

KAREN DEBLASIO: Hello, everybody. Welcome to this short training on capturing chronic homeless status in a client's HMIS record. I'm Karen DeBlasio, a Division Director of the Program Coordination and Analysis Division here in the SNAPS office. I'm joined by Abby Miller, our HMIS lead here in the SNAPS office. Abby, would you like to introduce yourself?

ABBILYN MILLER: Yeah, thanks, Karen, and thank you all for watching us today. I'm really happy to be doing the training with Karen today and to be diving into the HMIS work for SNAPS.

KAREN DEBLASIO: So before we begin, I want to take a minute and go over a couple of concepts... interrelated. It's important to understand that there are these three separate concepts, but related concepts at play when we talk about how HMIS can be used to assist in identifying people who are experiencing chronic homelessness. This webinar is intended to help CoCs and HMIS lead agencies understand the fundamental distinction between these concepts and to provide information that can be woven into appropriate provider and end user training. This particular webinar will cover capturing a client's chronic homeless status in their HMIS record according to the client's self-report at project entry.

The other key concepts as you can see here on the slide is using your HMIS to document a client's chronic homeless status for eligibility purposes, but to do this, you would need to look at a client's HMIS enrollment record rather than the self-reported data on length of time homeless that's collected at each project entry. This documentation activity is only necessary for those projects with chronic homelessness as an enrollment criterion. The third block you see on the slide, reporting, combines these two concepts by looking at self-reported data and enrollment histories for each client so that we can run local and HUD-required reports to determine whether the person meets the definition of chronic homelessness at entry at a point in time or over the course of a year. Again, today, we're going to be focused on the first of these concepts. HUD will provide separate webinars related to the other concepts later on.

The learning objectives for today, we hope that at the end of this brief presentation you'll be able to understand the data elements in the HMIS that must be captured in order to calculate chronic homelessness, understand the new, combined data element, 3.917 'Living Situation' and become familiar with available tools and products about the HMIS data standards. Again, this presentation is intended to provide more detail on how to use your HMIS to record information required at every project entry. Capturing these data on every client is required by HUD and is necessary to later be able to run reports and create by-name lists of people who are experiencing chronic homelessness in your HMIS participating projects. This webinar will not be an overview of the data standards' changes or the final rule defining chronic homelessness.

There are several data elements that are required by HUD to be collected at every project participating in the HMIS. These are the universal data elements. Some are collected once for each client and carried through the system while others are collected at each project entry. However, only two of those are relevant for determining a client's chronic homeless status for reporting purposes. These elements are disabling condition and living situation. This presentation will be an in-depth review of each of these elements and their subparts for which I'm going to turn it over to Abby to walk us through.

ABBILYN MILLER: Thanks, Karen. We're going to start with disabling condition, which is data element 3.8 in the HMIS data standards manual and dictionary. The universal data element, disabling condition, simply asks providers to indicate whether the client has a disabling condition, yes or no. A disabling condition is defined as a physical, mental or emotional impairment, including one caused by alcohol or drug abuse, PTSD or brain injury that 1) is long-continuing or indefinite, 2) impedes ability to live independently and 3) could be improved by suitable housing or a developmental disability or AIDS or any condition arising from HIV. In this data element 3.8, projects simply indicate yes or no as to whether a client reports that he or she meets these criteria.

Some projects, depending on their funding requirements may also have to answer more detailed questions about individual types of disabilities. It includes physical disability, developmental disability, chronic health conditions, HIV/AIDS, mental health problems and substance abuse problems. If a client has one of these specific disabilities and the project indicates an HMIS record that it's a long-continuing issue that substantially impairs the client's ability to live independently, then that also counts as the client having a disabling condition, but again these are more detailed data elements and they're not necessarily required by every single project in the continuum like 3.8 is.

The more complex data element and the one we're going to spend quite a bit more time on today is one that was introduced in 2014 as data element 3.17. It's been updated several times since then and is currently known as data element 3.917 in the data standards or living situation. This data element has five separate fields as shown here on the slide and functions differently depending on whether a client's entering a project type that means they are currently homeless. That is an outreach, a shelter, a safe haven project or they're entering a residential or other project type where they're not necessarily currently, literally homeless and so we treat each of those differently. We'll start with an overview of the five fields and then discuss how the structure is different for each of those project types.

