



HMIS Software Vendor Capacity Checklist

This resource is prepared by technical assistance providers and intended only to provide guidance. The contents of this document, except when based on statutory or regulatory authority or law, do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

Assessing a CoC's HMIS Software

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) developed the data collection and reporting requirements for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) through the 2004 HMIS Data and Technical Standards Final Notice and subsequent updates to the HMIS Data Standards Manual, in collaboration with federal partners. The 2004 Technical Standards remain in effect, while the current Data Standards are updated periodically and provide the documentation requirements for the programming and use of all HMIS and comparable database systems. HUD requires that each Continuum of Care (CoC) designate a single HMIS for the geographic area and ensure that the HMIS is administered in compliance with requirements. However, HUD does not prescribe how an HMIS attains compliance with data and technical standards, or other required management and reporting capabilities as defined in the HMIS Data and Technical Standards, program specific guides and reporting specifications.

All CoCs must have an HMIS governance structure that details who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating an HMIS software. For CoCs belonging to a multi-CoC HMIS implementation, there should be a shared HMIS governance charter with baseline roles and responsibilities that address monitoring and evaluation. This governance structure varies across HMIS implementations, but monitoring and evaluation is generally the responsibility of the CoC Board, data committee, or HMIS Lead, with compliance being primarily enforced through the terms and conditions of the contract with the HMIS Software Vendor. This checklist is intended to be used by the CoC in conjunction with the HMIS Software Vendor contract, the CoC's HMIS governance charter and policies and procedures, and applicable HUD notices and regulations. This checklist allows the CoC and HMIS leadership to develop an action plan or quality improvement strategy to improve the overall performance of the HMIS in relation to the data needs of the community.

This checklist provides CoC and HMIS leadership with a set of standardized criteria that the CoC may determine the HMIS Software Vendor should meet. These criteria generally are not to measure compliance, but rather to ensure that the HMIS Software Vendor provides a software that meets the needs of the community. This checklist can also be used as a strategic planning resource for how HMIS can be used as a tool to prevent and end homelessness in the community.

HUD would prefer that a CoC exhaust all options before considering a transition from one HMIS Software Vendor to another. CoCs have transitioned HMIS Software Vendors with mixed results. Challenges might be related to issues of CoC capacity to oversee the HMIS implementation, HMIS staff capacity to operate the HMIS, insufficient resources (i.e. number of staff, funding, skills); overly customized functionality; or providers undervaluing HMIS. In other words, underlying issues may be related to the management and oversight of the HMIS Software rather than the software itself.

A CoC can demonstrate due diligence by completing the checklist, identifying deficiencies, developing an action plan or quality improvement strategy, communicating with the HMIS Software Vendor, or negotiating enhanced contractual terms and conditions. To support this process, HUD has also published an HMIS Software Vendor Contract Management Toolkit to assure that the HMIS Software Vendor is accountable to the CoC and is providing the software and service in accordance with contractual requirements. **If the CoC is still certain that an HMIS Software Vendor transition is necessary, HUD strongly suggests that the CoC request HUD Technical Assistance before beginning the HMIS Software Vendor transition process.**

To understand if you are required to implement a comparable database, review the [Victim Service Provider Comparable Database and Reporting Requirements](#) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) guidance on [when to use a comparable database](#).

Criteria	✓	Checklist Notes
The HMIS Software is available for CoC use, with limited unplanned downtime for maintenance.		
The HMIS Software Vendor maintains backup, restoration and recovery procedures, off-site secured data storage, and emergency technical support.		
The HMIS Software Vendor provides a disaster recovery plan.		
The HMIS Software has sufficient security protocols in place including: end-to-end data encryption, automatic time out or lock out, concurrent login prevention, username and password access requirements, at least 128-bit+ encryption, SSL certificate, user log(s) and an automated audit trail.		
The HMIS Software can protect data to the different federal and local privacy laws as needed, these laws are not universally applicable (i.e. HIPAA, 42 CFR Part 2).		
The HMIS Software has features that allows those with disabilities or with special needs to enter and report data (508 Compliance).		
The HMIS Software contains all the Project Descriptor Data Elements (PDDE) and response categories. ⁱ		
The HMIS Software contains all the Universal Data Elements (UDE) and response categories. ⁱⁱ		
The HMIS Software contains all the common Program Specific Data Elements (PSDE) and response categories. ⁱⁱⁱ		
The HMIS Software contains all the individual federal partner Program Specific Data Elements (PSDE) and response categories. ^{iv}		
The HMIS Software contains all the Metadata Elements (ME). ^v		
The HMIS Software can manage record de-duplication via a client record merger feature or other functionality. ^{vi}		
The HMIS Software has sufficient protocols to prevent duplicate client record creation.		
The HMIS Software can collect data at different points throughout the data collection process, including the building of client records for street outreach projects for data prior to Date of Engagement.		
The HMIS Software provides access to historical data and has the ability to archive client level data after 7 years. ^{vii}		

