

Glossary of HMIS Definitions and Acronyms

ACF – See Administration for Children and Families

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) – A division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ACF has a budget for 65 programs that target children, youth and families, including for assistance with welfare, child support enforcement, adoption assistance, foster care, child care, and child abuse.

AIRS – See Alliance of Information & Referral Systems

AHAR – See Annual Homeless Assessment Report

Alliance of Information & Referral Systems (AIRS) – The professional association for more than 1,000 community information and referral (I&R) providers serving primarily the United States and Canada. AIRS maintains a taxonomy of human services.

Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) – Annual report to Congress on the extent and nature of homelessness

Annual Progress Report (APR) – Report that tracks program progress and accomplishments in HUD's competitive homeless assistance programs. The APR provides the grantee and HUD with information necessary to assess each grantee's performance.

APR – See Annual Progress Report.

Audit Trail - A record showing who has accessed a computer system and what operations he or she has performed during a given period of time. Most database management systems include an audit trail component.

Bed Utilization - An indicator of whether shelter beds are occupied on a particular night or over a period of time.

Biometrics - Refers to the identification of a person by computerized images of a physical feature, usually a person's fingerprint.

CDBG – See Community Development Block Grant

CHO – See Covered Homeless Organization

Chronic homelessness - HUD defines a chronically homeless person as an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. To be considered chronically homeless, persons must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter during that time.

Client Intake - The process of collecting client information upon entrance into a program.

CoC – See Continuum of Care

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – A flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. Beginning in 1974, the CDBG program is one of the longest continuously run programs at HUD. The CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to 1,180 general units of local and State governments.

Consumer - An individual or family who has or is currently is experiencing homelessness.

Continuum of Care (CoC) – A community with a unified plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. HUD funds many homeless programs and HMIS implementations through Continuums of Care grants.

Coverage - A term commonly used by CoCs or homeless providers to refer to the number of beds represented in an HMIS divided by the total number of beds available.

Covered Homeless Organization (CHO) – Any organization (including its employees, volunteers, affiliates, contractors, and associates) that records, uses, or processes data on homeless clients for an HMIS. The requirements of the HMIS Final Notice apply to all Covered Homeless Organizations.

Data Quality - The accuracy and completeness of all information collected and reported to the HMIS.

Data Standards - See HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice.

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Date of Birth (DOB) – the date a person was born

Dedicated HMIS - the cost of the HMIS implementation is its own component in the SuperNOFA project exhibit

De-identification - The process of removing or altering data in a client record that could be used to identify the person. This technique allows research, training, or other non-clinical applications to use real data without violating client privacy.

Department of Education (DOE)

Digital Certificates - An attachment to an electronic message used for security purposes. The most common use of a digital certificate is to verify that the user sending a message is who he or she claims to be and to provide the receiver with the means to encode a reply.

Disabling Condition - A disabling condition in reference to chronic homelessness is defined by HUD as a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions. A disabling condition limits an individual's ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living.

DOB – See Date of Birth

DOE – See Department of Education

Domestic Violence (DV) - Occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically dominate another. Includes physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, economic deprivation, and threats of violence. Violence can be criminal and includes physical assault (hitting, pushing, shoving, etc.), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking. Although emotional, psychological and financial abuse are not criminal behaviors, they are forms of abuse and can lead to criminal violence. There are a number of dimensions of DV. Including: mode - physical, psychological, sexual and/or social; frequency - on/off, occasional, chronic; and severity – in terms of both psychological or physical harm and the need for treatment, including transitory or permanent injury, mild, moderate, and severe up to homicide.

DV – See Domestic Violence

eHIC – See Electronic Housing Inventory Chart

e*SNAPs – See Electronic Special Needs Assistance Program

Electronic Housing Inventory Chart (eHIC)

Electronic Special Needs Assistance Program (e*SNAPs) – The electronic update from HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPs) in the Office of Community Planning and Development, offers policy and program highlights, resource links, and community spotlights. The e*SNAPs update is issued bi-monthly to members of HUD's Homeless Assistance Program listserv.

