

Over the last decade most communities have improved their access and use of reliable homeless system data and are gaining insight into effectiveness of their homeless system. These insights can become positive vehicles of systems and policy change, especially when paired with the expertise of people who have experienced homelessness, imbued with the diverse perspectives of various community stakeholders, and framed with an equity lens. Data leads to decisions, decisions to action, and action to change. Decisions and action informed by data are effective tools for systems change, made a great deal stronger by inclusive community decision-making and qualitative accounts, such as those from people with lived experience.

Baseline Data

Familiarize yourself with the [Point-in-Time \(PIT\) Count](#), [Housing Inventory Count \(HIC\)](#), and [System Performance Measures \(SPMs\)](#) processes and reports. These outline the needs, resources, and metrics that contribute to the goal of making homelessness “rare, brief, and one time.” Assessing system health may lean heavily on these reports, so understanding how the data is reported and how the outcomes are calculated will help your community analyze how this data can help better understand the inequities present in your system.

Know whom you serve

HUD’s [CoC Analysis Tool: Race and Ethnicity](#) is an excellent starting place to find data related to equity and homelessness within your community. A [blog series published by the Center for Evidence-based Solutions to Homelessness](#) explains how to read the tool to identify racial disparities for further analysis. The tool uses the PIT count and other population data from the Census and American Community Survey (ACS) to enable communities to evaluate differences in the racial and ethnic demographics of people in the general population, people in poverty and people experiencing homelessness. The resulting comparison may show significant inequities that exist within the community. These data alone, however, cannot fully answer whether the community’s response to homelessness is equitable. For that, much more data and perspective are needed.

Know your system

[Stella P](#) uses HMIS data for analyses of demographics and system performance, illuminating how people are served in your system and whether access, system use, and housing outcomes vary for different groups. Knowing these ‘System Pathways’ or how people navigate your system, and how outcomes vary for different groups, is important for resource allocation, performance target development, and system health and equity analyses. For example, as seen in Image 1, in exploring exits from the homeless system across race and ethnicity, a community may find that people who identify as white exit to permanent destinations more frequently than people who identify as Black or African American. Knowing how the system is organized and how people receive services can highlight disparities.



Image 1. Example of Stella P Exit Destinations by Population Group

In addition to Stella P, communities can pull other reports or raw data from HMIS for additional analysis, including coordinated entry assessment information and overlaying that information on housing outcomes.

A few questions to consider:

- To what extent do assessment scores differ across race, ethnicity, and other demographics?
- Do persons receive the service intervention suggested by assessment scores?
- If so, to what extent in total and across race, ethnicity, and other demographics?
- Do the data suggest implicit, or unconscious, bias?
- Of those housed, did the housing outcome correspond to the suggested intervention?

The United State Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has published a ["How To" guide](#) to addressing racial disparities and offer additional context and specific questions on data and policy communities should address in any equity review.

Before drawing any conclusions about Stella or HMIS data, review and assess data quality at a system level and in each data element used in an analysis, including review of Unknown/Don't know/NULL responses in HMIS, program coverage in HMIS, user training quality and consistency, and reporting. Even if the data quality review reveals significant challenges, identifying causes of quality issues and isolating them will help determine whether the issues will significantly impact further analysis of system health and equity. Put simply, **data quality need not be perfect** to begin or continue a systems analysis and racial equity review as long as the data quality issues are explained and, to the extent possible, mitigated to minimally impact the conclusions.

Presenting the data and discussing the differences with different stakeholder groups can begin to answer the question of why these disparities exist, and how best to address them as a community. These insights should not be limited to a small group of HMIS and data analysts, but should be brought forward to CoC Board and committee meetings, provider groups or meetings, and political and policy groups. Stakeholder groups should be representative of the community's racial composition to ensure

a balanced perspective. Parsing the effectiveness of a system also requires actively seeking, listening to, and incorporating the feedback and recommendations of those with current experience or former experience of homelessness. The CoC Board and committees are good places to start, if there are no lived experience groups or boards established, as it is a requirement that at least one member have lived experience.

