FLEXIBLE RESOURCES, DATA-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS:
USING HMIS AND HEARTH TO END HOMELESSNESS

# Data Collection Challenges in Rural Areas
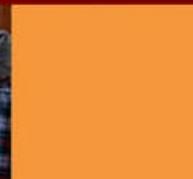
# Presenters

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# Learning Objectives

- Understand unique challenges posed by rural homeless programs

- Understand what other rural communities have done to create solid data collection and reporting processes

- Understand how technology can be used to assist with increasing data quality

- Understand how technology can improve services to clients and support agency administration and planning

# Handout

- SouthEastern Regional HMIS Collaborative (SERHC): "Challenges to Implementing HMIS in Rural Communities"

# Challenges Faced by Service Providers:

- Limited Resources
- Broad Service Offerings for Diverse Populations
- Transportation & Communication
- Lack of Best Practices and Training Materials
- Limited Funding, Capacity, and Technology

# Limited Resources

- Rural providers are often understaffed

- Existing staff must serve in multiple roles

- Multiple roles hinder sufficient time for data entry

- Limited resources for staff travel for trainings and meetings

- Limited access to skilled IT professionals

- Limited and inconsistent service use (motel vouchers, faith-based temporary assistance)

# Solutions: Limited Resources

- Use volunteers or students for data entry
- Streamline the data entry requirements and process
- Explore ways to make it easy to enter data during client interaction
- Offer web based training
- Offer on-site technical assistance
- Share HMIS data entry responsibilities across agencies (centralized data entry)

# Solutions: Limited Resources

- Provide reports and functions in HMIS that assist staff in doing their job efficiently
  - Tracking appointments
  - Outcomes
  - Documentation
  - Case management

- Encourage partnerships between small, non-traditional sheltering programs to make it more efficient to use HMIS

# Broad Service Offerings

- Wide geographic area
  - Causes the absence of local service providers
  - Limits the availability of services
  - Requires additional resources for service delivery
- Service providers aren't necessarily "homeless service agencies"
  - Aren't focused on homeless issues
  - Providers may not be a part of the homeless network
  - Hinders knowledge and implementation of best practices
  - Hinders linkages to mainstream resources

# Broad Service Offerings

- Lack of data collection standardization between programs
  - Variety of services delivered may require more robust data collection
  - Increases data collection and reporting burden
  - Leads to more complex HMIS installations
  - Rarely accompanied by incentives and funding
  - Results in double data entry (multiple system use)
  - Increases likelihood of conflicting data
  - Decreases likelihood of quality data

# Solutions: Broad Service Offerings

- Engage funding streams in data collection discussions
  - Streamline data collection practices
  - Reduce duplication
  - Standardize reporting requirements
- Develop reports to address other funding requirements and service needs

# Solutions: Broad Service Offerings

- Promote utilization of HMIS data to enhance planning and collaboration between providers
- Standardize data collection tools and work processes
  - Maximize information collected
  - Minimum data elements collected
  - Multi-purpose intake forms and processes

# Transportation & Communication

- Availability
  - Transportation
    - Few providers in each area and large distances between providers.
    - Transportation to service delivery sites sporadic or not available
  - Communication
    - Remoteness hinders regular communication and collaboration between providers

# Transportation & Communication

- Cost
  - Transportation
    - Geography requires additional resources for longer travel times and larger distances
  - Communication
    - Technology may be limited in remote areas, requiring more expensive solutions
    - Funding:  Lack of funding and other resources to address transportation and communication issues.