Emergency Shelter (ES) – Any facility whose primary purpose is to provide temporary shelter for the homeless in general or for specific populations of the homeless.

Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) – A federal grant program designed to help improve the quality of existing emergency shelters for the homeless, to make available additional shelters, to meet the costs of operating shelters, to provide essential social services to homeless individuals, and to help prevent homelessness.

Encryption - Conversion of plain text into unreadable data by scrambling it using a code that masks the meaning of the data to any unauthorized viewer. Computers encrypt data by using algorithms or formulas. Encrypted data are not readable unless they are converted back into plain text via decryption.

ES – See Emergency Shelter

ESG – See Emergency Shelter Grants

Ethnicity - Identity with or membership in a particular racial, national, or cultural group and observance of that group's customs, beliefs, and language.

Exhibit 1 – Part of the SuperNOFA, includes the Housing Inventory Chart (HIC)

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Exhibit 2 – Part of the SuperNOFA, project application section

Expansion Grant – additional funds to an existing grant by proposing a new expansion project within the implementation.

Extensible Markup Language (XML) – General-purpose specification for creating custom markup languages. It is classified as an extensible language because it allows its users to define their own elements. Its primary purpose is to facilitate the sharing of structured data across different information systems, particularly via the Internet, and it is used both to encode documents and to serialize data.

Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) – Provides national leadership on youth and family issues. Promotes positive outcomes for children, youth, and families by supporting a wide range of comprehensive services and collaborations at the local, Tribal, State, and national levels.

Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) – Publicly announced standards developed by the U.S. Federal government for use by all non-military government agencies and by government contractors. Many FIPS standards are modified versions of standards used in the wider community.

Final Notice - See HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice

FIPS – See Federal Information Processing Standards

FYSB – See Family and Youth Services Bureau

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – An information system for capturing, storing, analyzing, managing, sharing, and displaying geographically referenced information.

GIS – See Geographic Information Systems

Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) – One of a series of laws designed to improve government project management. The GPRA requires agencies to engage in project management tasks such as setting goals, measuring results, and reporting their progress. In order to comply with GPRA, agencies produce strategic plans, performance plans, and conduct gap analysis of projects.

GPRA – See Government Performance and Results Act

Hashing – The process of producing hashed values for accessing data or for security. A hashed value is a number or series of numbers generated from input data. The hash is generated by a formula in such a way that it is extremely unlikely that some other text will produce the same hash value or that data can be converted back to the original text. Hashing is often used to check whether two texts are identical. For the purposes of Homeless Management Information Systems it can be used to compare whether client records contain the same information without identifying the clients.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) – U.S. law designed to provide privacy standards to protect patients' medical records and other health information provided to health plans, doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers. Developed by the Department of Health and Human Services, these standards provide patients access to their medical records and give them more control over how their personal health information is used and disclosed.

HHS – See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

HIC – See Housing Inventory Chart

HIPAA – See Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996

HMIS – See Homeless Management Information System

HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice - Regulations issued by HUD via the Federal Register describing the requirements for implementing HMIS. The HMIS Final Notice contains rules about who needs to participate in HMIS, what data to collect, and how to protect client information.

HMIS Lead Organization – The central organizations that will house those individuals who will be directly involved in implementing and providing operational, training, technical assistance, and technical support to participating agencies.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) – Computerized data collection tool designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

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HOPWA – See Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS

Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) – Consists of three housing inventory charts for: emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) – Established by HUD to address the specific needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. HOPWA makes grants to local communities, States, and nonprofit organizations for projects that benefit low-income persons medically diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and their families.

HUD – See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

I&R – See Information and Referral

Inferred Consent – Once clients receive an oral explanation of HMIS, consent is assumed for data entry into HMIS. The client must be a person of age and in possession of all his/her faculties (for example, not mentally ill).

Information and Referral (I&R) – A process for obtaining information about programs and services available and linking individuals to these services. These services can include emergency food pantries, rental assistance, public health clinics, childcare resources, support groups, legal aid, and a variety of nonprofit and governmental agencies. An HMIS usually includes features to facilitate information and referral.

