

Chicago Data Dictionary

This dictionary is a working document that will be updated as data elements are refined, and new elements are added. Please monitor the last issue date to ensure you are reviewing the latest version.

Contents

Introduction	3
Preparing Data for Analysis.....	3
Dictionary of Data Elements, Definitions, and Reports	4
The Active List	4
Chicago CoC System Goals.....	5
The Coordinated Entry (CE) List	5
Identifying Individuals who are Eligible for the CE List.....	5
Prioritizing Individuals on the CE List.....	6
Disability Status.....	6
Domestic Violence Survivor	6
Experiencing Homelessness.....	7
Experiencing Literal Homelessness.....	7
At Imminent Risk of Homelessness.....	8
Youth Experiencing Housing Instability.....	8
Fleeing Domestic Violence	9
Head of Household	9
Determining Head of Household Status	9
Housed Clients	10
Housed in CoC projects.....	10
Housed in Community Housing	11
Length of Time Experiencing Homelessness.....	11
Veteran Status.....	11

Introduction

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) contains information on tens of thousands of individuals and the services provided to them over the past approximately ten years. Every day, information entered in HMIS tracks the services and resources people need to address experiences of homelessness. The information is used in a variety of ways, from determining who will next receive housing to meeting funding requirements at the project, agency, and system level. Collectively, data in HMIS can be analyzed to understand how our community is doing in preventing and ending homelessness and to understand how individual projects and agencies are performing.

Too often, only those who create the reports know how the data is organized, undermining other's ability to use the information or interpret it correctly. This data dictionary is intended to help everyone use and interpret data with the same foundational information, as well as to bring greater transparency around how data is analyzed.

Preparing Data for Analysis

The HMIS team at All Chicago conducts analyses to track system performance and respond to individual data requests. While HMIS has existed in Chicago for well over a decade, All Chicago became the HMIS lead agency in 2012. Since that time, the HMIS system has undergone substantial changes, which have improved its quality and reliability. When Chicago rolled out the Coordinated Entry system in 2014, it also enacted community-wide efforts to improve data quality. For this reason, All Chicago established a best practice that analyses should not include HMIS data older than **September 01, 2014**. While data entered prior to 2014 can be accessed, the quality of the data cannot be verified and so could create inaccurate information.

If the HMIS team is creating a report with identifiable information, such as name or date of birth, the analysis will be limited to individuals whose most recent consent on record indicates they consent to share that information.

Dictionary of Data Elements, Definitions, and Reports

This is an alphabetized list of common data elements, definitions, and reports that are applied in a standardized manner. If you do not find the information you are looking for, email your question to helpdesk@allchicago.org.

The Active List

The Active List is a list of people who, as of a single day, are recorded in Chicago's HMIS to be experiencing homelessness. Multiple data elements and analysis from HMIS are used to determine that a person is experiencing homelessness and should be included on the Active List. The list guides Chicago's understanding of the current need in our community and thus is often included in analyses of Chicago's homelessness response system. For those who consent for their information to be shared, the Active List is also used to conduct matches with the Chicago Housing Authority to verify homeless preference.

The Active List includes people who are [experiencing homelessness](#), including all four categories of homelessness recognized by HUD. Individuals who are housed in [CoC projects](#) are categorically excluded from the Active List as they are currently in housing. An individual's enrollment is active when HMIS records show that person accessed emergency services within a specified time period. The HMIS project types counted as emergency are Street Outreach and Drop-in programs, Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Safe Havens, and enrollment in Coordinated Entry.