# Solutions:
# Transportation & Communication

- Streamline data collection processes
  - Utilize technology to capture HMIS data from multiple locations
    - Web-based technologies
    - Cell phone technologies
    - PDAs/laptops
  - Multi-purpose intake forms and training tools

# Solutions:
# Transportation & Communication

- Streamline service delivery methods
  - Utilize technology to assist providers with collaboration on service provision
  - Utilize existing resources (town offices, libraries, other service provider locations)
- Encourage communities to use HMIS data to foster communication
  - Utilize data for planning
  - Implement integrated and coordinated case management

# Solutions:
# Transportation & Communication

- Develop communication mechanisms within HMIS to increase communication between providers and with stakeholders
  - Utilize HMIS software dashboards, list servs
  - Utilize web-based communication technology, such as GoToMeeting and Webinars
  - Utilize community communication technology, such as ITV sites and donated use of video conferencing

# Best Practices & Training Materials

- Best practice and training literature rarely address the rural context

- Current best practice models focus on urban areas

- Lack of research on urban model effectiveness in rural environments

- Alternative best practice models for rural provision of services need to be documented, evaluated, and disseminated

- Data collection challenges hinder the understanding of prevalence

# Solutions:
# Best Practices & Training Materials

- Encourage funders to provide resources for research and capacity building in rural areas

- Collaborate with local universities and other groups to conduct local research

- Document successful rural program models

- Share potential best practices with other rural communities

- Utilize regional collaboratives: SERHC, MARHMIS, NERHMIS

- Start small . . . use HMIS data, count data, any data available to start documenting

# Limited Funding, Capacity & Technology

Limited infrastructure reduces the capacity to implement and utilize HMIS:

- Limited funding

- Limited capacity to apply for funding

- Lack of funding makes it difficult to:
  - Purchase appropriate software
  - Hire skilled staff
  - Analyze data and publish findings

# Limited Funding, Capacity & Technology

- Limited infrastructure for technology
  - Consistent and reliable access to broad-band Internet service
  - Limited pool of skilled personnel

## Solutions:
## Limited Funding, Capacity & Technology

- Approach other funders about the value of HMIS and the need for resources
  - United Way
  - State and Local Government
- Look beyond the usual suspects for funding and assistance
  - Technology Businesses
  - Technical Schools
  - Regional or Rural Development Centers

# Solutions:
# Limited Funding, Capacity & Technology

- Explore partnerships with other types of service providers
  - Community Action Agencies/Partnerships
  - Town offices, libraries
  - Employment Training Programs
  - Private businesses

# Challenges of HMIS Lead Organizations

- Lack of basic computer skills in many rural areas which can result in a significant reduction in HMIS usage

- Geographical barriers prevent implementation of training, technical assistance, and service and support strategies in remote areas

- Mission and vision of HMIS lead organization does not always include a training and technical assistance focus

- Lack of existing rural best practices for training organizations and end users to effectively use HMIS

# Challenges of HMIS Lead Organizations

- Overcoming providers past negative experiences with information systems

- Limited funding resources to address the many gaps experienced in rural areas which make it difficult to implement and support HMIS

- Limited technology infrastructure

- Lack of technology and project management expertise in implementing and maintaining HMIS in rural areas

# Needs of HMIS Lead Organizations

- Provide local assistance on current funding opportunities, training information, and engagement strategies for the diverse range of local agencies and collaboratives

- Revisit HMIS policies to ensure that any requirements which go above and beyond the federal mandate are manageable to smaller and more resource restricted agencies

# Needs of HMIS Lead Organizations

- Provide regular communication and an individual to visit rural agencies to show them how to adapt HMIS to their programs
- Ensure rural providers participate in CoC meetings to represent needs specific to rural areas and to learn from their experiences

# Solutions: HMIS Lead Organizations

- Engage in the 10 year planning processes and ensure data is a part of the plan
- Collaborate with other funders that may have additional resources
  - United Way
  - State and Local Governments
  - Disaster Recovery
  - Hospitals
- Web based and On-Site Training

**KEF6**     Add these to the list on slide 15

Kathleen Freeman, 7/8/2010

# Solutions: HMIS Lead Organizations

- Regional trainings
- Resources for data entry assistance staff to help catch agencies up, correct large amounts of problem data, etc.
- Explore employment training or technical school partnerships
- Rural issues conference calls to share solutions
- Explore the possibility of very small providers forming or joining partnerships/collaboratives in an effort to make use of HMIS more efficient (sharing HMIS data entry)

