

# Built for Zero Housing Stabilization Learning Cohort (HSLC)

## Housing Insecurity & Emergency Needs Assessment Guide

March 2024

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This document provides guidance for examining community data to better understand the characteristics and service needs of people who experience homelessness and severe housing insecurity. Guidance begins with an examination of the 'usability' of currently available Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data and then provides tips and approaches for generating HMIS data reports to understand system inflow across three different different groups: those who are newly homeless, those returning to homelessness after exiting the system, and a subset of those returning to homelessness who previously exited to permanent housing. Guidance then turns to strategies for using other local data in combination with HMIS data to generate a community **Housing Insecurity Heat Map**. This guide then concludes with questions to consider as data is examined, with an emphasis on using data to inform prevention targeting and initial piloting.

### Audience:

- HMIS Data Leads & Data Analysts
- Community Core Prevention Team

### HSLC Foundational Priority:

- **2: Examine Current Housing Insecurity & Emergency Needs (months 2-4)**

### Topics:

- [HMIS Data Usability Review](#)
- [Annual Inflow Analysis](#)
- [Community Interviews](#)
- [Housing Insecurity Heat Mapping](#)

### Related Tools/Guidance:

- [HSLC Template: Presentation of Prevention Lived Experience Descriptions](#)

### Community Examples:

- [Hartford Inflow Data Example](#)
- [Hartford Example: Inflow Interview Questions](#)
- [Cincinnati Inflow Data Example](#)

## HMIS DATA USABILITY REVIEW

**Objective:** Determine the data quality and useability of key HMIS data (i.e., how complete, up-to-date, and accurate) necessary prior to inflow analysis.

### Data to Examine:

- Data used to identify when someone is “newly homeless” or returning to homelessness from housing or inactive status, including:
  - Entry and exit dates
  - Exit destination
- Prior living situation data to identify where people are immediately before system entry, including:
  - Location of previous night before they became literally homeless
  - Zip code of last permanent address or other available locational data
- Demographic data to understand the racial, ethnic, gender, and other key characteristics of people experiencing homelessness, including:
  - Race
  - Gender
  - Disabling conditions
  - Household size and configuration

### Questions to Consider:

- Does the CoC have specific standards for timely, complete, and accurate HMIS data entry?
- Does the CoC assess and enforce compliance with HMIS data quality and timeliness standards on a regular basis (i.e., more frequently than during annual LSA submission)?
- Can a report be pulled that isolates each cohort: newly homeless, returns from inactive, returns from housing?
- Is data complete, accurate, and representative?

## ANNUAL INFLOW ANALYSIS

**Objective:** Identify the key demographic and geographic characteristics of people who experience literal homelessness annually in the community to understand the number and characteristics of people who become homeless ("inflow") currently, to inform prevention targeting, and to measure change over time..

**Data to Examine:** Overall, by inflow cohort (newly homeless, returned from inactive, returned from housing), and disaggregated by subpopulation (race, household type, etc.).

- Number of unduplicated people/households "inflowing" into the homeless response system who are literally homeless
- Inflow changes over time and trends, including estimated inflow for upcoming annual period expected without additional prevention efforts
- Living situations and locations of households prior to becoming literally homeless
- Demographic characteristics of households becoming literally homeless, including disparities in overall rates of homelessness, access to crisis services and prevention assistance, outcomes, etc.
- For those returning: prior homeless response system involvement patterns and program enrollments

### Questions to consider:

- At the population level, what does the HMIS inflow data represent?
  - What percent of the population that experiences literal homelessness annually are not included in HMIS data?
  - Are data on people who are not included in HMIS data (e.g., who don't consent) maintained elsewhere, for a fuller picture?
- What are the racial, ethnic, gender, disability, and other key demographics and household characteristics?
  - Are there any major variances between inflow cohorts and/or subpopulations?
- Where are people staying just prior to becoming literally homeless in terms of the **specific living situations** (e.g., friend/family, apartment, jail) and **locations** (e.g., zip code of prior residence)?
- For those returning, what programs were people enrolled in last and are there opportunities for improvement relative to client engagement prior to exit, housing stabilization, and/or eviction avoidance assistance?

## COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

**Objective:** Understand and document common user *experiences with accessing emergency homeless assistance resources*, along with experiences and insights from coordinated entry/diversion assistance providers and frontline staff.

**Data to Examine:**

- Qualitative information from interviews and/or focus groups with people using homeless assistance regarding their experiences and insights.
- Qualitative information from interviews and/or focus groups with frontline staff regarding their experiences and insights.

**Questions to consider:**

- What do people know about homeless crisis response and diversion assistance and how to access it?
- What do people experience when they're trying to access homeless assistance, including diversion assistance just prior to literal homelessness?
- What do people experience after they've resolved their homelessness crisis and are in housing with regard to the service supports, resources, and prevention safeguards available to avoid a return to homelessness?
- What do frontline staff experience when they're trying to provide housing problem-solving and diversion assistance or trying to stabilize someone in housing to avoid a return to homelessness, with regard to needed support, resources, and training?
- Are there opportunities to improve access, timeliness, or the effectiveness of diversion and/or housing stabilization services?

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## HOUSING INSECURITY HEAT MAPPING

**Objective:** Use HMIS inflow data, eviction data, and other readily available data to identify areas and groups experiencing higher (severe) housing insecurity.

**Example Data to Examine (by zip code and/or other geography-related data):**

- Inflow data: prior living situation locations
- Eviction data: filings, writs, set-outs
- Extremely low-income household data: household income and poverty levels, public assistance benefits recipients, emergency rental assistance recipients
- Other available data evidencing economic distress/disparity

**Questions to consider:**

- What are the top areas or zip codes where people are experiencing housing insecurity?
- How does the Housing Insecurity Heat Map intersect and relate to other community needs assessments, heat maps, and area demographics?
- Are there current or potential access points or service partners in areas with the highest housing insecurity we can partner with?
  - See **HSLC Foundational Priority 3** and related environmental scan guidance and resources to assist with examining current prevention resources and potential partners, particularly in high need areas.