

Monitoring Length of Stay at Emergency Shelters in HMIS

This report provides background information about why the HMIS Project will be monitoring for length of stay, how it is calculated and how this data can be used at agency level and at the Balance of State Continuum of Care level. It also includes analysis of how the emergency shelters enrolled in HMIS are currently performing in the Continuum.

Why Monitor for Length of Stay?

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 Looking at performance measurements, such as length of stay, helps all communities and funders make informed decisions about resource allocations and enables individual programs to evaluate and strengthen its approach to ending homelessness.

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. At this time, we don't have the ability to pull data on length of homelessness, but we can look at average length of stay in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs as a start. This particular report provides an overview of the average length of stay at 15 emergency shelters in the Balance of State Continuum of Care. While we are not currently able to pull the length of stay data for transitional housing programs, a request has been made to Municipal Information Systems, Inc (MISI) to make this data available in the future.

The final regulations for grading continuums on their performance have not yet been released by HUD. However, HUD currently identifies a high performing community as one where the average length of stay at an emergency shelter is 20 days or less.² 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. This report provides a baseline measure for the average length of stay at emergency shelters enrolled in HMIS within the Balance of State.

Calculating Length of Stay

The average length of stay takes into account all families and individuals who are staying at an emergency shelter in a given period of time. Data is pulled from HMIS for the date range of January 1 to December 31 of a particular year. For the 2011 data, reports were pulled from January 1 through September 30. The numbers for 2011 will be updated the first week in January once all the data for 2011 is in HMIS. The following formula is used to calculate the average length of stay:

Average Length of Stay Formula

(household exit date or report end date – Entry date) ÷ (total # of distinct households served within the reporting period) = average length of stay

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. [PDF document].

This calculation is currently done in the HMIS database and is available through the “Emergency Shelter Analysis” report.

Monitoring for Length of Stay

To ensure the accuracy of the data for the length of stay report, it is important for agencies to review what is in HMIS. For this particular report we want to ensure that the entry and exit dates of clients in the shelter are accurate. Agencies can work with the HMIS Project to:

- Verify that the length of stay averages appear accurate, taking into account total households served in the report period. If an agency has a large increase or decrease in their average length of stay, it may be an indication that clients were not entered or exited accurately.
- Determine if the agency faces any barriers in entering quality HMIS data and how those barriers can be addressed.

HMIS Project Staff will be monitoring for the length of stay on an annual basis and submitting reports each year to the Balance of State Committee. An agency and/or region may request their data at any time for purposes of writing grants, completing needs assessments, etc. The HMIS Project will also monitor for length of stay at transitional housing programs annually once that data becomes available.

Results

Below are the results of the length of stay HMIS data monitoring. An area in red does not mean an agency is in “trouble” or “out of compliance” with the HMIS Project. Those are indicators for where an agency is above the 30-day marker for length of stay at an emergency shelter, which is the first benchmark that many Continuums are using.

Length of Stay for Single Households

We examined the 15 emergency shelters in the Balance of State Continuum of Care who are enrolled in HMIS. We found that about two-thirds of the emergency shelters had a period where the average length of stay was more than 30 days for a single household (see Figure 1.1). There are also periods where shelters had zero for their average length of stay. This may be due to no data entry, which is the case for SEMO Family Heartland Center and Loving Hearts Outreach in 2011. Additionally, the zeros for SALT are not calculated into the Balance of State CoC average length of stay because they were not in existence prior to 2011. The same is true for Wiley House in 2008.

Figure 1.1

Facility Name	2008	2009	2010	2011**
DAEOC ES	74.7	59.4	51.4	31.4
Harvest House ES	17.4	17.3	17.4	18.6
Hope House ES	4.4	9.5	13.7	15.7
Lake Area Helping Hands ES	27.8	36.0	51.2	44.6
Loving Hearts Outreach ES	55.8	0.0	89.5	0.0
Haven House ES	52.8	38.9	75.5	135.0
Wiley House ES	0.0*	25.6	27.3	198.9
Sal Army - Columbia Harbor House ES	21.9	22.9	18.3	23.6
Sal Army - JC Center of Hope ES	51.2	49.3	58.2	52.0
Sal Army - Cape G. ES	3.0	3.1	2.2	2.7
SALT- Simply Achieving Life's Triumphs ES	0.0*	0.0*	0.0*	3.0
Samaritan Outreach Center ES	20.3	19.3	18.4	24.1
SEMO Christian Restoration Center ES	36.8	65.6	60.7	54.5
SEMO Family Heartland Center	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
United Gospel Rescue Mission	92.6	107.0	119.6	110.0
Balance of State Continuum of Care Average LOS:	35.3	32.4	43.1	47.6

* Data not included in overall average length of stay as program was not in existence.

** Data for 2011 is only through September. Final 2011 data will be pulled the first week in January 2012.

In examining the data, there are five agencies that consistently have an average length of stay for single households above the 30-day benchmark. However, one of those agencies, DAEOC, has reduced the average length of stay quite substantially from 75 days in 2008 to 36 in 2011.³

³ Data for 2011 is reported only through September 2011. Data will be updated the first week of January 2012 to reflect data from the entire year.

