

AHAR-Webinar-Part-1-Introduction-to-the-AHAR

Script

Abt Associates Inc.

1. Hello and welcome to the first of a two part webinar series on reporting data for the 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report.
2. My name is Galen Savidge-Wilkins, and I will be joined today by Korrin Bishop and Marissa Personette.
We are all members of the interdisciplinary team here at Abt Associates tasked with collecting AHAR data for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or HUD.
3. Before we get started, if you have any questions about this presentation or other aspects of the AHAR process that were not covered in this webinar series, please submit your questions to the HUD Exchange Ask A Question portal by following the link shown here.
Be sure to select 'HDX' as the reporting system in step 2 of the question submission process
4. This webinar series is designed to provide an introduction to the AHAR data collection process, and this presentation has three primary goals.
First, we want communities to understand the importance and usefulness of the AHAR data they provide.
Second, we want communities to understand the data quality thresholds for inclusion in the AHAR.
Lastly, we want communities to understand how to navigate the Homelessness Data Exchange, or HDX which is the website where data are submitted for the AHAR.
5. In this webinar we will go over some of the key terms that we use and the important dates you'll need to be aware of;
We will provide an overview of the AHAR process and what data are collected;
And we will briefly walk through the data submission process on the HDX, our AHAR data reporting site.
We will provide more in-depth guidance on the data submission process, including how to address some common data quality issues in part 2 of this webinar series.
6. We will now provide an overview of the AHAR including its importance, key deadlines for the 2015 cycle, the data sources, and AHARs use of the HMIS data standards.
7. Before we get started, we just want to review some of the acronyms that you will become very familiar with during the AHAR process.
The AHAR, as you may know, is the annual homeless assessment report to congress on the extent and nature of homelessness in the US.
The Housing Inventory Count, prepared by communities in January is a point in time inventory of programs in the CoC for persons who are homeless.
Point-in-Time Counts are one night counts of sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations.
8. The AHAR is an Annual report submitted to Congress that provides: National estimates of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals and families on a single night through the annual Point-in-Time counts collected by CoCs and reported to HUD.
The AHAR also provides a 12-month count of sheltered homelessness; nationwide trends in homelessness; characteristics and service-use patterns of sheltered people and those residing in PSH programs; and the size and use of the housing inventory of residential programs for homeless people. This training focuses on the collection of HMIS data to produce the 12 month estimates of sheltered homelessness.
If you would like to look at past reports, they are available for download at www.hudexchange.info

9. The AHAR is important because it is the primary data source on the extent and nature of homelessness nationwide. When various media outlets reference national trends in homelessness, they are usually referring to AHAR data.

The AHAR data are being used to measure progress against the nation's strategic plan to end homelessness. Communities use the AHAR to learn about their homeless population and compare their data against the national profile. Lastly, HUD considers AHAR participation a benchmark of a high-quality HMIS implementation. Community's HMIS data are reviewed by a team of data experts and all data must satisfy specific data quality thresholds to be included in the AHAR.

10. AHAR has three important deadlines.

On October 1, 2015, AHAR data collection begins in the HDX. You are assigned a Data Liaison either from Abt Associates or from the University of Pennsylvania to be your primary point of contact, and your Data Liaison will reach out to you around the start of the AHAR process. December 2, 2015 is the draft deadline for both all persons and Veterans data. Draft data do not need to have all data quality questions fully addressed by this date, but communities must submit data to give their Data Liaisons a chance to review their submission and provide feedback.

December 23, 2015 is the final deadline for data on both All Persons and Veterans. For the final deadline, data submissions must be completed and confirmed by communities. Data collection is often an iterative process, and successful communities often submit data well before the deadlines.

11. There are two data sources for the AHAR. The first is HMIS Data. This includes clients served between **October 1st and September 30th** of the following year in Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing.

The building blocks of the AHAR reporting requirements are the universal HMIS data elements from the March 2010 HMIS data standards such as Age, Race, and Veteran status. It also uses some program specific elements for PSH such as destination at exit.

The AHAR collects HMIS data for several subpopulations like individuals, people in families, veterans, and people in PSH.

