY 2001 HUD appropriation process the Senate Report 106-410 directed HUD to continue assessing data from local HMIS:

...to continue on an annual basis to provide a report on a nationally representative sample of jurisdictions whose local MIS data can be aggregated yearly to document the change in demographics of homelessness, demand for homeless assistance, to identify patterns in utilization of assistance, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of assistance.

...The Committee instructs HUD to use these funds to contract with experienced academic institutions to analyze data and report to the agency, jurisdictions, providers and the Committee on findings.

Implementing an Annual Homeless Assessment

HUD will build upon the current work it has undertaken on reporting on homeless data from 12 jurisdictions with HMISs. HUD will assess which additional jurisdictions could be included in a nationally representative sample for purposes of conducting the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.

IV. Implementing a Homeless Client-level McKinney-Vento Program Reporting System

Background

In addition to working with communities to have them collect client-level data in three years and preparing an Annual Homeless Assessment, Congress gave direction to HUD concerning client-level reporting in its Annual Progress Report in FY 2001 Senate Report 106-410:

Further, the bill includes language allowing HUD...to further its efforts to develop an automated, client-level APR system.

Implementing a Client-level Reporting System

HUD will assess the technical feasibility of receiving client-level reporting on client characteristics and outcomes through the Annual Progress Report for each of its thousands of operating projects. HUD will assess the technical issues and program implications of client-level reporting from its grantees, including but not limited to, the following: proposed alternatives, their costs for HUD and grantees, implementation advantages and

disadvantages, issues of confidentiality, and the use of HMISs to provide client-level APR reporting. HUD will consider approaches that minimize duplicate reporting and reporting burdens, and address the need for national standards given different data systems used across the country. HUD will develop a short- and long-term strategy for implementing and operating the client-level reporting system.

V. Financing the Strategy

The FY 2001 HUD Appropriations Act provided for resources from the Homeless Assistance Grants account to address the provision of technical assistance for management information systems and the development of the client-level program reporting system:

Provided further, That up to 1.5 percent of the funds appropriated under this heading is transferred to the Working Capital Fund to be used for technical assistance for management information systems and to develop an automated, client-level Annual Performance Report System.

HUD will utilize approximately half of the funds allocated to the Working Capital Fund along with previous unobligated TA funds for implementing two years of the above strategy.

VI. Summary

The Department is implementing a comprehensive strategy that is responsive to Congressional direction on improving the quality of data and analysis on the extent and nature of homelessness in the nation. In light of the goal set by Congress, HUD will work with jurisdictions to implement HMISs as a means of collecting unduplicated counts of the homeless and to analyze service use and the effectiveness of local systems in reducing homelessness. HUD will build a nationally representative sample of HMISs to prepare an Annual Homeless Assessment Report. A comprehensive TA program is being developed to facilitate the implementation and operation of HMISs and to develop a national sample. Finally, HUD plans to develop a homeless client-level Annual Progress Report system for its McKinney-Vento programs using, to the maximum extent possible, data from local HMISs.