

based rental assistance and rental assistance in connection with moderate rehabilitation for single room occupancy units in conjunction with supportive services funded from other sources for homeless persons with disabilities. Specific information is required to establish both the initial disability status of the client to enter the program and to ensure that appropriate supportive services are provided during the full term of the program to address the needs of the client and to meet the match requirement of the program.

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Section 454(b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides in part that—

(b) MINIMUM CONTENTS—The Secretary shall require that an application identify the need for the assistance in the community to be served and shall contain at a minimum—

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(2) A description of the size and characteristics of the population of eligible persons;

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(4) The identity of the proposed service provider or providers * * *;

(5) A description of the supportive services that the applicant proposes to assure will be available for eligible persons;

(6) A description of the resources that are expected to be made available to provide the supportive services required by section 453;

(7) A description of the mechanisms for developing a housing and supportive services plan for each person and for monitoring each person's progress in meeting that plan * * *

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires recipients to provide for ongoing client assessments and provision of needed services. Section 456 states that the Secretary may not approve assistance under this subtitle unless the applicant agrees—

(1) To operate the proposed program in accordance with the provisions of this subtitle;

(2) To conduct an ongoing assessment of the housing assistance and supportive services required by the participants in the program;

(3) To assure the adequate provision of supportive services to the participants in the program.

1.3 The Vision and the Development of a Local HMIS

The development of a local HMIS is about: (1) Bringing the power of computer technology to the day-to-day operations of individual service

providers; (2) knitting together service providers in a more coordinated and effective service delivery system for the benefit of homeless clients; and (3) obtaining and reporting critical aggregate information about the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons. While some sophisticated service providers have developed in-house management information systems using technology of the time, many providers have not been able or willing to do so. Even those with working systems have not always been able to keep up with the latest technology. A number of communities have developed computer systems to manage large government programs (e.g., New York, Philadelphia). Others have pioneered systems linking decentralized service providers around a centralized bed-registry (St. Louis) or other services, such as emergency utility assistance (Kansas City) or an information and referral system. In the mid-1990s, HUD and HHS supported a comprehensive planning effort to develop comprehensive intake and assessment software. While the Automated National Client-specific Homeless services Recording (ANCHoR) software developed as a result of that initiative did not meet expectations, much was learned from that effort.

Reflecting experiences at both local and national levels to develop and test first-generation HMIS software, today's most advanced HMIS software combines a number of functionalities to enhance individual service provider operations and to link providers together into a broader CoC data-sharing system. These functionalities include:

Client Profile: Client demographic data obtained at intake and exit.

Client Assessment: Information on clients' needs and goals, as well as case management or treatment plans.

Service Outcomes: Client-level data on services provided, progress, outcomes, and follow-up.

Information and Referral/Resource Directories: Timely data on the network of available services within the Continuum to determine eligibility and provide referrals. Some systems provide documentation and tracking of a referral from one provider to the next and messaging capability.

Operations: Operational functionality that permits staff to manage day-to-day activities, including bed availability, and incident reporting.

Accounting: Traditional accounting tools and special components to record service activity/expenditures against specific grants. Some systems have donor and fundraising elements.

All these functionalities provide local providers and agencies with the ability to generate reports on their internal operations and for various funders. Because each agency agrees to share certain information with the HMIS, there is also the ability to generate reports on the operations of the Continuum of Care system as a whole.

One of HUD's major goals in this HMIS initiative is to help individual homeless service providers access the very best computer technology to assist them in their day-to-day operations and to help increase the effective coordination of services in the Continuum of Care. To this end, HUD has developed several publications to assist local jurisdictions including: Homeless Management Information System Consumer Guide: A Review of Available HMIS Solutions, January 2003; and Homeless Management Information Systems: Implementation Guide, September 2002. These guides can be found at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/guide>.

The Benefits of an HMIS

An HMIS provides significant opportunities to improve access to, and delivery of, services for people experiencing homelessness. An HMIS can accurately describe the scope of homelessness and the effectiveness of efforts to ameliorate it. An HMIS can strengthen community planning and resource allocation.

Homeless Clients

An HMIS offers many benefits to persons seeking and receiving homeless assistance services. Homeless clients can benefit from more effective and streamlined referrals from on-line information and referral and service directories. Clients can benefit from enhanced intra-agency coordination. For example, advanced HMIS software has been developed that both calculates client eligibility for multiple programs and generates ready-to-sign applications for those programs.

If information about clients is shared across providers, these systems can be used to reduce the number of times that clients are required to complete intake forms and assessments. They also allow providers to coordinate and track activities and services more effectively within a locality, streamline the referral process, and improve case management services for homeless clients. Finally, homeless persons benefit from the Continuum of Care's ability to better understand their characteristics and needs as well as the system's effectiveness in responding to homelessness in general and the unique