The second data source is CoC Exhibit 1 Data. This includes the annual housing inventory count and the Point-in-Time counts.

12. Please note that there has been one major change to the AHAR submission requirements in 2015. Instead of reporting out the number of persons aged 18-30, communities will instead have to report separately on the number of persons aged 18-24 and 25-30. Questions regarding the change to this data element should be directed to your HMIS vendor or your AHAR Liaison. The question recording zip code of last permanent residence has been hidden from view for the 2015 AHAR. This data element may still be included in an XML upload, but data corresponding to that question will not show up on the HDX.

Otherwise, the AHAR is the same as last year.

13. Also, we want to reinforce that the 2015 AHAR is largely unchanged, although the new HMIS Data Standards went into effect in 2014. New Data Standards will be used in future AHARs. We developed tools to map the 2014 Data Standards to existing AHAR categories. If you have any questions, or encounter any errors mapping existing HMIS data to the AHAR please discuss the issue with your HMIS vendor or your AHAR Liaison.

14. As a part of the AHAR data collection process, all CoCs nationwide provide Housing Inventory (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) data, but there are 2 types of communities that report HMIS data. These are: sample sites and contributing Communities.

Sample sites were selected when the AHAR was first launched and their data became the basis for producing national estimates.

Contributing Communities are typically CoCs that submit data for their area and help improve the precision of national estimates.

Regardless of their type, CoCs must meet data quality standards can be included in the final report to Congress.

15. Let's look more closely at what a sample site is versus a Contributing Community.

There are 102 Sample Communities. These are Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) jurisdictions selected to represent the nation during the important analysis stage of the AHAR process. These CDBG jurisdictions can be all of or part of a CoC, but generally they are a small jurisdiction within a larger jurisdiction. Sample sites are designated by the geocode found on HUD's HIC.

There were 391 Contributing Communities in 2013 AHAR. These are CoCs that volunteer to provide CoC-wide or balance of the CoC data.

In 2013 493 communities submitted some usable data to the AHAR.

16. There are six reporting categories used in the AHAR. They are separated by program type and household type. For the purposes of the AHAR, persons in households with at least one member over the age of 18 AND at least one member over the age of 18 are considered in Families. All other persons are considered Individuals.

We generally go by shorthand when referring to these categories:

ES-FAM is all people in families served in emergency shelter;

ES-IND is all people served in emergency shelter for individuals;

TH-FAM is all people in families served in transitional housing;

TH-IND is all people served in transitional housing for individuals;

PSH-FAM is all people in families served in permanent supportive housing;

PSH-IND is all people served in permanent supportive housing for individuals.

17. Each set of reporting categories are submitted separately for "All persons" and "Veterans". All questions in the Veterans categories are about homeless veterans and exclude any non-veterans that may be in the household. Thus a complete data submission from a CoC may have up to 12 reporting categories.

18. If you think your community might have trouble reporting quality data for every category it's important to remember that CoCs can report in all categories or a few categories—it's not all or nothing! For Example, a CoC can participate in the AHAR with only data on people in emergency shelters if the data on people in transitional housing and permanent supportive housing is not usable.

Each reporting category is assessed independently for data quality, using three thresholds:

The first is a 50% HMIS bed coverage rate, which is a hard cut off; we will be unable to use any categories where less than 50% of beds in a category are in HMIS.

Second, we look for reasonable bed utilization rates, typically between 65-105%. Bed utilization rates above 105% or below 65% may indicate data quality issues.

If utilization rates are above 105%, it could indicate that projects are not exiting clients out of HMIS. Some other issues could be that seasonal or overflow beds were in use the night of the count (more on these beds later!), cots or cribs were used (which are not included in the bed count), and kids sharing beds. If utilization rates are below 65%, it could indicate that programs are not entering clients into HMIS.

Third, we look for reasonable missing data rates. This year, every question will show you the missing data rate for that question. Missing data rates above 5% may indicate data quality issues and CoCs are encouraged to provide complete data to the AHAR.