# The Michigan Model

- Michigan's Statewide HMIS includes:
  - 22 Independent Jurisdictions largely composed of large population counties such as Detroit or Oakland
  - A geographically large BOS made up of 61 rural counties

# The Michigan Model

- Currently 154 of the 602 participating agencies are located in rural counties and 747 users are licensed in the 61 rural counties

- Rural agencies are diverse including shelters, TH, PSH, faith-based, community action agencies, youth service agencies, mental health agencies, and DHS

# All implementations are local

- The 61 rural counties are organized into 38 planning groups.
  - Each group must assign a lead agency to act as a fiduciary for any local grants and assign a local liaison for the HMIS implementation
  - Each group is required to design their local HMIS implementation to include to diverse organizations that intersect with the homeless

# All implementations are local

– Community-based planning allows each locality to tailor it's implementation and to build from the local culture

  • Support structure for participating agencies flow through these liaisons

  • A variety of the solutions described below are supported by this basic organization

• During the role out, each planning group hosted us for two days to plan each agencies data organization

# Not all rural communities are alike

- Each community has a unique mix of resources
  - Some have private foundations and other assets
  - Some lack any social supports beyond DHS
- Each has unique geographic challenges
  - Some are very large with widely distributed populations
  - Some have tribes/reservation land
  - Many have magnet towns where resources are clustered

# Not all rural communities are alike

- All have a unique mix of personalities, relationships, culture and personal histories with technologies

# Getting Privacy Dialogue Right

- HMIS offers new and revolutionary opportunities to share data, however to take advantage of those opportunities, the privacy message much be well thought-out and carefully presented
  - The privacy rules must be easily explained in terms that people can easily understand and visualize
  - Michigan – selected a rule that could be explained in language that was similar to paper sharing

# Getting Privacy Dialogue Right

- – The HMIS leadership must demonstrate that they care about privacy and that they understand local concerns
- – Michigan – privacy protocols were developed and tested collaboratively with piloting agencies, privacy experts were employed to assure basic compliance, and the HMIS staff that present the privacy message have extensive program expertise in privacy and risk management

# Michigan Solutions:
# Adding Value & Participation

- Visited each community to establish a relationship and make the case for participation:"It's not easy and a lot of work, but it is a critical advocacy and solutions"
- HMIS operations must be customer oriented, ideally, Really nice and <u>really really patient staff</u> who go the extra mile and understand programs

# Michigan Solutions:
# Adding Value & Participation

– Build from successes through peer culturing:  It's harder to claim the System is broken if others are making it work

  • Within each community we can find at least one willing agency that achieves success with the system

  • Make sure that some communities are really successful

  • Recognize  and reward success

# Michigan Solutions:
# Adding Value & Participation

- Align with funding organizations

    – Requirement for funds:  Required for SHP, ESG, PATH, S+C, HOPWA, DHS Youth and all MSHDA funds

    – DHS and DCH have live audit access for SHP, PATH, HOPWA and S+C funds

    – Need based allocation formulas: Michigan's Homeless Count is used for allocating Tax Credits, HPRP, and Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers

# Michigan Solutions:
# Adding Value & Participation

- The last 2 years Michigan has prioritized HCVs for homeless consumers
- Homeless veteran counts were provided to VA staff to support VASH applications

# Michigan's Solutions: Making HMIS Useful

- **Using automation to improve the consumers experience:**
  - Across the State, the software is being used to print identity cards for those without identification and Our pilot rural community networked with the library, DHS and other key partners to use the card
  - The ability to coordinate care in real time both within large multi-service agencies and between agencies serving the same client. The tool allows for a virtual interagency team meeting. Consumers then manage 1 care plan with coordinated objectives rather that multiple plans with disparate (sometimes conflicting) objectives