Informed Consent - A client is informed of options of participating in an HMIS system and then specifically asked to consent. The individual needs to be of age and in possession of all of his faculties (for example, not mentally ill), and his/her judgment not impaired at the time of consenting (by sleep, illness, intoxication, alcohol, drugs or other health problems, etc.).

McKinney-Vento Act - The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on July 22, 1987. The McKinney-Vento Act funds numerous programs providing a range of services to homeless people, including the Continuum of Care programs: the Supportive Housing Program, the Shelter Plus Care Program, and the Single Room Occupancy Program, as well as the Emergency Shelter Grant Program.

Mental Health – MH - state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life.

MH – See Mental Health

NOFA – See Notice of Funding Availability

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) – An announcement of funding available for a particular program or activity. See also SuperNOFA.

PART – See Performance Assessment Rating Tool

PDE – See Program Data Element

Penetration Testing - The process of probing a computer system with the goal of identifying security vulnerabilities in a network and the extent to which outside parties might exploit them.

Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART) – Developed to assess and improve program performance so that the Federal government can achieve better results. A PART review helps identify a program's strengths and weaknesses to inform funding and management decisions aimed at making the program more effective. The PART therefore looks at all factors that affect and reflect program performance including program purpose and design; performance measurement, evaluations, and strategic planning; program management; and program results. Because the PART includes a consistent series of analytical questions, it allows programs to show improvements over time, and allows comparisons between similar programs.

Performance Measures – A process that systematically evaluates whether your program's efforts are making an impact on the clients you are serving.

Permanent Supportive Housing – Long-term, community-based housing that has supportive services for homeless persons with disabilities. This type of supportive housing enables the special needs populations to live independently as possible in a permanent setting. Permanent housing can be provided in one structure or in several structures at one site or in multiple structures at scattered sites.

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Personal Protected Information (PPI) – Information that can be used to uniquely identify, contact or locate a single person, or may enable disclosure of personal information.

PH- See Permanent Housing

PIT – See Point in Time

PKI –See Public Key Infrastructure

Point in Time Inventory - A calculation of the numbers of beds in a region on one particular night.

Point in Time (PIT) – A snapshot of the homeless population taken on a given day. Since 2005, HUD requires all CoC applicants to complete this count every other year in the last week of January. This count includes a street count in addition to a count of all clients in emergency and transitional beds.

PPI – See Personal Protected Information

Privacy Notice - A written, public statement of an agency's privacy practices. A notice informs clients of how personal information is used and disclosed. According to the HMIS Data and Technical Standard, all covered homeless organizations must have a privacy notice.

Program Data Element (PDE) – Data elements required for programs that receive funding under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and complete the Annual Progress Reports (APRs).

Public Keys - Public keys are included in digital certificates and contain information that a sender can use to encrypt information such that only a particular key can read. The recipient also can verify the identity of the sender through the sender's public key.

Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) – An arrangement that binds public keys with respective user identities by means of a certificate authority (CA). The user identity must be unique for each CA. The binding is established through the registration and issuance process, which, depending on the level of assurance the binding has, may be carried out by software at a CA or under human supervision. The PKI role that assures this binding is called the Registration Authority (RA). For each user, the user identity, the public key, their binding, validity conditions, and other attributes are made unforgeable in public key certificates issued by the CA.

Race – Identification within five racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White

RHYMIS – See Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System

Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) – An automated information tool designed to capture data on the runaway and homeless youth being served by FYSB's Basic Center Program and Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth (TLP). RHYMIS also captures information on the contacts made by the Street Outreach Program grantees and the brief service contacts made with youth or families calling the FYSB programs.

S+C – See Shelter Plus Care (McKinney-Vento Program)

SA – See Substance Abuse

Scan Cards – Some communities use ID cards with bar codes to reduce intake time by electronically scanning ID cards to register clients in a bed for a night. These ID cards are commonly referred to as scan cards.

Shared Grant - the cost of the HMIS Implementation is shared with another program. For example, if a transitional housing facility shares the cost of the HMIS implementation with other providers.

Shelter Plus Care (McKinney-Vento Program) (S+C) – A program that provides grants for rental assistance for homeless persons with disabilities through four component programs: Tenant, Sponsor, Project, and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Rental Assistance.