19. The Sandbox is a “dummy” HDX site designed to help communities test their AHAR data uploads and to preview possible data errors or warnings. Sandbox is available year-round. We encourage communities to enter data prior to Oct. 1 to test their data quality in preparation for data collection. To access the Sandbox site go to sandbox.hudhdx.info. Please note, however, data entered into the Sandbox cannot be transferred to the live HDX site for regular submission.
20. Here is an example of a community that has data quality issues in a few categories, which could cause the AHAR category to be unusable:
The community has 40% HMIS bed coverage in the ES-Family category
The bed utilization rate is 160% in the ES-Individuals category
And 55% of clients are missing information for Question 3, age of participants, in the TH-Individuals category.
21. However, these problems can be fixed!
If the community identified that 3 more ES-Family projects participated in HMIS, then that would bring the bed coverage up to over 50%.
An ES-Individuals project did not exit clients properly throughout the year, but the program back-entered the missing exit dates, and utilization is now under 105%.
And, missing age data were obtained for a large percentage of individuals in TH.
Now, all of these categories have usable data.
22. The AHAR submission process has two stages.
First, what communities do to prepare their data, and second what happens after communities submit their data.
23. Before submitting any data to the HDX communities should start to run their own local HMIS reports to see what kinds of data cleaning steps might be needed before AHAR data can be considered usable. Regardless of what HMIS software you use, you should generate an AHAR report for your own reference prior to submission.
Data issues vary from community to community, but it is helpful to check your bed coverage rates, bed utilization rates, see if you can identify any sources of missing data, and test your data in the Sandbox site.
Lastly, you should review the resources we have posted to the HDX homepage; in addition to part 2 of this webinar series we have a detailed introductory guide to the AHAR, and a list of Frequently Asked Questions.
24. As you look over the data you will submit for the AHAR you should be sure to note the ways in which your bed counts differ from what is currently shown in the HIC. The HIC auto-populates what was submitted in January, and it’s not uncommon for number of available beds in a community to change.

The notes tool in the HDX is incredibly valuable during this stage of the process. Data liaisons read every note when reviewing data submissions, and well documented notes with clear explanations will greatly facilitate the data cleaning process.

And remember, your Data Liaison is here to help, starting with the launch of AHAR data collection on **October 1st** through the final deadline on **December 16th**, but they can only help you if you work collaboratively with them throughout that time period, not just the days and hours before the deadline.

25. This slide presents a general framework for submitting data to the AHAR, beginning with the initial submission of data into the HDX.

Once a community submits AHAR data in the HDX, their Data liaison will review it for errors, warning flags, and irregularities along with any notes that have been submitted.

Most communities require some degree of extra data cleaning or additional explanation in at least one of their submitted categories.

If the data are not yet complete, the Data Liaison will mark any categories with issues as “in progress” and communities are asked to work through any outstanding questions the Liaison may have before the submission can be marked “complete” and considered usable.

Once the data are marked as complete, CoCs will be asked for a final confirmation of the data, and the AHAR staff make final determinations about the usability of the data.

26. The website to submit AHAR data is called the homeless data exchange, or HDX for short.

27. Every CoC primary contact must have a login for the HDX and each CoC can assign, read, write, and submission rights to their staff. If you don't know what “rights” you have, please check with your CoC Primary Contact. If you don't know who your CoC Primary contact is, email the AHAR data collection team at AHAR@abtassoc.com

The primary contact is the person listed on the last NOFA application. Please remember, if you already have a login and password for HMIS.info, then you do not need to re-register for the HDX. The logins and passwords are identical.

28. As a tip when using the HDX, you should be sure you know who has submission rights for your CoC before the deadline. This will avoid the potential scenario where the deadline arrives and a CoC is unable to submit the data because the person with submission rights is unavailable or no longer with the CoC.

The CoC Primary Contact has the ability to give an HDX user submission rights. An additional helpful tip is to check the validation report at the end of each reporting category before submitting. This will show you any errors in your data and thus can reduce the amount of back and forth with your data liaison if the errors are fixed prior to submission.

29. I will now go through a demonstration of the HDX website.

30. One of the first things you should do after logging in, is go to the HDX Admin tab, to ensure that everyone who needs access to read, write, and submit data, is set up properly. It is up to the CoC to update this information if there is staff turnover of any kind.