- For project types Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, and Transitional Housing, projects are expected to do an annual assessment, regardless of when they did the most recent update, every 12 months. When individuals are continuously enrolled for 13 months, with no sign of activity (meaning, no service transactions or updates in that project), the HMIS team will interpret this to mean that the individual is no longer enrolled in the project. While the expectation is that the update should occur at 12 months, the HMIS team incorporates a one-month grace period in case the annual assessment is delayed.
- For Street Outreach and Drop-in programs, projects are expected to do updates every 30 days. Therefore, when individuals are continuously enrolled for 45 days, with no sign of activity (meaning no service transactions or updates in that project), the HMIS team will interpret this to mean that the individual is no longer engaged in this project. While the expectation is that the update should occur every 30 days, the HMIS team incorporates a 15-day grace period in case the update is delayed.
- For Coordinated Entry, updates are expected to be completed every 30 days. Therefore, when individuals are continuously enrolled for more than 30 days, with no sign of activity (meaning no service transactions or updates in the project), the HMIS team will interpret this to mean that the individual is no longer engaged in this project. No grace period is incorporated in the Coordinated Entry project enrollments.

When a person does not meet the activity criteria described in these bullet points, then they are considered to have an "imputed" exit from their enrollment and are not counted on the Active List.

Chicago CoC System Goals

The CoC System Goals are five high-level aims shared by all contributors to preventing and ending homelessness in Chicago. Measuring annual progress towards these goals sheds light on the system's collective performance in addressing homelessness. These goals will be included in future dashboards.

Visit the [Continuum of Care](#) webpage for details on each goal and how it is calculated. Full information can be found in the [2020 System Goals report](#).

Chicago CoC System Goals

1. Reduce the number of persons who experience homelessness.
2. Reduce the time persons experience homelessness.
3. Projects committed to Coordinated Entry will use only that system to fill their units.
4. Increase the earned income and/or other income of adults served by the homeless response system.
5. Increase persons who exit street homelessness to enter sheltered destinations.

The Coordinated Entry (CE) List

The CE List is a foundational report. It combines many data elements to report who is waiting to be matched for housing. People on the CE list are a subset of people on the Active List who have completed the coordinated entry assessment and are not yet matched for housing. The CE List is built in two steps: first, the HMIS team uses information about individual's interaction with the system to determine who is eligible to be on the CE List. Then, the HMIS team gathers information about this subset of individuals to prioritize them according to community standards, and to provide information to the matching team to connect people to housing.

Identifying Individuals who are Eligible for the CE List

Individuals are considered eligible to be on the CE list if they meet either of these criteria:

- They enrolled in the CE project in the past 30 days or had an update in the past 30 days; OR
- They have an [active enrollment](#) in an emergency services type project, are experiencing [literal homeless](#), [fleeing domestic violence](#), or are a [youth experiencing housing instability](#), and they have ever been enrolled in the CE project. Individuals who are at imminent risk of homelessness are **not** on the CE list.

Individuals must also have an active consent to release their information to be included on the list.

Individuals who are housed in [CoC projects](#) or in [community housing](#) are categorically excluded from the CE List as they are currently in housing.

Prioritizing Individuals on the CE List

Individuals are prioritized according to Chicago's [community prioritization plan](#). As of spring 2021, individuals are prioritized in the following order:

- Longest [length of time experiencing homelessness](#);
- Individuals experiencing [unsheltered homelessness](#);
- [Veteran status](#);
- Highest [VI score](#);
- Individuals who have [survived domestic violence](#);

In addition to the data used for prioritization, HMIS is the source of a variety of other data vital to the matching process. HMIS provides data related to eligibility for certain housing projects, such as Veteran status or gender. It also provides data to facilitate safe and effective contact, such as where the person recently received services and if they have any mobility issues. For any further questions about Chicago's Coordinated Entry, contact the project's lead agency at ChicagoCES@csh.org.

Disability Status

Individuals are asked about their disability status in multiple places in HMIS, including HUD project entry assessments, the Standardized Housing Assessment, and the Coordinated Entry Assessment. Disability status is determined based on a "yes" response to any of the following questions:

General Entry or Standardized Housing Assessment:

- "Does the client have a disabling condition?"

CE Entry Assessment:

- "Does the client have a disabling condition?"
- "Some people under-report disabling conditions because they do not have insight into their current struggles. Do you believe this application is under-reporting disabling conditions?"

