

Federal Registry
Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)
Homeless Management Information Systems
Data & Technical Standards Final Notice
Volume 69, Number 146 Friday, July 30, 2004

1.4.1. Universal Data Elements

Data to be collected by all HMIS are those essential to the administration of local homeless assistance programs and to obtaining an accurate picture of the extent, characteristics and the patterns of service use of the local homeless population. These data elements are critical to meeting the Congressional requirement for HMIS. Therefore, all providers participating in a local HMIS will be required to collect the universal data elements from all homeless clients

seeking housing or services, including:

- date of birth
- race
- ethnicity
- gender
- veteran's status
- Social Security Number (SSN)

Standards for notification about the purposes of data collection, non-disclosure, and protection of this and other data elements are discussed in Section 4 of this Notice.

In addition to personal identifying information, the universal data elements include information on a client's demographic characteristics and recent residential history in order to enable local providers and communities to analyze patterns of homelessness and service use. Among other important uses, these data will enable CoCs to identify the chronically homeless. Section 2 of this Notice provides more detail on the data standards for the universal data elements.

1.4.2. Program-Specific Data Elements

Program-specific data elements are needed to assess the operations and outcomes of programs that provide services to homeless clients. HUD, other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and private funders of homeless services often require certain information to assess services, to determine eligibility for housing or services provided by particular programs, and to monitor service provision and outcomes for clients. This eligibility-related information is often statutory and/or regulation-based and is contained in provider agreements. Therefore, some providers are required to obtain certain information from homeless persons as a condition for receiving services. (*See HUD's McKinney-Vento Act client-eligibility and assessment program requirements above*).

Program-specific data elements should be collected from all clients served by programs that are required to report this information to HUD or other organizations. For programs with no such reporting requirement, these standards are recommended to allow data across all local programs to be easily analyzed. For programs that receive funding through HUD's SHP, S+C Program, and Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation for Single Room Occupancy Dwellings (SRO) Program, as well as HOPWA-funded homeless programs, most program-specific data elements are required to complete APRs. Exceptions to this requirement may occur in outreach programs to the street homeless or other nonresidential-based services such as soup kitchens. In such cases, an intake is often not taken, or even possible, and no information is required to access the service. Data elements required to assess operations and outcomes of programs include private or sensitive information on topics such as:

- Income
- physical disabilities
- behavioral health status

- whether the client is currently at risk of domestic violence

As described in Section 4, CoCs will have to establish firm policies and procedures to protect against unauthorized disclosure of personal information. Section 3 of this Notice provides more detail on the standards for program-specific data elements.

The universal data elements should be collected by all agencies serving homeless persons. HUD carefully weighed the reporting burden of the universal data elements against the importance of the information for producing meaningful local and Federal reports. Of special concern to HUD was the reporting burden for programs that register large numbers of applicants on a daily basis, with little time to collect information from each applicant. As a result, the number of universal data elements was kept to a minimum, and the ease of providing the information requested and whether or not many homeless service providers were already collecting such information was considered for each element. The universal data standards will make possible unduplicated estimates of the number of homeless people accessing services from homeless providers, basic demographic characteristics of people who are homeless, and their patterns of service use. The universal data standards will also allow measurement of the number and share of chronically homeless people who use homeless services. The standards will enable generation of information on shelter stays and homelessness episodes over time. The universal data elements are:

- Name (entered by staff; only collected the first time a client uses a program)
- Social Security Number (entered by staff; only collected the first time a client uses a program)
- Date of Birth (entered by staff; only collected the first time a client uses a program)
- Ethnicity and Race (entered by staff; only collected the first time a client uses a program)
- Gender (entered by staff; only collected the first time a client uses a program)
- Veteran Status (entered by staff; can be collected at subsequent visits)
- Disabling Condition (entered by staff; can be collected at subsequent visits)
- Residence Prior to Program Entry (entered by staff; can be collected at subsequent visits)
- Zip Code of Last Permanent Address (entered by staff; can be collected at subsequent visits)
- Program Entry Date (entered by staff or computer-generated with each visit)
- Program Exit Date (entered by staff or computer-generated with each exit)
- Unique Person Identification Number (automatically generated)
- Program Identification Number (automatically generated with each program entry)
- Household Identification Number (automatically generated with each program entry)

3. Program-Specific Data Elements

Program-specific data elements must be collected from all clients served by programs that are required to report this information to HUD and other organizations. For programs with no such reporting requirements, these standards are optional but recommended since they allow local CoCs to obtain consistent information across a range of providers that can be used to plan service delivery, monitor the provision of services, and identify client outcomes. These data elements, however, do not constitute a client assessment tool, and providers will need to develop their own data collection protocols in order to properly assess a client's need for services. For programs that receive funding through HUD's Supportive Housing Program, Shelter Plus Care, Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation for Single Room Occupancy Dwellings (SRO) Program, and the homeless programs funded through Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), most program-specific data elements are required to complete Annual Progress Reports (APRs). The program-specific data elements that are required for HUD's current APR reporting include:

- Income and Sources
- Non-Cash Benefits
- Physical Disability
- Developmental Disability
- HIV/AIDS
- Mental Health

- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Services Received
- Destination
- Reasons for Leaving

In addition to these data elements that are required for APR reporting, additional program-specific data elements are recommended by a team of HMIS practitioners, federal agency representatives, and researchers. These data elements are based on best practices that are currently being implemented at the local level. In addition, HUD is working to bring together federal agencies that fund McKinney-Vento programs in an effort to standardize the data elements and definitions used by these agencies in their reporting requirements. This effort to standardize data definitions and standards across federal agencies will make reporting easier and more consistent for homeless providers who use multiple federal funding sources. Some of these data elements may be added to HUD APRs in the future. They include:

- Employment
- Education
- General Health Status
- Pregnancy Status
- Veteran's Information
- Children's Education

A summary of the program-specific data elements is provided at the end of this section (see Exhibit 4). All of the program-specific data elements require that staff from a homeless assistance agency enter information into the HMIS database. This information may be:

- Provided by the client (during client assessment and, for some data elements, at program exit);
- Taken from case manager interviews or records; and/or
- Observed by program staff