

Introduction and Purpose

Communities across the country are expanding their focus to include and address racial and ethnic inequities in homeless response systems. Through building and maintaining partnerships with Black, Indigenous, and all people of color (BIPOC), local systems create more equitable practices, policies, and regulations that better serve the needs of racial and ethnic groups who have historically been the most impacted by systemic oppression. While a primary starting point in racial equity work is local system and program-level Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, data from outside of HMIS is critical to gaining a broader understanding of a community's realities, strengths, and challenges.

Though HMIS is an important starting point to understand the homeless response system, there are some critical gaps in HMIS data. For instance, HMIS is missing information due to instances in which:

- Homeless service providers (including victim service providers) are not participating in HMIS.
- Intake workers do not collect all required data elements.
- People experiencing homelessness are not engaged with an HMIS-participating provider.
- People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are not engaged in services (and thus not tracked by the homeless response system).

Continuums of Care (CoCs) should identify and fill gaps in their data to get a more complete understanding of homelessness in their area.

The purpose of this guide is to highlight non-HMIS data sources that communities can use to improve their homeless response system, especially concerning racial inequities. Communities should pursue data strategies that complement HMIS with other sources that can both broaden and deepen analyses of system-level performance data, including systems mapping, [qualitative data collection](#), and inclusion of data from adjacent service systems.

Approaches

Every community has different local factors and histories that disproportionately and negatively impact BIPOC, specifically those living at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (i.e., gender identity, sexuality, disability status, immigration status) in addition to experiencing homelessness. Across the country, communities are beginning to [reassess the tools](#), processes, and practices within homeless response systems that exacerbate and create housing disparities for BIPOC. To begin the work of dismantling these systemic inequities, communities must begin with a transparent conversation around data and its functions, limitations, and possibilities.

The first step toward communities understanding their local racial and ethnic demographics is to review the [CoC Analysis Tool: Race and Ethnicity](#). Pre-loaded with Point-In-Time (PIT) count and American Community Survey (ACS) data for every CoC, this tool enables a focused comparison of a CoC's broader demographics such as race, ethnicity, and poverty rate to homeless response system data.

It is important to acknowledge that no community is static—communities are always rapidly changing. For understanding general trends, it may be useful to use mapping tools to capture and explore demographic data across CoC geographies (such as neighborhoods, census tracts, cities/towns, and counties). [Geospatial analysis](#) can help communities visualize trends and patterns impacting their systems in ways that other types of analyses cannot achieve. This kind of analysis illuminates a community's specific social and political history, particularly the outcomes of practices that are rooted in racism and racial segregation. For example:

- **Racially restrictive covenants**, which inserted prohibitions against renting or selling residential property to certain racial or ethnic groups.
- **Redlining**, which refers to practices in mortgage lending and home equity lending that withheld investment in neighborhoods classified as "hazardous," with the intent of targeting low-income neighborhoods and those with a large percentage of BIPOC residents.

Such practices were made illegal by the Fair Housing Act of 1968 but continue to negatively impact communities that are divided along racial or ethnic lines.

Intersectionality is a framework for better understanding how aspects of an individual or group’s social and political identities are impacted by or benefit from systemic inequity. For example, it may be useful to conduct focus groups or community discussions to learn more about how racial discrimination intersects with lived experience of homelessness. Additionally, it may be useful to analyze data disaggregated by race/ethnicity *and* gender, age, sexuality, disability, or household type to specifically explore which populations experience the greatest racial inequalities in homeless response systems.

Another way of building a community’s capacity to engage in the work of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities is by identifying those disparities in adjacent systems that have historically exacerbated experiences of homelessness and housing crises. Adjacent systems may include education, justice or local judicial, foster care, child welfare, mental or behavioral health, or workforce development systems. Communities can explore partnerships with adjacent systems, such as formal data-sharing agreements, that can provide the ability to perform client-level data matches across systems or explore trends in data. For example, gaining insights into how and when people with lived experience and expertise (PLEE) of homelessness interact with local jail and prison systems could be paired with existing quantitative or qualitative data from the homeless system to better understand and alleviate system inequities. When developing any type of partnership with an adjacent system, the focus should always prioritize the quality of the experiences, housing outcomes, and housing stability of BIPOC who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness.