# Michigan's Solutions: Making HMIS Useful

- **Examples of benefits for large social service agencies**

  – Salvation Army tracks and approves private utility assistance funds in 60 sites across the State

  – Child and Family Services tracks outreach activities for homeless and runaway youth across the Upper Peninsula

  – NCCS manages all of it's holiday gift process through the system

# Michigan's Solutions: Making HMIS Useful

- Using automation to support management
  - Provide a suite of outcomes and process measures that all agencies need
    - Exit to positive destination, retention in housing, improved income/employment, improved self sufficiency (self sufficiency matrix)
    - Performance on case plan objectives
  - Parse the data so that reports can be used to improve management

# Michigan's Solutions: Making HMIS Useful

- Provide details on client characteristics associated with success and failure
- Provide reports parsed by case manager to identify staff who are struggling or those that would be good mentors
– Providing benchmarking groups to support assessment of outcomes and sharing of best practices

# Michigan's Solutions:
# Training, Transportation & Communication

- Training  and support when staff turn-over is high and distances are large:

  – Initially offered in-person training in all 38 communities during roll-out

  – Ongoing training using remote training and podcasts to create a "training at your finger-tips" environment (www.mihomeless.org)

  – Regional in-person training periodically and by request

# Michigan's Solutions:
# Training, Transportation & Communication

– Include geographically-based support staff/using remote office and help desk

• Address connectivity issues routinely

• We require that all Community Liaisons attend a monthly meeting that is hosted remotely and convene local User Meetings

# Michigan's Solutions:
# Data Entry & Data Quality

- Data is organized to support reporting and accounting to funders and Grant accounting is done by grouping records or by delivering specific services

- Data is organized so that rural patterns do not disappear into the larger urban data set

- A wide variety of data quality reports are available to the system to help identify errors and Routine user meetings are required

# Michigan's Solutions:
# Data Entry & Data Quality

– Agencies are required to run certain reports quarterly for their funding organizations and sign off that the data is complete and accurate

– Workflows are streamlined and optimized by funding source and One visit or overnight service providers are required to do entry/exits

– Annually we create a rural message that tells the story of rural homeless in our Statewide report and we provide the analytical tools and staff support to create a "State of Homelessness" report for rural communities and regions

# Michigan's Solutions:
# Data Entry & Data Quality

- The most important data quality issue is to use the data!
- The opportunity to participate in a variety of studies:
- The Shadow Project which creates de-identified data set that includes HMIS and state service information to study the relationship between entitlements and homelessness
- Abt Associates studies on migration
- Veteran studies (UPenn and Abt Associates )

## MSHMIS
## Basic Configuration



Sharing between agencies.