SHP – See Supportive Housing Program

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Single Room Occupancy (SRO) – A residential property that includes multiple single room dwelling units. Each unit is for occupancy by a single eligible individual. The unit need not, but may, contain food preparation or sanitary facilities, or both. It provides rental assistance on behalf of homeless individuals in connection with moderate rehabilitation of SRO dwellings.

SNAP – See Special Needs Assistance Program

Social Security Number (SSN) – A 9-digit number issued by the Social Security Administration to individuals who are citizens, permanent residents, and temporary (working) residents.

Special Needs Assistance Program – SNAP

SRO – See Single Room Occupancy

Substance Abuse (SA)

SuperNOFA – See Super Notice of Funding Availability

Super Notice of Funding Availability (SuperNOFA) – The consolidation of all of HUD’s homeless grants program into one notice of funding availability. The SuperNOFA funds the Continuum of Care Competition.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) – A monthly stipend provided to aged (legally deemed to be 65 or older), blind, or disabled persons based on need, paid by the U.S. Government.

Supportive Housing Program (SHP) – A program that provides housing, including housing units and group quarters that has a supportive environment and includes a planned service component.

Supportive Services - Services that may assist homeless participants in the transition from the streets or shelters into permanent or permanent supportive housing, and that assist persons with living successfully in housing.

Supportive Services Only (SSO) – Projects that address the service needs of homeless persons. Projects are classified as this component only if the project sponsor is not also providing housing to the same persons receiving the services. SSO projects may be in a structure or operated independently of a structure, such as street outreach or mobile vans for health care.

SSN – See Social Security Number

SSI – See Supplemental Security Income

SSO – See Supportive Services Only

TA – See Technical Assistance

TANF – See Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Technical Assistance – TA

Technical Submission – The form completed in the second phase of the SHP fund application process where an applicant that is successful in the competition (called a “conditionally selected grantee” or “selectee”) then provides more detailed technical information about the project that is not contained in the original application.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) – Provides cash assistance to indigent American families with dependent children through the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

TH – See Transitional Housing

Transitional Housing (TH) – A project that has its purpose facilitating the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing within a reasonable amount of time (usually 24 months).

UDE – See Universal Data Element

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Unaccompanied Youth – Minors not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, including those living in inadequate housing such as shelters, cars, or on the streets. Also includes those who have been denied housing by their families and school-age unwed mothers who have no housing of their own.

Unduplicated Count – The number of people who are homeless within a specified location and time period. An unduplicated count ensures that individuals are counted only once regardless of the number of times they entered or exited the homeless system or the number of programs in which they participated. Congress directed HUD to develop a strategy for data collection on homelessness so that an unduplicated count of the homeless at the local level could be produced.

Universal Data Element (UDE) – Data required to be collected from all clients serviced by homeless assistance programs using an HMIS. These data elements include date of birth, gender, race, ethnicity, veteran's status, and Social Security Number (SSN). These elements are needed for CoCs to understand the basic dynamics of homelessness in their community and for HUD to meet the Congressional directive to support AHAR.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – A Cabinet department of the United States government with the goal of protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – The Federal agency responsible for national policy and programs that address America's housing needs that improve and develop the Nation's communities, and enforce fair housing laws. HUD's business is helping create a decent home and suitable living environment for all Americans, and it has given America's cities a strong national voice at the Cabinet level.

VA – See Veterans Affairs

VAWA – See Violence Against Women Act

Veterans Affairs (VA) – A government-run military veteran benefit system. It is responsible for administering programs of veterans' benefits for veterans, their families, and survivors. The benefits provided include disability compensation, pension, education, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation, survivors' benefits, medical benefits, and burial benefits.

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) – Programs range from policies to encourage the prosecution of abusers to victim's services to prevention programs. VAWA helped forge new alliances between police officers, courts, and victim advocates.

Written Consent - Written consent embodies the element of informed consent in a written form. A client completes and signs a document consenting to an understanding of the options and risks of participating or sharing data in an HMIS system. The signed document is then kept on file at the agency.

XML – See Extensible Markup Language