Non-HMIS Data Sources:

Data Source Category	Description of Data	Links/Resources
Qualitative data from PLEE and BIPOC	Gather critical insights and experiences of homeless response systems by providing compensated opportunities for PLEE and currently unhoused individuals to share their deep insider knowledge of the system.	<u>HUD guidance document on collecting qualitative data</u>
Hospital/health system data Public health data	Community-level data regarding the physical health conditions and diseases may offer contextual clues and ideas for meaningful health-related partnerships with the homeless response system (e.g., COVID-19 rates). Similarly, reviewing information on substance abuse and mental health issues faced by individuals in communities may be useful in understanding and targeting resources for marginalized populations.	Local hospital systems <u>Centers for Disease Control and Protection</u> (CDC) <u>CDC COVID Data Tracker</u> <u>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive</u> (From Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]) <u>Departments of Public Health</u> National Health Care for the Homeless
Local town/city/county/state government	Depending on the community, city, county, or state offices related to health or human services, communities may already have access to useful datasets or data analysis tools (such as geo-mapping software).	<u>State/County Government</u> Contact Information <u>Census mapping tools</u> (Census.gov)

	<p>This can include information on local systems that support child welfare/foster care, mental/behavioral health, developmental disabilities, and others.</p>	
<p>Legal/justice systems (e.g., eviction, recidivism, and re-entry data), jails/prisons, police, detention centers, etc.</p>	<p>National statistics on evictions are available from several sources, and local partnerships with legal aid chapters could be explored to gather relevant data (i.e., eviction court filings that can be accessed as public records).</p>	<p><u>Local Legal Aid Chapter</u> <u>The Eviction Lab</u></p>
<p>Schools and education systems (e.g., data on the mobility of households with youth experiencing homelessness)</p>	<p>McKinney-Vento liaisons are representatives of local school districts who coordinate services to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.</p>	<p><u>National Center for Homeless Education</u></p>
<p>Other child/youth services and systems</p>	<p>The family Unification Program (FUP) is coordinated nationally by local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), typically in coordination with state or county departments of family or human services.</p> <p>Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) is a program under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with a large menu of services ranging from drop-in and outreach services to various forms of transitional housing as well as much more.</p>	<p><u>Family Unification Program</u> <u>Runaway Homeless Youth Program</u></p>
<p>Economic or income data</p>	<p>Communities may consider analyzing local economic data such as poverty rates, income levels, wealth gaps, income inequality rates, unemployment rates, and workforce development information to contextualize data from homeless response systems (e.g., Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WOIA] or other workforce development programs may provide meaningful employment-related partnerships).</p>	<p><u>Census Data</u> <u>Department of Labor programs</u> <u>Workforce Performance Results</u></p>
<p>Street outreach information</p>	<p>A current and ongoing understanding of the location of encampments or “hotspots” in addition to identifying areas that are not typically labeled or checked for people experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>This information is local and specific to each CoC and can be collected from outreach programs but may or may not be included in HMIS data collection.</p>

	<p>A geographic understanding of any rivers, bridges, mountains, beaches, parks, parking lots, or other locations where unhoused individuals are living.</p> <p>Natural community-building locations such as convenience stores, pharmacies, post offices, libraries, laundromats, etc.</p>	
Affordable housing	<p>Fair market rental (FMR) rates.</p> <p>PHA data including information about housing choice vouchers, site-based vouchers, etc.</p>	<p>FY 2022 <u>Area Fair Market Rental Rates</u></p> <p><u>Listing of local PHAs</u></p>

How Equitable Homeless Response Systems Can Use Non-HMIS Data

As communities build the capacity to explore non-HMIS data to contextualize racial equity work, data interrogation should be driven and informed by the actual experiences and barriers faced by BIPOC PLEE. Building a shared understanding of these realities is crucial to changing how racial equity work is managed and undertaken. The following ideas may support communities in this regard:

- Digest and review HMIS and non-HMIS data with a diverse group of partners including PLEE and BIPOC.
- Ensure that there is a shared understanding of the HMIS and non-HMIS data, including an explanation of acronyms and technical concepts so that data is understandable to a wide variety of audiences.
- Co-develop approaches to quantitative and qualitative data collection with PLEE as well as stakeholders whose racial and ethnic identities align with the populations most impacted by homelessness in CoCs. Discuss the data together as a group and co-develop learning questions for further exploration. For example:
 - Which racial and ethnic groups are impacted by homelessness?
 - How do community-wide demographic Census data compare to the demographics of individuals and families experiencing homelessness? Who is overrepresented in the homeless response system and who is underrepresented?
 - Where are households of different or multiple racial and ethnic identities accessing housing and services? Are there groups that experience barriers to accessing the system?
 - Are there geographic areas where more individuals experience homelessness than in other areas? What factors may account for these geographical differences? What do you notice about these geographies?
 - Is there funding for outreach teams?
 - Is outreach team coverage comprehensive and culturally competent? Do outreach services reach racial and ethnic groups that are most impacted by homelessness? Are there gaps in outreach team coverage in certain areas and, if so, why? What trainings are available for outreach staff? How often are they conducted? Are they required or optional, and why?
 - In what areas do folks who are connected to housing end up living? Which neighborhoods are these, and are they conducive to housing stability? Examples: Is the housing close to needed services, public transit, food, and social networks?
 - Are there racial or ethnic groups that return to homelessness at higher rates than other groups? If so, what do qualitative and quantitative data tell us about contributing factors to these patterns?
 - Do people with certain racial or ethnic identities exit to permanent housing at different rates?
 - Does the length of stay before exiting to permanent housing differ by racial or ethnic groups? How can qualitative data collection help explain these differences in the quantitative performance of these groups?
- Utilize new insights gained through the process of acknowledging, accepting, and understanding the lived experiences of people who are impacted by homelessness, as well as communities of BIPOC, to develop and implement more racially equitable policies and practices.
- Within more racially equitable policies and practices, implement continuous quality improvement processes to ensure that the homeless response system can pivot and operationalize new strategies if current interventions are not producing equitable results.

Community Examples

Tacoma, Lakewood/Pierce County CoC

As part of their [SPARC \(Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities\) work in 2018](#), the Tacoma, Lakewood/Pierce County CoC incorporated Tacoma Housing Authority data from their Housing Choice Voucher program into their racial equity analysis. The study explored dimensions such as the household's receipt of a voucher, move-in status, income level, racial and ethnic identity, and more. This community also conducted qualitative research including 24 individual interviews with BIPOC experiencing homelessness and three focus groups of providers, stakeholders, and consumers to complement their quantitative data analyses.

State of Oregon

The State of Oregon Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities was created by Oregon House Bill 2100 (2021) to identify methods to decrease racial disparities in homelessness and investigate potential changes to the state's funding structure to address these disparities. The group used a mixed-methods approach including an ecosystem power mapping exercise, one-on-one interviews with 11 task force members, a qualitative survey that reached 172 stakeholders, a mix of HMIS and non-HMIS data, and a policy and funding analysis. The non-HMIS data review included American Community Survey data, homeownership data, rent cost burden data, income data, unemployment data, data from child welfare and legal systems, and information related to the demographics of rural communities. The team collecting and performing data analysis included PLEE.

Omaha/Council Bluffs CoC

Leveraging a partnership with Legal Aid of Nebraska, the Omaha/Council Bluffs CoC conducted a geographic review from June 2020 to July 2021 of publicly available eviction filings in their CoC using a mapping tool. They also reviewed the locations of the CoC's access points in relation to the numbers served in a housing problem-solving program using geographical data layering techniques. In general, creating layers of non-HMIS data on mapping tools such as (race/ethnicity, income and other census data, etc.) may be possible either by using built-in features of a mapping program or by adding in data from external datasets. Coupling this with data from homeless response systems may help communities make meaning of racial equity-related data across CoC geographies.

Conclusion

The work of deconstructing racial and ethnic inequities in homeless response systems must first be contextualized within the forces of systemic oppression that shaped the inequities. Every community has distinct and specific local factors and histories that impact BIPOC experiencing homelessness.

The most important source of information is people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness. Robust qualitative data sources, informed by listening sessions, surveys, and work groups with PLEE, can be supported by quantitative data from HMIS and non-HMIS data sources.

HMIS serves as a valuable starting point for context-gathering and data analysis when disaggregating data by race and ethnicity, and data from outside HMIS are also critical to understanding homeless response systems in the context of racial equity. Many non-HMIS, open-source datasets are currently available for this purpose and referenced in this document. Other non-HMIS datasets can be leveraged locally by forming new partnerships with organizations and systems that impact individuals who experience homelessness. Most importantly, *HMIS and non-HMIS data interrogation should be driven by BIPOC PLEE.*