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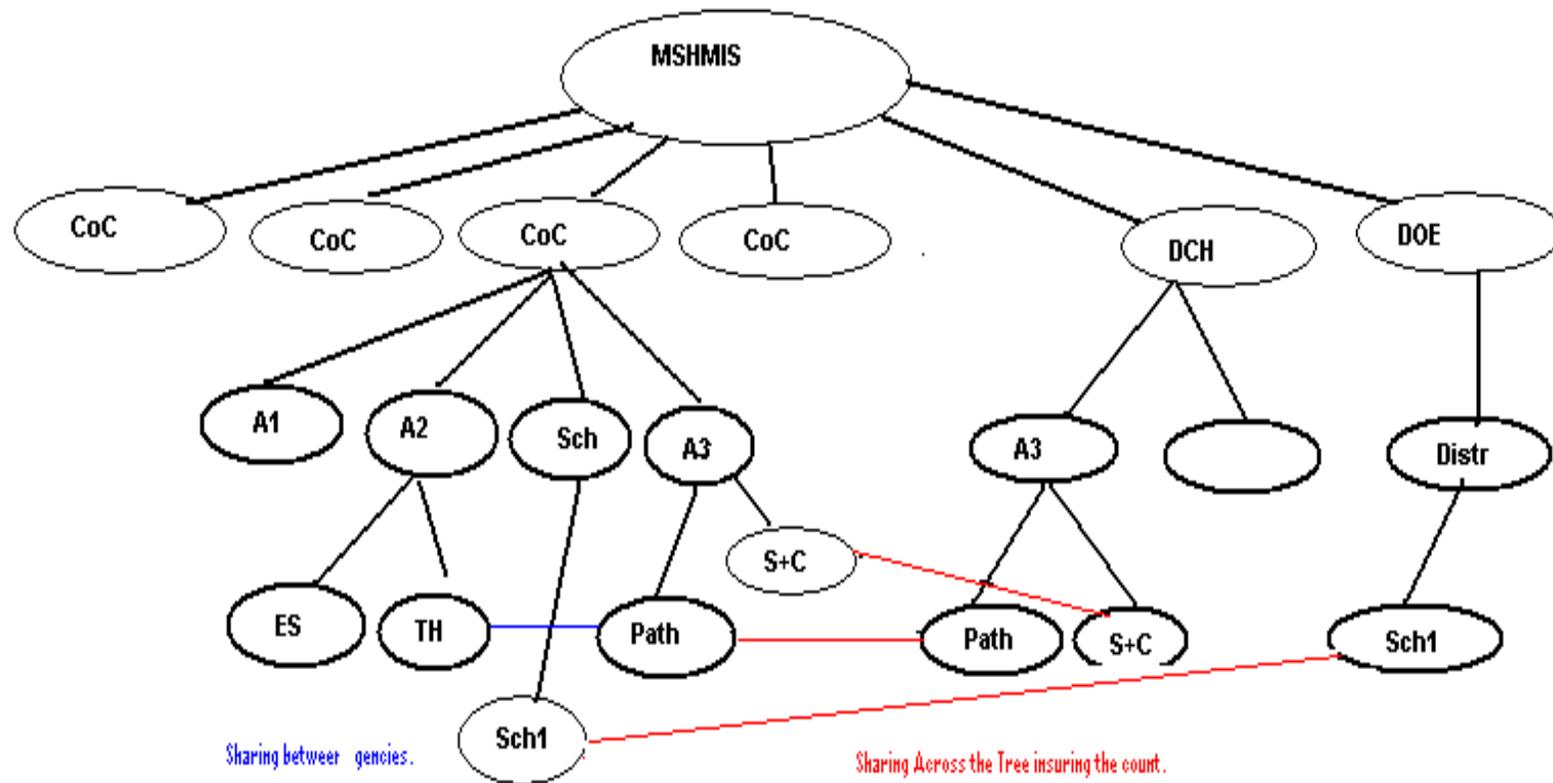
# Needs

- Communication and Collaboration with other rural homeless service providers

- Knowledge of rural community's experience of homelessness

- Expanded community partnerships (local schools, service providers, businesses)

- Engagement of Faith-Based providers

# Needs

- Opportunities to highlight the plight of rural areas through HMIS without the larger numbers of people experiencing homelessness in urban areas

- Equitable access to HUD funds: with current funding structures and opportunities, entitlement areas have distinct advantages in terms of guaranteed money and opportunities to complete for funds

# Homeless Service Delivery: Creating System Change

- Encourage Research on Rural Best Practices
- Specialized Capacity Building for Rural Communities
- Technological Solutions for Rural Communities
- Reporting and Data Standards that Address Rural Program Models

# Homeless Service Delivery: Creating System Change

- Funding and Program Guidelines that Address Rural Program Models

- Collaboration between Rural Communities, Funders, Policymakers, Researchers and Vendors

- Awareness of the Prevalence of Rural Homelessness and the Unique Challenges faced by Rural Homeless Service Providers

# Questions?
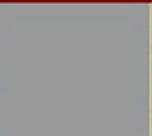
# Resources

- www.hudhre.info

- www.hmis.info

- SERHC Rural Homeless Paper (Handout)

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