The Balance of State Continuum of Care overall length of stay has increased from 2008. This is, in part, because there are individual agencies that are seeing an increase in their average length of stay. In 2011 there was also a spike for one emergency shelter in particular. The Wiley House dramatically increased their average length of stay from 27 days to about 199 days. The same is true for Haven House, which jumped from 75.5 in 2010 to 135 days in 2011. This is due to data entry errors, however. The HMIS Project staff met with these two agencies to determine their barriers to entering entry and exit dates on clients. It was determined that staffing constraints limited these agencies to entering data in a timely manner. As a result, the HMIS Project has acted as a liaison between these two agencies and a community partner to create an MOU so that data entry can be taken on by multiple agencies.

Length of Stay for Families

The average length of stay for families is slightly lower than the average length of stay for individual households (see Figure 1.2). This is in part due to the fact that some emergency shelters only house individuals and not families, which is the case for United Gospel Rescue Mission, SEMO Christian Restoration Center and Wiley House. As with the previous calculations, the zeros for SALT prior to 2011 and Wiley House in 2008 are not calculated in the average length of stay as they were not in existence.

For family households, emergency shelters are closer to the 30-day benchmark. While four agencies are consistently above that benchmark, three of them have decreased the average length of stay in the last four years. The Lake Area Helping Hands shelter has seen a consistent increase, starting with 39.5 days in 2008 and rising to 88.7 days in 2011.

Figure 1.2

Facility Name	2008	2009	2010	2011**
DAEOC ES	44.0	37.6	48.6	40.7
Harvest House ES	14.9	28.1	6.2	25.9
Hope House ES	4.0	29.8	31.3	15.5
Lake Area Helping Hands ES	39.5	44.7	68.4	88.7
Loving Hearts Outreach ES	72.3	39.5	23.0	0.0
Haven House ES	80.8	61.0	31.6	53.2
Wiley House ES	0.0*	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sal Army - Columbia Harbor House ES	20.9	20.6	20.7	20.8
Sal Army - JC Center of Hope ES	59.5	52.0	47.8	42.9
Sal Army - Cape G. ES	2.0	2.6	2.4	2.5
SALT- Simply Achieving Life's Triumphs ES	0.0*	0.0*	0.0*	9.5
Samaritan Outreach Center ES	29.4	7.9	35.3	17.5
SEMO Christian Restoration Center ES	9.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
SEMO Family Heartland Center	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
United Gospel Rescue Mission	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Balance of State Continuum of Care Average LOS:	28.9	23.1	22.5	21.1

* Data not included in overall average length of stay as program was not in existence.

** Data for 2011 is only through September. Final 2011 data will be pulled the first week in January 2012.

To obtain a more accurate picture of the average length of stay for families, we removed the emergency shelters that do not house families at their facilities. Removing those shelters increased the overall Balance of State Continuum of Care average length of stay by seven days (see Figure 1.3). There are currently 11 emergency shelters enrolled in the Balance of State HMIS that house only single males and/or females.

Figure 1.3

Facility Name	2008	2009	2010	2011**
DAEOC ES	44.0	37.6	48.6	40.7
Harvest House ES	14.9	28.1	6.2	25.9
Hope House ES	4.0	29.8	31.3	15.5
Lake Area Helping Hands ES	39.5	44.7	68.4	88.7
Loving Hearts Outreach ES	72.3	39.5	23.0	0.0
Haven House ES	80.8	61.0	31.6	53.2
Sal Army - Columbia Harbor House ES	20.9	20.6	20.7	20.8
Sal Army - JC Center of Hope ES	59.5	52.0	47.8	42.9
Sal Army - Cape G. ES	2.0	2.6	2.4	2.5
SALT- Simply Achieving Life's Triumphs ES	0.0*	0.0*	0.0*	9.5
Samaritan Outreach Center ES	29.4	7.9	35.3	17.5
Balance of State Continuum of Care Average LOS:	36.7	32.4	31.5	28.8

* Data not included in overall average length of stay as program was not in existence.

** Data for 2011 is only through September. Final 2011 data will be pulled the first week in January 2012.

Balance of State Continuum of Care

With the implementation of the new HEARTH Act, the Balance of State Continuum of Care will be monitored and graded on a series of performance indicators. The average length of stay is likely to be one of those data elements in order to move toward reducing the overall length of homelessness. In examining the average length of stay at the Balance of State Continuum level, we find that emergency shelters are making progress at decreasing the amount of time that families are in shelters, taking into account only the shelters that house families (see Figure 1.4).

For individuals, however, the average length of stay is increasing over time. In 2009, there seemed to be a shift in the Balance of State for individuals in emergency shelters (see Figure 1.4). As noted above, four shelters in 2011 have an average length of stay of more than 100 days. Those numbers may change slightly once we have final data from 2011. HMIS Project Coordinators are working with agencies to ensure the accuracy of the data and find solutions to barriers with data entry. As mentioned, a high performing community is defined by the HEARTH Act as one that has an average length of stay for individuals of about 20 days, although most Continuums are starting with a target goal of 30 days.

It is important to note, however, that this report only tracks emergency shelters currently enrolled and entering data into HMIS. There are many other shelters in the Balance of State that could impact the Balance of State's efforts to reduce and end homelessness. Additionally, with only 15 shelters determining the average length of stay at emergency shelters in the Balance of State Continuum, it

becomes important to ensure quality data and program efficiency. The HMIS Project Coordinators will continue working with agencies to address any barriers to data entry and will also be collaborating with funders to look at the data from a programmatic perspective to see how as a Continuum we can continue to reduce the average length of stay for individuals and families in emergency shelters.

Figure 1.4: Balance of State Continuum of Care Average Length of Stay by Year