First, we have type of living situation. Here, you want to talk to the client about the type of place the client was staying just before they came to your project. Select the best match from the list of the homeless, institutional, permanent and other types of situations that are available to you. Second, you want to find out how long the client was staying in that situation. If the client was in shelter for the last two weeks, you select one week or more, but less than one month from the options that are provided to you in the HMIS. Now if the client is entering a project type other than shelter, safe haven or outreach, there are some extra fields here. If a client is coming from a permanent or transitional housing situation that they were in for less than seven days or if they're in an institutional situation that they were in for less than 90 days, you're going to have to work with the client to figure out where they were before that. If it was on the street in an emergency shelter or in a safe haven, you'd indicate that in this field. If the client was in one of those three situations, you keep going. If not, you stop at that point.

The third field then is the date the client's literal homelessness experience started. This would look back further than what you collected in that second field to cover any continuous time either on the streets, shelter or safe haven. If the client had been staying in a shelter for two weeks, but had been on the street before that for a year, you ask the client if they remember when they first started living on the streets. You might then have to ask the client where they were staying

before that to confirm that it was a place there they wouldn't be considered literally homeless. Once you get clear on that date or approximate date the client became literally homeless this time, you enter that date in this field. If the client became homeless today, you would indicate today's date. We want to understand how many different times a client has been in literally homeless situations over the past three years. You want to work with the client to think about breaks. In other words, breaks are those times that they were in permanent or in transitional housing for a week or more or in jail or other institution for three months or more, the 90-day break.

Once you and the client figure out how many breaks there have been in the past three years, you can add up the number of times a client was homeless between the breaks. Finally, the last question asks you to work with the client to look back over the last three years and then you want to count up the total number of cumulative months the client was in a literally homeless situation and you can round up on the current month. If the client tells you they were homeless in January and February and it's now March 10th, for instance, you can include March for a total of three months. Karen, that was a lot. Is there anything that you want to add to that?

KAREN DEBLASIO: Yeah, there is. Thanks, Abby. We want to stress each of these fields is here to capture self-reported data and we understand that different project types may have different realities that they're working in when it comes to interviewing clients. Some high volume shelters are going to need to simply ask people to tell them how many times they've been homeless and to ballpark how many months total. Other projects are going to have a more complex intake process that may allow their case managers to sit with the client and get a clear picture of official breaks in homelessness according to the definition of chronic homelessness. Permanent supportive housing projects with documentation requirements are going to be depending time with clients' HMIS records and files to get information for documentation purposes, which they can then use to improve data quality in this field. All of these strategies are perfectly fine. We expect that the data quality will vary from project type to project type. This field is simply meant to provide a consistent way to capture information in the HMIS, so CoCs can actually start to use it for planning purposes.

ABBILYN MILLER: Thanks, Karen. Those are really important points... that different project types will have to handle this differently. Now that you understand what the fields mean, I'm going to talk about the structure of the questions you might ask the client to gather information and walk through two examples talking about our hypothetical person John and his housing for the last three years.

So, we'll start with John entering a shelter on October 10th, 2017. He's entering the shelter from a stay out on the streets, so the response for Field One is "Place not meant for human habitation."

He remembers that he started staying on the streets at the end of last winter. He thinks it was around May of 2017, or about 5 months ago. So the response for Field Two is "90 days or more, but less than 1 year." After a brief discussion and a quick glance at his HMIS records, the case worker talking with John confirms that he was staying in an emergency shelter all through last winter. Before that, he was staying in a rental apartment with a few roommates. John remembers that his roommates kicked him out last November, right after Thanksgiving of 2016. So in Field

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Three, the case manager records that he's been on the streets or in a shelter since November 25, 2016.

The case manager discusses with John whether he'd stayed in a shelter or on the streets any other times in the last 3 years. There's no record of any other enrollments in the system, but John recalls that he stayed in a shelter in another state for 3 months in 2015. That was the only time, other than this current occasion, so the response to Field Four is 2 times. Counting up the months over the 2 occasions, there are 3 months from 2015 combined with this occasion's approximate 11 months and 3 days (that includes the 3 days from November 2016 – and then the whole current month of October 2017). So that adds up to the response to Field Five, which is “12 or more months.”