Engaging People with Lived Expertise in your Data Efforts

Before data are used to inform decision making, it is critical that your [community intentionally and regularly works with people who are currently or formerly homeless](#), to both get their perspectives on the accuracy of the quantitative data you are using for your equity analysis, and to provide more nuanced, personal information about their own experiences in your system, that can give a balance and a depth to your work that is not possible by just looking at reports or data from HMIS.

Communities should consider implementing the following suggestions for incorporating more qualitative data from people with lived expertise into their equity efforts:

1. Include as members, at least two people with lived expertise on your community's data or HMIS committees. The CoC Program interim rule requires CoCs to have at least one person who is currently or formerly homeless on their CoC Board, so these individuals could also be engaged in discussions.
2. Facilitate focus groups with people who are currently or formerly homeless, to: 1) capture their reactions to data on inequities, 2) understand and document their own experiences with inequities in your system, and 3) solicit their suggestions for how these inequities can and should be addressed in your system. HUD requires that CoCs conduct an annual evaluation of their coordinated entry system, and in doing so that they have received feedback on CE from people who are or were experiencing homelessness. CoCs should consider how to integrate this equity work into [their CE evaluation efforts](#).
3. Pay people for their time participating in any of these efforts. Communities are very strongly encouraged to compensate people for their time and efforts in this work. Everyone's time is of value, and one of the best ways to demonstrate that is by ensuring that everyone is compensated for their time in an equitable manner.

Using Actionable Data

Pairing data with action is how communities can drive systems and policy change, and build a more equitable system. Merely collecting data and presenting metrics to the public is not enough to impact the system. Data must be collected, analyzed, and packaged in a way that policy makers can use, which go beyond graphs and tallies.

Communities should:

- 1) Envision and document an equitable system of care and establish measurable goals that advance the overall vision
- 2) Identify meaningful measures that connect directly to the goals
- 3) Consistently bring data forward for accountability, information, and action, at multiple tables and groups to solicit observations and feedback at different levels and backgrounds, comparing differences and cross-pollinating insights and incorporating provider and lived expertise on system functioning (i.e., qualitative data)

- 4) Measure by measure, identify how they will indicate success (e.g., housing placements should increase over time), collaboratively draft action plans or policies in response to a measure trending in the opposite direction of success (e.g., if housing placements decrease over time, we as a system, will...)
- 5) Monitor progress, draft and implement action plans, adjusting as needed

Community Examples

Los Angeles, CA

Full-court press: using data to drive cross-sector commitments to dismantle racism and address inequities

As a result of a PIT count, which found that “[i]n 2017, Black people represented only 9% of the general population in Los Angeles County yet comprised 40% of the population experiencing homelessness,” the CoC convened community members, experts, and data to form the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness. The final report and recommendations are replete with data from national published sources, as well as cuts of data from HMIS pulled and formatted by the CoC. The data guided discussions and grounded the policy and recommendations development and paired seamlessly with the voices, insights, and decisions of the community, particularly those with lived experience, which only further enriched the data presented and recommendations made.

Read: [Report and Recommendations on the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

North Carolina, Balance of State CoC

Evaluating Racial Disparities in the North Carolina Balance of State CoC

The North Carolina Balance of State (BoS) CoC committed to “...conduct ongoing and deepening analysis, grow partnerships, and foster dialogue. The goal is to develop meaningful participation and stimulate action from stakeholders throughout the NC BoS CoC.” Their goal is to help dismantle racism and eliminate racial, ethnic, and gender disparities throughout the CoC. The report outlines their approach that relies on the tools provided earlier in this document and outlines their areas of action and strategies to implement change.

Montgomery County, PA

Racial Equity and Homelessness in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: Initial Findings

Montgomery County partnered with a consultant, and formed an Equity Advisory Team, reviewed policies and procedures, conducted listening sessions and provider interviews, and analyzed data. The data used was from their HMIS, as well as other publicly available data sources such as Fair Housing Reports and Eviction Prevention data. Final recommendations include developing racially explicit outcome metrics for programs, and reexamining coordinated entry procedures to reduce racial disparity in access to services.