

# HMIS Definitions

## Glossary of Homeless Management Information System Acronyms and Terms

### Acronyms

**AIRS** – Alliance of Information & Referral Systems  
**AHAR** – Annual Homeless Assessment Report  
**APR** – Annual Progress Report  
**CHO** – Covered Homeless Organization  
**CoC** – Continuum of Care  
**DOB** – Date of Birth  
**DV** – Domestic Violence  
**ESG** – Emergency Shelter Grants  
**FIPS** – Federal Information Processing Standards Codes for states, counties, and named populated places.  
**HIPAA** – Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996  
**HMIS** – Homeless Management Information System  
**HUD** – U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
**I&R** – Information and Referral  
**MH** – Mental Health  
**NOFA** – Notice of Funding Availability  
**PIT** – Point in Time  
**PKI** – Public Key Infrastructure  
**PPI** – Personal Protected Information  
**S+C** – Shelter Plus Care (McKinney Vento Program)  
**SA** – Substance Abuse  
**SHP** – Supportive Housing Program  
**SRO** – Single Room Occupancy  
**SuperNOFA** – Super Notice of Funding Availability  
**SSN** – Social Security Number  
**SSI** – Supplemental Security Income  
**SSO** – Supportive Services Only  
**TA** – Technical Assistance  
**TANF** – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families  
**VAWA** – Violence Against Women Act  
**XML** – Extensible Markup Language

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## Terms

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

**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.

**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.

**Chronic homelessness** – HUD defines a chronically homeless person as:

1. An individual who:
  - a. Is homeless and lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter; and
  - b. Has been homeless and living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter continuously for at least one year or on at four separate occasions in the last 3 years where each homeless occasion was at least 15 days; and
  - c. Can be diagnosed with one or more of the following conditions: substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability (as defined in section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 15002), post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability;
2. An individual who has been residing in an institutional care facility, including a jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility, for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of this definition, before entering that facility; or
3. A family with an adult head of household (or if there is not adult in the family, a minor head of household) who meets all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of this definition, including family whose composition has fluctuated while the head of household has been homeless.

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

**Consumer or Client** – An individual or family who has or is currently 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. It refers 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*.

**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.

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**Digital Certificates** – An attachment to an electronic message used for security purposes. The most common use of a digital certificate is to verify that a user is 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.

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

**Emergency Shelter Grant (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.

**Final Notice** – See *HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice*

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 or her faculties (for example, not mentally ill).

**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 or her faculties (for example, not mentally ill), and his or her judgment not impaired at the time of consenting (by sleep, illness, intoxication, alcohol, drugs or other health problems, etc.).

**Information and Referral** – A process for obtaining information about programs and services available and linking individuals or families 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 non-profit and governmental agencies. An HMIS usually includes features to facilitate information and referral.

**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.

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

**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.

**Permanent Supportive Housing** – Long term, community based housing that has supportive services for homeless persons with disabilities. This type of supportive housing enables 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.

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

**Point in Time Count** – 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.

**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 Elements** – 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 can also verify the identity of the sender through the sender's public key.

**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.

**Single Room Occupancy** – 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.

**Shelter Plus Care Program** – 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.

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

**Supportive Housing Program** – 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.

**Transitional Housing** – 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).

**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

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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 Elements*** – 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.

***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.