Criteria	✓	Checklist Notes
The HMIS Software can dynamically manage households as members join and depart from the household. ^{viii}		
The HMIS Software Vendor meets HUD and federal partner deadlines for implementing data element, response category and report specification updates. ^{ix}		
The HMIS Software provides up-to-date HUD-required reports Annual Progress Report (APR), Longitudinal Statistical Analysis (LSA), System Performance Measures (HUD SPM), Consolidated Annual Performance Evaluation Report (CAPER), and Data Quality Framework. ^x		
The HMIS Software provides up-to-date federal partner reports for HUD, SAMHSA, RHY, and the VA. ^{xi}		
The HMIS Software can create a valid CSV export per the current HUD CSV Specifications. ^{xii}		
The HMIS Software has a data dictionary, clear naming conventions and transparency in table structure to support reporting and data import and export.		
The HMIS Software can allow for flexible sharing of data by data element, program and agency in accordance with CoC privacy protocols and the client's wishes.		
The HMIS Software allows the HMIS Administrator(s) to manage user access through a username, password and role-based access.		
The HMIS Software has multiple, tiered levels of system access that provides access to only necessary data collection and reporting functionality for the HMIS user to complete their responsibilities.		
The HMIS Software Vendor offers training or supports local HMIS Lead training development and delivery on data entry, work flow, security and privacy protocols and reporting.		
The HMIS Software Vendor is timely when responding to feature enhancements, issues, errors, or system bugs.		
The HMIS Software Vendor is timely when responding to CoC and HMIS Leadership questions, issues and concerns.		
The HMIS Software Vendor provides dedicated customer service representation for HMIS Administrator(s).		
The HMIS Software Vendor has an easily distinguishable testing environment that mirrors the production environment.		
The HMIS Software is available for online data entry and real-time data access.		
The HMIS Software can provide a resource directory that details the agency and program information as well as program eligibility and real time vacancies to facilitate the coordinated entry process.		
The HMIS Software provides the ability to make eligibility-informed referrals and track referral outcomes.		
The HMIS Software can upload documents to client files.		
The HMIS Software provides a customizable prioritization function that can be accessed by HMIS users for coordinated entry process purposes.		
The HMIS Software can collect assessment data for the coordinated entry process.		

Criteria	✓	Checklist Notes
The HMIS Software has a bed and unit management feature to allow for expedient entry and exit into specific beds and units that feeds to real time vacancy.		
The HMIS Software can print assessments, reports, and documents.		
The HMIS Software can be securely accessed from multiple devices including computers, smart phones and tablets.		
The HMIS Software provides report capabilities that have drill down functionality to assure the data contained within reports is valid.		
The HMIS Software provides ad hoc reporting capabilities accessible to HMIS administration.		
The HMIS Software can import and export data to the latest HUD CSV specifications. ^{xiii}		
The HMIS Software has logical workflow that eliminates redundant data entry and prevents wasted effort of data entry across multiple screens or modules.		
The HMIS Software displays system alerts that detail system-level information, agency-specific information and HMIS user level action items.		
The HMIS Software provides a tool for case management including, case notes, goal plans and housing plans.		
The HMIS Software has the ability manage and report sheltered and unsheltered Point In Time (PIT) data.		
The HMIS Software can track geocoded data that can be turned into maps.		
The HMIS Software can upload a photo to identify the client.		
The HMIS Software has barcode, scan card or biometric capabilities for data entry.		
The HMIS Software can collect electronic signatures.		
The HMIS Software provides report functionality that allows for export into other common report platforms (Tableau, SPSS).		
The HMIS Software allows for real time data analysis.		
The HMIS Software provides agency and project level reporting capabilities for use by HMIS users beyond HUD and federal partner required reports (client served reports, dashboards).		
The HMIS Software provides rating and ranking reporting capabilities to aid with the CoC Application.		
The HMIS Software provides the ability to manage data by various and multiple funding sources.		
The HMIS Software has coordinated entry process reports available (including reports for prioritization, referral, and active list management purposes).		
The HMIS Software produces e-mail notification for HMIS user level action items.		
The HMIS Software provides data element and response category definitions within the workflow for HMIS users.		
The HMIS Software allows for HMIS users to reset their passwords without HMIS System Administrator assistance.		

- i HMIS Data Standards Manual: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3824/hmis-data-dictionary/>
- ii Ibid.
- iii Ibid.
- iv Ibid.
- v Ibid.
- vi HEARTH Act. Title IV, Subtitle A, S. 402(f)(3)(a)
- vii 2004 Technical Standards 5.2.1 Storage Requirements. "HMIS data must be stored at the central location for a minimum of seven years after the date of collection by the central coordinating body or designee of the CoC.
- viii HMIS Data Standards. Data Dictionary 5.9 Household ID "Persons may join a household with members who have already begun a project start or may leave a project although other members of the household remain in the project. A common Household ID must be assigned to each member of the same household. Persons in a household (either adults or children) who are not present when the household initially applies for assistance and later join the household should be assigned the same Household ID that links them to the rest of the persons in the household. The early departure of a household member would have no impact on the Household ID."
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HMIS-Data-Dictionary.pdf>
- ix HUD and federal partners occasionally update HMIS data standards to improve data collection and reporting capabilities across HMIS implementations. Current HMIS data standards are available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3824/hmis-data-dictionary/>
- x HMIS Guidebooks, Templates, and Resources for CoC Grant-Funded Programs: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/hmis-guides/#coc-resources>
- xi Federal partner Program Manuals: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/hmis-guides/#hmis-federal-partner-grantees-resources>
- xii HMIS CSV Export Specifications: <https://hudhdx.info/VendorResources.aspx>
- xiii Ibid.