31. As you can see on the screen, all HUD CoC level reports (AHAR, Pulse, HIC, and PIT) are listed in HDX admin.

Start by looking at AHAR to see who has submit, write and read rights for the data. Only one person can submit data for the AHAR, so you want to ensure that you select someone who will be available throughout the reporting cycle and has the authority to submit data on behalf of the CoC.

If someone needs to be added to the system, the primary contact must click Add User on the bottom right hand side of the screen.

The primary contact can also change the rights of any user at any given time. Just hit save after doing so.

32. After you've confirmed your users in the HDX, click on the dashboard tab for your CoC. The Dashboard gives you a quick snapshot of the status of your data and whether it has been submitted or not.
33. Next you should click on the AHAR tab. You will find all the reporting categories (ES-FAM, ES-IND, etc.) listed on the screen.

You can begin by selecting either: Enter Data (this will allow you to enter your data), Not Reporting (this means you will not be submitting data for a particular category this year), or Zero Providers (a zero provider means you do not have any of those types of projects in your AHAR jurisdiction. For example, if you don't have any emergency shelters for families, you would mark ES-FAM as a zero provider).

As you can see, there is a column for that gives you your % your data is complete and any validation errors that may appear in your data.
34. After you select "Enter Data," a navigation box with the AHAR questions will appear at the top of the screen for each section of the reporting category.

When you've completed entering data for each question, hit save and next. You can click on each box to reveal the specific questions associated with the box, and then you can click the question to begin data submission. We strongly urge you to submit your data sequentially, beginning with question 1 and continuing to the end.
35. At any point during the data submission process you have the ability to enter notes along the way. Notes are a very important function in the HDX. They allow you to explain your data to HUD.

For example, if you served more clients than you expected and your utilization rates are somewhat higher than normal, you can leave a note to explain why this happened. The notes will also be seen by your AHAR Data Reviewer. It is important to be thorough in your explanations, so they can help you work out any issues.
36. Throughout the process, you can use the "my data" page to see any errors that are in your data. The errors are shown under the column labelled "validation". You can also see the status of your data, whether it is still in progress or has been submitted for review.
37. The validation report for each reporting category lists the AHAR questions with reporting errors. It also tells you what the error is in a short descriptive narrative along the right hand side of the report.

You can click "fix this" to go directly to the question so you can fix the error. You also have the ability to download the validation report into an excel file if you prefer to sort the report differently or share it with others in your community.
38. The Home page in the HDX lists various links to resources that will be very helpful in submitting your AHAR data.

These include:

 - Parts 1 and 2 of this webinar series.
 - An introductory guidance document for the AHAR process.
 - And a comprehensive list of helpful Frequently Asked Questions with detailed explanations.

39. Additionally, if you click on “reports” in the HDX, you can find prior reports from your community.
The Data Summary provides an overview of your AHAR data and is used to finalize your data. For jurisdictions with less than 100% bed coverage, the extrapolated count report produces CoC wide data that accounts for projects that do not participate in HMIS.
The Demographics Report provides the percentage of persons in each demographic category.
The Prior Living Situation Report shows and categorizes the prior living situations of homeless people counted in the AHAR data.
And finally, the Length of Stay report breaks down the amount of time each person used shelter during the AHAR reporting period.
40. Finally, we will talk about the next steps and additional resources to help you through the AHAR process.
41. There is a second training available at www.hudexchange.info . The topics that will be covered are: HUD guidance for the 2015 AHAR, tips for reviewing and cleaning your data, and how to work with your AHAR Liaison.
42. Data collection for the 2015 AHAR begins October 1st! Before you start submitting data in HDX, some common first steps are checking to see if your CoC has:
Expanded HMIS Bed Coverage, Improved Data Quality, Simplified the AHAR reporting process, or Identified and new CoC data review processes.
43. Thank you all for joining us for this webinar. As a reminder, if you have additional questions, please submit them through HUD Exchange Ask A Question. This webinar and other resources are available on HDX home page. Please reach out to your data liaison if you have specific questions.
44. You can obtain information or assistance from the HUD Exchange by searching the Resource Library, using the “Ask a Question” function, or requesting technical assistance.