

Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH)

Q&A FACT SHEET: HMIS

Q. What is VT BoS CoC? **A.** The VT Balance of State Continuum of Care is a geographic area recognized by HUD and the federal government to coordinate the general homeless system (ex. submit the annual competitive HUD CoC Application, develop a Coordinated Entry System, conduct a Homeless Point-in-Time Count, selecting a single HMIS database, coordinate with ESG recipients, advocacy/policies, etc.).
**VCEH is the primary decision-making body to conduct or oversee these tasks within the VT BoS CoC.*

Q. What is HMIS? **A.** Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) is a generic name for a software application that is recognized by the federal government to collect homeless data. All HUD CoCs, including VT BoS CoC, must designate a single information system as the official HMIS software for the geographic area, which all core federal homeless programs are required to use.

Q. What is the purpose of HMIS? **A.** HMIS is a valuable tool with capacity to integrate & de-duplicate data across projects such as: record and store client-level information about numbers, characteristics and needs of persons who use prevention and homeless housing & supportive services over time; produce unduplicated counts of homeless persons; understand extent and nature of local, regional and national homelessness; and to understand patterns of service use and measure program effectiveness.

Q. What is HMIS software? **A.** ServicePoint is the HMIS software developed by Bowman Systems & selected by the VCEH to be used for all* required federal core homeless programs within VT BoS CoC.
**Victim Service Providers are prohibited from using HMIS but instead use a comparable database.*

Q. Which Core Homeless Programs are required to use the CoCs HMIS? **A.** In 2010 the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) affirmed HMIS as the official method of measuring outcomes in its Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. Since then many federal agencies providing homeless funding are working with HUD to coordinate HMIS for required programs:

- U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS): Runaway & Homeless Youth Programs (**RHYP**)
- U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA): Supportive Services for Veteran Families (**SSVF**)
- U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): Emergency Solutions Grants (**ESG**); Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (**HOPWA**); and the Continuum of Care Program (**COC**).

Other federal homeless programs are strongly encouraged to use HMIS: HHS-Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (**PATH**); VA-Grant & Per Diem Program (**GPD**); and HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (**VASH**).

Q. Can Other Homeless Programs use the CoC HMIS? **A.** Yes. ALL publicly & privately funded homeless providers are welcome & encouraged to participate in the VT BoS CoCs HMIS [ServicePoint] which helps homeless providers evaluate needs data for the people they serve, advocate for funding, strategically target limited funds, report to Boards & Funders; as well as help their local community and the State combat homelessness collaboratively. State-funded programs may also use HMIS.

(Continued on Page 2)

Q. What is a HMIS Lead Agency? **A.** A CoC must designate & oversee a HMIS Lead. The CoC must review, revise, and approve all policies and plans the HMIS Lead is required to develop. The CoC must develop a HMIS Governance Charter and document all assignments and designations. The HMIS Lead supports the CoC through: acting as HMIS System Administrator [VT BoS CoC-ServicePoint] or overseeing a private contractor; develop HMIS budget; create data policies & agreements; monitor data security & confidentiality protocols; ensure trainings; assist with HMIS users reports; generate CoC reports (Point-in-Time Count, Annual Homeless Assessment to Congress, CoC Performance, etc.).
**Effective 6/1/15, the VT BoS CoC-HMIS Lead is the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA).*

Q. What is a HMIS Administrator? **A.** The individual(s) whose job it is to manage the HMIS data implementation at the local level: enrolling programs and managing appropriate use, supporting HMIS users through connection to or direct provision of user training, and overseeing system setup.

Q. What is a HMIS User? **A.** HMIS User means the individual at a homeless provider organization who uses or enters data in a HMIS [VT BoS CoC-ServicePoint] database approved by the CoC.

Q. What is a HMIS Advisory Board? **A.** The HMIS Advisory Board is a VCEH committee with members from a broad-based representation of the VT BoS CoC who provide guidance to the HMIS Lead to:

1. Implement and continuously improve the Vermont Balance of State CoC HMIS.
2. Ensure the HMIS scope aligns with requirements of agencies, HUD and other stakeholders.
3. Address any issue that has major implications for the HMIS, such as policy mandates from HUD or performance problems with the HMIS vendor [Bowman Systems].
4. Reconcile differences in opinions and approaches, and resolve disputes arising from them.
5. Review, revise and approve HMIS policies developed by the HMIS Lead/System Administrators.
6. With the HMIS Lead, develop and approve the policy and procedural documents.

Q. What is a HMIS Budget? **A.** The Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness is responsible for ensuring the capacity of the VT BoS CoC HMIS implementation. VCEH must assist the HMIS Lead secure financial support from a variety of potential sources including, but not limited to:

- HUD: Emergency Solutions Grants (**ESG**); Continuum of Care Program (**COC**); and the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (**HOPWA**)
- HHS: Runaway & Homeless Youth Programs (**RHYP**) & Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (**PATH**)
- VA: Supportive Services for Veteran Families (**SSVF**), Grant & Per Diem Program (**GPD**); and HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program (**VASH**)
- HMIS User License Costs & Technical Assistance Fees
- Other Funding from Federal, State, Local, etc.