Domestic Violence Survivor

Individuals [currently fleeing domestic violence](#) are defined as homeless by HUD. In addition to those currently fleeing domestic violence, many individuals experiencing homelessness have also been victims of domestic violence in their past. Collecting this data can help the Chicago CoC understand how common domestic violence is for people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the Chicago coordinated entry process prioritizes individuals who have experienced domestic violence. For these types of analyses, individuals are understood to have experienced domestic violence if any of the following are true:

Standardized Housing Assessment:

- Housing status is fleeing domestic violence,
- Answer yes to “being a domestic violence victim/survivor”,
- Answer yes to “currently fleeing domestic violence.”

CE Entry Assessment:

- Answer yes to the question "currently residing with or trying to leave someone who threatens you or makes you fearful"
- Answer yes to the question "has your current partner or anyone in your home, ever hit, choked, or physically hurt you."

Experiencing Homelessness

Many of the people recorded in HMIS are experiencing homelessness. Others are housed with support from CoC housing projects, and still others access prevention services or drop-in programs where they may not be presently or previously experiencing homelessness. This variety of circumstances means that a person should not be considered experiencing homelessness simply because they have a record in HMIS. When attempting to understand who within HMIS is experiencing homelessness, the analysis includes individuals who are experiencing any of the types of homelessness [HUD recognizes](#):

- People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or who are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided.
- People who are losing their primary nighttime residence within 14 days.
- Unaccompanied youth and families with children who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state.
- People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, who have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

This information is drawn from the client’s prior and current living situation, and type of project enrollment, as well as information related to domestic violence. The subsequent sections describe these criteria in detail. For all calculations of homelessness, a person is excluded if they are housed through [CoC provided housing](#).

Experiencing Literal Homelessness

Individuals experiencing literal homelessness meet the first or the fourth of HUD’s categories of homelessness. This includes people who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or who are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. This also includes people who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, who have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. Someone is considered to be experiencing literal homelessness if they meet one of the following criteria:

- They have an open enrollment in emergency shelter, street outreach, transitional housing, or a safe haven project;

- They are enrolled in a project, other than [CoC Housing](#) projects, and their current or prior living situation indicates they are experiencing homelessness. These projects could include Coordinated Entry or a Drop-in Center;
- They meet the definition of [Fleeing Domestic Violence](#).

Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

Individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness are the subset of individuals experiencing literal homelessness who are residing somewhere not meant for human habitation. This is determined by looking at individuals who are enrolled in street outreach or individuals who leave any project with an exit destination of "place not meant for human habitation."

Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

Individuals who are chronically homeless must meet the HUD standards for both length of time homeless as well as disability status. For length of time, the head of household must have been either continuously homeless for the previous 12 months or have experienced homelessness four or more times in the previous three years for a total duration of at least 12 months. HUD provides a helpful [flowchart to determine chronicity](#).

When determining chronicity, the analysis begins from the list of heads of household who are disabled, and then uses the calculation on [length of time experiencing homeless](#) to determine if the individual meets the HUD threshold for chronicity.

At Imminent Risk of Homelessness

Individuals at imminent risk of homelessness must meet the second of HUD's categories of homelessness: People who are losing their primary nighttime residence within 14 days. Similar to the construction of literal homelessness, at imminent risk of homelessness is also determined if the person meets one of the following criteria from a current enrollment or one exited in the past 90 days:

- They are enrolled in a project, other than [CoC Housing](#) projects, and their current or prior living situation indicates they are at-risk of homelessness.¹

Because the prior and current living situations suggest a risk of homelessness similar to those that indicate housing instability (see next), the imminent risk of homelessness group is limited to those who are over the age of 25.

Youth Experiencing Housing Instability

Youth experiencing housing instability must meet the third of HUD's categories of homelessness: unaccompanied youth and families with children who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. Similar to the construction of literal homelessness, youth experiencing housing instability is also determined if the person meets one of the following criteria from a current enrollment or one exited in the past 90 days:

¹ These include staying in a hotel or motel without an emergency shelter voucher, staying in transitional housing or a host home, or staying or living with family or friends.

