**Hampden County Continuum of Care**

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

**What is HMIS?**

HMIS is a secure, locally-run electronic data collection system which aggregates information over time and across agencies about people who experience homelessness. Service providers throughout the community input client data into a single system. The system produces data that informs local planning and funding for service and housing programs, and is also combined with aggregated data from communities throughout the nation to produce an annual report to Congress on the scope and extent of homelessness.

**Who is responsible for the Hampden County HMIS?**

In Hampden County, as in communities around the country, the Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for establishing and operating the local HMIS. The Hampden County CoC is an organization made up of community stakeholders—such as service providers, funders, government officials, consumers, advocates, business and faith-based organizations—and is overseen by a Board of Directors. More information about the Hampden County CoC is available at <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/coc/hampden-coc>.

The CoC has designated the City of Springfield to provide day-to-day oversight and staffing of the CoC’s HMIS. The CoC has chosen the product Social Solutions’ Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) as its HMIS program, and the City holds an enterprise license for this system.

**Why is HMIS Important?**

* Data informs local state and national policy and funding responses to homelessness.
* Every CoC is required to maintain an HMIS and to achieve the highest level of HMIS participation as possible among local providers. CoCs are scored on participation levels in annual competitive funding applications to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
* Data collection and analysis provides feedback to agencies and funders about the effectiveness of programs. Good data helps programs demonstrate their value to funders.
* CoCs assess the community-wide response to homelessness, setting performance measurements and evaluating progress toward goals; HMIS data provides the raw information that enables this evaluation to take place.
* HMIS can improve referral and coordination among agencies in the community that are serving the same clients.

**How does an Agency Participate in HMIS?**

The City’s HMIS Administrator sets up each Contributing HMIS Organization (CHO) with its own site on the web-based ETO system. The City purchases licenses for each agency staff member who will access the system, and provides training and support for agency users. On a regular basis, CHO staff log on to the system, and input client-level data.

The minimum requirement is that CHOs enter the Universal Data Elements for each client, which are 12 items (name, DOB, SSN, race, ethnicity, gender, veteran status, presence of a disability, prior housing situation, zip code of last address, housing status, and program entry date). Providers may choose to add additional data elements (which are extremely helpful for program evaluation), to use the program for data-sharing with other agencies (when supported by a client’s signed release of information) or to use the system as a case-management tool.

**What about Client Privacy and Data Security?**

HUD, the CoC, and provider agencies all recognize the need to ensure the privacy and security of personal identifying information. For this reason, HUD created data standards in 2004 which dictates HMIS privacy and security protections, and the Hampden County CoC has also established privacy and security standards and policies. The CoC requires privacy and security training for all users prior to authorizing access to the system.

The ETO HMIS meets all Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) standards for security, privacy and confidentiality. Each CHO maintains ownership of its own data, and the only other access to the data is by the HMIS Administrator, who is authorized to access the data solely for the purpose of providing technical support or running aggregate reports. Agencies may elect to enter into a data-sharing agreement, which allows use of the system to coordinate data with other agencies, but even with an agency-sharing agreement, no data may be shared without an authorization for release of information form signed by the client whose information is to be shared.

**Who Participates in HMIS?**

In Hampden County, 17 agencies currently participate in HMIS or have agreed to start participation: Friends of the Homeless, HAPHousing, the Center for Human Development, New England Farm Workers Council, Mental Health Association, River Valley Counseling Center, Catholic Charities, Open Pantry/South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Springfield Housing Authority, Domus, Inc., Providence Ministries, Samaritan Inn, Gandara, Human Resources Unlimited, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services, Home City Housing (The Rainville Apartments), and the City of Springfield Chronic Homelessness Initiative.