



PERFORMANCE MEASURES USING HMIS

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With the implementation of the new Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, all continuums will be monitored and graded on a variety of performance indicators. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is moving toward more performance measurement across continuums in order to understand how well the CoC can prevent and end homelessness, identify areas of improvement, and to understand how individual programs can impact the overall CoC performance.¹

Currently there are six HEARTH performance measures:²

- Length of time homeless
- Recidivism
- Thoroughness of reach
- Overall reduction in number of persons experiencing homelessness
- Job and income growth for persons experiencing homelessness
- Reduction in first time homeless

Essentially, performance measures allow a CoC to systematically evaluate to what degree current efforts make an impact on the clients being served. A subsequent goal in creating performance measurement reports is to ensure data quality.

The following performance measurements will be reviewed for the Jasper/Newton CoC. Future reports will capture baseline measures and information in order for the continuum to set benchmarks to improve performance.

Bed Utilization Rates

Utilization rates represent the percentage of beds or units that are occupied on a given night at emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent housing programs. Data on the number of clients or households being served on a given night are pulled on the last Wednesday of each month to complete the calculation.

From a data quality perspective, utilization rates can often be an indication when data entry is not timely or complete. It could be that a shelter is not entering all clients into the system, or are perhaps waiting until a report is due to input all of the data. In some cases, an agency may forget to exit clients from the program. Utilization rates show the ebb and flow of clients in their program(s) and it is important for agencies to review those rates to ensure accuracy.

If data in HMIS is accurate, utilization rates provide an opportunity for the CoC to determine if they have the appropriate capacity and housing mix to handle fluctuations in the need for housing. It

¹ Albanese, T. *Performance measurement of homeless systems* [PDF document]. Retrieved from Housing and Urban Development Web site: http://www.hudhre.info/documents/PerfMeasurementHomelessSystems_Presentation.pdf.

² Albanese, T. idb

also provides a collaboration opportunity for agencies in knowing where there are open beds within the community. This information is also useful in showing HUD the need for additional beds.

Emergency Shelter Length of Stay

One of the measures HUD will likely grade or score is the average length of homelessness. An individual's or family's length of homelessness often refers to the time from becoming homeless to permanent housing. While the specific measures for length of stay have not been released yet, the HMIS Project looks at baseline measures for the average length of stay for individuals and families in emergency shelters. HUD currently identifies a high performing community as one where the average length of stay for an individual or family is:

- 20 days or less; or
- Decreases by 10 percent each year.³

Many continuums are starting with 30 days as a goal, although the target goals for each continuum will be developed upon review of their baseline measures.

Before setting goals, however, it is important to ensure that the data in HMIS is accurate so that the average length of stay is reflective of the program. If an agency has a high average length of stay, it may be an indication that one or more clients had an inaccurate exit date, skewing the average length of stay. This information is pulled on an annual basis, though a mid-year report is also developed to determine what progress has been made.

Exit Destinations

One of the primary performance measures for housing programs is housing stability upon exit.⁴ In addition to being reported in the CoC funding application, which is what HUD uses to fund new and existing projects, housing stability at exit also pertains to the HEARTH measure of reducing recidivism.⁵ Both are ways HUD can monitor and subsequently score continuums on their performance once final HEARTH regulations are released.

Within the CoC funding application, exit destinations are examined in two ways. The first depicts what percent of clients exit to stable housing situations. This is measured for CoC-funded programs, and more points are awarded to a continuum if they have a higher percentage of people exiting to permanent housing. The second review of exit destinations is through the percent of clients who exit to "Unknown" destinations. Having information and data available on where clients go once they complete a program helps the CoC and HUD understand

While there is not a threshold that a continuum needs to meet to ensure funding, many continua incorporate the measure into their data quality plan and set a benchmark for agencies to reach. This helps ensure data quality so the CoC can gain a more complete picture of that state of homelessness. For this reason, the HMIS Project also monitors exit destinations for emergency shelters. Although shelters do not necessarily have a programmatic goal of exiting clients to permanent housing, it is important to ensure completeness of data.

³ Albanese, T. idb

⁴ Snow, W. & Matthews, N. (2012). *Performance measurement in the CoC APR*. Retrieved from Homelessness Resource Exchange Web site: http://hudhre.info/documents/PerformanceMeasurement_CoCPR_three.pdf.

⁵ Albanese, T. idb

Reasons for Leaving

While this is not a measure expected to be addressed through the HEARTH Act, it is still an important data element. Tracking this program output allows programs and the continuum to identify issues or barriers clients may face in completing specific programs or remaining in a particular facility.⁶ It also pertains to program effectiveness. Some continuums are able to look at the percentage of negative reasons for leaving. Negative reasons for leaving primarily pertain to non-compliance with the project and “disagreement with rules.”⁷ A program’s success in stabilizing the housing situation for a client or household can be measured by having a small percent of clients who leave the program for those two reasons.

Additionally, monitoring reasons for leaving offers a supplement to the length of stay reports. If an agency is at one end of the spectrum – either having a relatively high or low average length of stay – it can be important to look at why clients leave the program. A higher length of stay for a program may be more understandable if clients are consistently exiting for other housing opportunities or because they completed the program. Conversely, it would be important to look at whether programs with a consistently low average length of stay have clients exiting for positive reasons, such as other housing opportunities, or if it is due to the negative reasons.

Moving Forward

The HMIS Project will continue to work with agencies to address data quality issues and assess barriers an agency may have with entering or reviewing data. With an increased focus on data quality, the CoC can begin to use baseline measures for each of these elements to set benchmarks to improve the performance of the delivery system.

⁶ Canavan Associates. (2006). *Using HMIS to inform performance measurement outcomes*. Retrieved from Housing and Urban Development Web site:
<http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewDisclaimer&ptpid=4&resourceurl=/documents/UsingHMISToInformPerformanceOutcomes.ppt>.

⁷ Community Shelter Board. (2009). *Program evaluation*. Retrieved from Community Shelter Board Web site:
<http://www.csb.org/files/docs/Publications/2009/FY2009%20Program%20Evaluation%20Final.pdf>.