- They are enrolled in a project, other than [CoC Housing](#) projects, and their current or prior living situation indicates they are unstably housed.¹

To be in this group, the individual must also be between the ages of 18-24 based on their reported date of birth during the report analysis period. At present, unaccompanied minors are not included in analyses.

Fleeing Domestic Violence

Individuals fleeing domestic violence must meet the fourth of HUD's categories of homelessness: People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and who lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. While HMIS may record information on a person's experience with, or history of, domestic violence, for a person to be identified as homeless due to fleeing domestic violence that person must be enrolled in a project, other than [CoC Housing](#) projects. They must also meet one of the following criteria from a current enrollment or one exited in the past 90 days:

- They indicate a housing status of "Category 4 – Fleeing Domestic Violence (HUD)."

Or, they indicate yes to both of these questions:

- "Domestic Violence Victim/Survivor"
- "If yes to domestic violence victim/survivor, are you currently fleeing"

Head of Household

Understanding who is a head of household is important for establishing family composition for analyses and for constructing the coordinated entry list. A household is a single person or group of people living together as a social unit. When the household is a group of people, such as a family, HMIS asks that they identify one person as the head of household. Any calculation that references the household as a unit will use the head of household's data. For example, if a housing project takes both singles and families that are youth led, then the head of household's age is used to determine eligibility.

Determining Head of Household Status

HMIS records an individual's household status. The standard way to determine if a person is the head of their household is their *relationship to head of household* is listed as "self." However, it is possible to identify a person as the head of household by other means. A report or analysis using HMIS data will set the appropriate head of household determination logic for itself. For Chicago's Coordinated Entry system, the following logic is used.

Coordinated Entry System Head of Household Determination

People are interpreted to be heads of household if they meet any of the following criteria:

- In any CE entry assessment, their relationship to head of household is listed as “self”;
- They are enrolled in any coordinated entry project; or
- They are enrolled in any project by themselves.

Additionally, they must have a completed vulnerability index assessment. At present, the coordinated entry matching process is limited to households that contain at least one adult over the age of 18.

Housed Clients

In many instances, reports are created that aim to distinguish between individuals in need of housing from those who are already housed. For example, the community may want to understand how many people are enrolled in housing programs or how long they typically remain housed, and the report needs to be limited to just those who are in a housing program. Alternatively, the community may want to understand how many people are in need of housing, and the report needs to exclude people who are already in a housing program. Depending on the report, housed clients may include those housed in CoC projects, those who are housed in community housing (also known as exits to permanent housing), or both.

Housed in CoC projects

In the [System Goals](#) report, this element is titled CoC housed. An individual is considered housed in a CoC project if they are enrolled and, when required, have a move-in date but no exit date for one of the following program types:

- Permanent housing with short term support;
- Youth project-based transitional housing;
- Youth scattered site transitional housing;
- Transitional housing-rapid rehousing joint projects;

A person must have a recorded move-in date before being considered housed in:

- Permanent supportive housing;
- Rapid rehousing;
- Youth intentional permanent supportive housing.

A person is considered housed in these projects until their enrollment is closed with a recorded exit date.

Housed in Community Housing

In the [System Goals](#) report, this element is titled outside of CoC housed. These individuals have exits from their most recent project enrollment that suggest they are in housing. People are considered housed if their most recent exit includes any of the following words as part of their exit type:

- Rental by client;
- Permanent;
- Owned by client;
- Long-term care facility;
- Housed; or
- Not homeless.

Length of Time Experiencing Homelessness

Understanding how long people have been experiencing homelessness is an important metric for understanding how effectively we are preventing and ending homelessness. It is also used to prioritize individuals for housing and to understand when someone has experienced chronic homelessness. HUD uses multiple methods to calculate length of time homeless—the calculation for [System Performance Measures](#) is different than the calculation for determining [chronicity](#). In order to ensure consistency across reports, Chicago follows HUD's outline for determining length of time experiencing homelessness to determine chronicity.

Veteran Status

Individuals are determined to be a veteran if any of the following are true:

- Client Veteran Status is marked "Yes (HUD)"
- They respond, "Yes (HUD)" to the questions "Are you a U.S. Military Veteran?"