

FAQs

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What is a Continuum of Care (CoC)?

The Continuum of Care (CoC) program is designed to address the critical problem of homelessness through a coordinated, community-based process of identifying needs and building a system of housing and services to address those needs. The purpose of the CoC program is to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly re-house individuals and families experiencing homelessness while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness; promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by individuals and families experiencing homelessness; and optimize self-sufficiency among those experiencing homelessness.

In Alaska, there are two Continua of Care – Anchorage and the Balance of State. The Continuum of Care is a geographically based group of representatives that carries out the planning responsibilities of the CoC program. Each Continuum is responsible for measuring their respective community’s overall performance at reducing homelessness, in addition to tracking performance on a project-by-project basis. Furthermore, each Continuum is responsible for establishing and operating a centralized or coordinated entry system that will provide a comprehensive assessment of the needs of individuals and families for housing and services.

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What is AKHMIS?

AKHMIS is the Alaska Homeless Management Information System. A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness and at-risk of homelessness. Each Continuum of Care is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards. The HMIS software solution in the State of Alaska is ServicePoint.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other planners and policymakers use aggregate HMIS data to better inform homeless policy and decision-making at the federal, state, and local levels. HMIS enables HUD to collect national-level data on the extent and nature of homelessness over time. An HMIS can be used to produce an unduplicated count of persons experiencing homelessness, understand patterns of service use, and measure the effectiveness of homeless programs. Data on persons experiencing homelessness is collected and maintained at the local level.

Who is the HMIS Lead Agency and System Administrator?

The Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) serves as the State of Alaska's HMIS Lead Agency. ICA provides technical assistance and training support for service providers entering client-level data into AKHMIS. ICA's Alaska-specific staff serve as the State's System Administrators.

Who is the HMIS Vendor?

The State of Alaska's HMIS software solution is ServicePoint, and the vendor for that software is Mediware Information Systems, Inc.TM.

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Why is data quality and completeness important?

Because HMIS is used to better inform homeless policy and decision-making at the federal, state, and local levels, it is imperative that the data entered into the system is as complete and accurate as possible.

Otherwise, decisions are made on incorrect information. Additionally, HMIS data is used to produce an unduplicated count of persons experiencing homelessness for each Continuum of Care; describe the extent and nature of homelessness locally, regionally, and nationally; identify patterns of service use; and measure program effectiveness.

The ability to show the need for services in a community, as well as the progress a community is making towards ending homelessness occurs through HMIS data. Additionally, while HUD does not require CoCs to use their HMIS as part of their coordinated entry process, many communities recognize the benefit of using this option and have incorporated HMIS into their coordinated entry process. HUD is encouraging communities to consider using HMIS to meet the community's coordinated entry needs. To effectively use HMIS for a community's coordinated entry process, the data quality and completeness in the system must be as accurate as possible.

What do I do when I lock myself out of AKHMIS?

If you lock yourself out of AKHMIS by entering the incorrect password too many times, you will need to contact your System Administrator. Please email AKHMIS@icalliance.org to request a password reset.

How do I answer the Race question if a client identifies as “Hispanic” but not a race?

This question was submitted to HUD via their “Ask A Question (AAQ)”. Their response was as follows:

“This is an example of how academic terminology does not always line up with how people actually talk or identify. This question can be especially confusing because people of Latin American descent would say their race is “Hispanic”, for example, and would not be referred to in casual conversation or seen in their communities as “White”. Unless the person is from an original people's group – that is indigenous or American Indian – their ancestors came to South America, Central America, North America, Cuba, or Puerto Rico from another part of the world like Africa or Europe, causing them to be included in one of the racial categories listed. By the time you get to the Ethnicity question, you've likely already asked the client what their race is, and they might have responded with something like “Hispanic”, “Guatemalan”, or “Latino”. To help ascertain the best response for “Race”, you could say: “Great, I will say that you are Hispanic. Do you know if your ancestors were originally from a country like Spain, somewhere in Africa, or are you part of an indigenous group?” to guide the individual to a response to the Race question. However, if the person refuses to disclose his or her race based on the categories provided (or doesn't know), you should use “Client refused” (or “Client doesn't know”) rather than make an assumption.”

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How do I answer the Social Security Number (SSN) Data Quality question if a client does not have a social security number?

Per HUD, users are instructed to use “Client doesn’t know” when a client does not have a social security number.

What do I do if a client signs the Release of Information and selects the last option – “By initialing here, I agree that I do not want to share my and my household members’ above specified information to better coordinate services with other agencies.”? Do I still enter their data into AKHMIS?

If the client chooses the last option on the Release of Information and asks not to have their data shared in AKHMIS, the user entering the information into the system must enter a new client record into HMIS, regardless of whether there is an existing client record for this client, and close the created client record from other agencies. YOU MUST STILL ENTER THE CLIENT DATA INTO AKHMIS. To prevent the client record from being shared, click on the padlock in the upper right-hand corner of the client’s record and remove all agency names except your own. For more guidance on this, please see the Visual Guide.

When do I use Back Date?

Unless your project is doing “live time” data entry (you are entering the information into AKHMIS as you are getting that information from the client), you will always Back Date. This is a vital part of ensuring the data entered into the system is entered correctly.

How much time do I have to enter data into ServicePoint after getting it from the client?

The AKHMIS Advisory Board created the AKHMIS Policies and Procedures, which governs the system. In that document, it states: “Agencies participating in the AKHMIS must meet the current mandatory data entry requirements established by HUD, as well as any updates to those standards set forth by the federal government. Data must be entered within 10 calendar days from service.”

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If a client gets a job they didn't have when they first entered the project, how is that recorded in AKHMIS?

A change in a client's Monthly Income, Non-Cash Benefits, and / or Health Insurance Coverage from what they reported at the time of their Project Entry is recorded as an Interim Review. For guidance on how to complete an Interim Review, please see the Visual Guide.

When does an Annual Assessment have to be completed and entered into AKHMIS?

An Annual Assessment must be created for clients who are enrolled in CoC-funded projects for a year and longer. To be considered completed, the Annual Assessment must be recorded in AKHMIS either 30 days before or after the "annual anniversary" of the client's entry into the project. For guidance on how to complete an Annual Assessment, please see the Visual Guide.

If a Child within a Household Receives Income (SSI, SSDI, etc.), where is that income recorded?

Per the HUD HMIS Data Manual v5, the following guidance is provided: "Income received for a minor (e.g. SSI) should be recorded as part of the household income under the Head of Household."

If an adult other than the Head of Household receives income, where is that income recorded?

Per the HUD HMIS Data Manual v5, the following guidance is provided: Any additional income received by a non-minor member of the household can be recorded under that adult person's record.