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Increasing HMIS Participation and Update on HUD-VASH Data Sharing

A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is essential for communities to understand how the homeless response system is working and where strategic changes should be made to better serve people experiencing homelessness, including veterans. HUD and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are excited to announce that in November 2020, HUD will be providing a tool to each Continuum of Care (CoC) to support direct uploads of VA's HOMES-HMIS HUD-VASH Universal Data Elements Report.

Next Steps to Access the VA HUD-VASH Data Export

In December 2019, [HUD announced a partnership with VA](#) to provide HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) data, exported from the VA's Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES), to CoCs by late Spring 2020. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has commanded both agencies' full attention over the course of 2020. VA has a report available which contains HUD-VASH data elements for an HMIS import and a mechanism in place for secure email transmission. HUD has developed a tool for CoCs, which will transform this report into a format that meets HMIS technical specifications to enable direct upload into HMIS. This tool will be available the **first week of November**.

In the meantime, VA can share the HUD-VASH report with CoCs for direct entry by CoCs or for CoCs to utilize with existing import processes to add the information to HMIS. There are a few steps that must be taken for this data to be input into HMIS.

- 1. CoC establishes a single point of contact for VA Medical Centers (VAMCs).** To access the data, each CoC will need to coordinate with their HMIS Lead to identify a point of contact for each VAMC. For some CoCs, this may mean reaching out to multiple VAMCs. Using a single point of contact for each VAMC will reduce confusion in the process.
- 2. VAMC sends a HUD-VASH export to the point of contact.** Each VAMC will send a CSV file containing the HUD-VASH data elements for the HMIS import. VA does not collect information by CoC, so HMIS leads will need to work with their VA homeless program lead to determine what data should be included in your HMIS. This may involve coordination with neighboring CoCs as well to ensure you are not both entering the same HUD-VASH data in your HMIS. HUD and VA will provide additional guidance to address commonly asked questions about the process. Once the data is transferred by VA, it is the CoC's responsibility to import the data into HMIS.
- 3. HMIS Lead must analyze their technical capacity to import the data.** Some CoCs have been working with their VAMC already and may be able to immediately import the data into HMIS, but most HMIS Leads will require some way to convert the data into a useable import file. HUD has developed an Excel-

based tool that converts the HOMES report into useable import files, and this tool will be publicly available to CoCs the first week of November 2020. While HUD is confident that the tool will support most imports, some HMIS software products still may not allow the report to be imported. In these instances, HUD TA will help troubleshoot, but there may be some CoCs that will have to manually enter the data or pursue a different avenue to include the data in HMIS.

HUD recognizes that this exciting announcement also comes with more work for CoCs and HMIS Leads, but the data also provides an answer to a long-standing issue of HMIS bed coverage that will improve and expedite access to homeless program services. CoCs continue to serve people experiencing homelessness while COVID-19 continues to threaten this vulnerable population, and HMIS Leads have several reporting requirements they will be fulfilling in October. Acknowledging these demands on CoC and HMIS Lead time, HUD recommends that HMIS Leads focus on incorporating this data **no later than the 2021 Housing Inventory Count (HIC)**, and that HMIS Leads focus on this effort in the final months of 2020 to identify and resolve any potential issues by **January 2021**.

HMIS Participation

While there are some programs that are not funded by HUD and not required by their funder to participate in HMIS (e.g., HUD-VASH, gospel rescue missions), it is critical for communities to strive to get complete bed coverage to execute critical system planning to end homelessness. Today's announcement helps CoCs fill a critical gap – all CoCs will have access to HUD-VASH data. If CoCs import this data into HMIS, that will count as full HMIS participation for the HUD-VASH inventory.

HUD anticipates continuing to include bed coverage as a competitive element in its CoC Program Competition. To assist in gaining participation from other partners that are not required to participate in HMIS, HUD recommends reviewing the resources below. Please note that victim service providers must use a comparable database and cannot use HMIS.

HMIS Resources on HMIS Participation

- [Data Quality 201: Bed Coverage and Strategies to Improve It](#)
- [Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness](#)
- [SNAPS In Focus: Partnerships Between CoCs and Faith Based Organizations](#)

For other resources on HMIS visit the [HMIS resource](#) page. For HMIS guidance specific to COVID-19 please refer to the “Data Management” section of the [Disease Risks and Homelessness](#) page.



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