For all other project types, the data element is set up to only collect responses to fields in certain circumstances. So, for example, if John moves on from the shelter, and enters into a PSH project on January 15th 2018, the response for Field One at the time of that PSH enrollment is “Emergency Shelter.” The case manager can see his record of his prior stay in an emergency shelter and he confirms with John that he entered the shelter on October 10th of 2017. That was just over 90 days ago, and so the response is “90 days or more, but less than 1 year.”

He was coming from a homeless situation, that is, the emergency shelter, so we bypass these questions. If he was coming from a long stay in an institution or a permanent or transitional situation, he wouldn't be considered chronically homeless at project start, nor would he be able to age into chronic homelessness while in the transitional housing project, so further data collection would not be necessary for this data element. If had come from a short stint in an institution, or a few nights in permanent housing, the data element has a series of questions to determine if the client was in a literal homeless situation just before that, since those short stays don't count as “breaks” in literal homelessness.

But John *has* been continuously on the streets or in a shelter for the last 14.5 months, so we continue with the questions. Using the Thanksgiving holiday as a marker, the PSH project is able to pinpoint the last date he slept in a permanent housing situation for 7 nights or more and completes Field 3.

As before, his only other experience of homelessness was his 3 month stay in a shelter in 2015. He therefore has been on the streets or in a shelter a total of 2 times in the past three years....for a cumulative total of 17.5 months.

One additional consideration in completing this data element is the inclusion of the previous living situation labeled “Interim Housing.” This is a special response category that is used only in certain circumstances. Where it has been determined to be absolutely necessary to use transitional or RRH housing to keep the client engaged prior to moving into PSH, the client must be identified as coming from “interim housing” to preserve chronic identification in reporting.

The client must have applied for the housing, been accepted into the housing project or voucher program, and have a unit or voucher reserved. For example, the unit may be awaiting a tenant moving out, require repairs or painting, or the client has a voucher but is looking for a unit.

Using the interim housing designation housing is not a substitute for a waiting list or for any situation other than identified here.

Now, hopefully, those two examples of John moving through the system broke down 3.917 in a way that helps you. We know that this is complicated, so feel free to move the cursor back, rewind it and watch it again, but at this point, I'm going to turn it back to Karen to finish this out and talk about some of the resources we have available for you.

KAREN DEBLASIO: Thanks, Abby. As Abby just said, 3.917 is a challenging data element. We recognize that. It's really, really important, but it is also challenging particularly for certain project types that may have a lot of clients and have a lot of case management and work to do with clients. We've together some resources specific for you all for 3.917. One thing it is important to note is that vendors are expected to have the data element programmed in such a way or have these pathways or dependencies programmed so that you all and your staff are assisted in navigating the complexities of the data element. It looks very clunky on paper and when we're walking through it, but part of the reason we had Abby go through the data and do the examples that she did was to give you the flow of you're only getting questions that are dependencies, you're only getting questions based on answers, in some cases, to previous questions. Your system should be programmed to reflect those dependencies.

In order to help you all and your staff understand the data collection process for this particular element, we've developed paper data collection forms for each project type, so for outreach, shelter, safe havens and all the other project types. The forms are available at the hyperlink showed on the page. There are forms for the universal data elements, plus two supplemental forms specific to data element 3.917. The forms are called the Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter and Safe Haven Project Supplement and the Transitional Housing, Permanent Housing and Other Supplement that are provided in Word that hopefully will allow you to incorporate them into your own local forms. I will just add, though, that HUD has been encouraging folks, for a while, to try to move as much as possible to real-time data entry. We know that that's not always possible and that some communities like to have these forms available for cases where real-time data entry is not possible, so that's why we're making this resource available.

To close it all out, I'd like to just go over a couple of data standards resources and core materials that we have available... And we thought that putting these all in one slide would be helpful, so you could kind of have a list of all of the existing materials in place. Hopefully, you're familiar with these. If not, we encourage you to check these materials out. We are going to continue to add materials on the data standards and some of the trickier data elements and, as we said, we will be releasing more of these brief webinars around reporting and documenting chronic homeless in your HMIS. So, we want to thank everybody for joining us today. Hopefully, this was helpful and thank you for all the good work you're doing in our communities with our most vulnerable citizens.