HARNESSING CROSS SYSTEMS DATA TO KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER

ONE ROOF

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CSH

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Introduction

Effectively implementing housing solutions that strengthen families often requires coordination of data and services across the boundaries of the systems that families frequently are involved with, such as child welfare, housing, homelessness response, behavioral health, education, and justice. When such systems can talk with each other and share information, they can more effectively address families' needs and assist them in meeting their reunification, preservation, housing stability, and wellness goals.

Cross systems data sharing can help answer the following questions, a key to resource development and optimization:

- How many unique families are served across systems?
- What are the characteristics these families have in common (i.e., demographics, service needs, utilization)?
- Who are the families that have frequent contacts across systems over lengthy periods of time?
- What services and resources are families accessing that, through coordinated housing and services, could be more effectively used?
- What services and resources are families *NOT* accessing that could address their needs?
- What types of housing resources are needed? (i.e., amount of subsidy, unit size)
- Are there racial disparities in the services families access and the outcomes families achieve?
- What are the outcomes for the families and at the system and community levels?
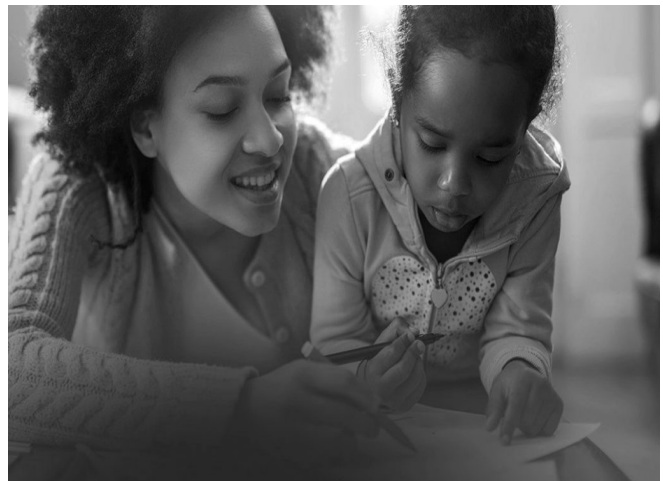
This brief provides guidance on how child welfare, housing, and other systems can share data, including a brief overview of approaches to data sharing, the critical data elements needed for planning and service delivery, and a 10-step process to help communities get started. The concepts presented are largely transferrable to sharing data across systems working with children, youth, and families.

Data Sharing Approaches

There are three major approaches to sharing data across systems. Each approach has specific purposes, benefits, and considerations. Often, communities start by sharing information related to specific clients for the purposes of care coordination. This collaboration allows system partners to observe and experience the benefits of coordinating care in increasing positive outcomes,

generating the will to explore one-time data matches and integrated data systems that can lead to increased resources, better matching of families to appropriate housing and services, more equitable access and better outcomes for families.

The three approaches are described in the below chart:

Approach	Description	Purpose	Benefits	Considerations
Client Specific Care Coordination	Staff from different agencies share information on a specific client's needs, status, and goals.	To coordinate care across systems to address a specific client's or family's needs.	Requires minimal level of effort to put in place from an administrative perspective (MOU between agencies and client consent).	Does not provide aggregated information to inform broader system planning and resource development and allocation.
One Time Data Match	Historical data from different systems are matched to identify populations served in both systems.	To identify target population characteristics that can inform planning, prioritization and strategy.	Builds political will and shared accountability. Helps drive resource development and strategic allocation. Can be used multiple times to track and inform outcomes.	Must have a data use agreement and client releases of information to protect family privacy, which can be a lengthy process to put in place. May not provide de-identified information that can be used to match services to specific individuals or families.
Integrated Data Systems	Different systems regularly share data through a defined data exchange process or shared data system.	To coordinate housing and services interventions for all shared active clients.	Provides real time data for use in decision-making, continuous quality improvement and service delivery. Provides regular tracking and reporting of outcomes. Can be used to provide families access to their own data.	Requires infrastructure and staffing to support data system administration and management. Can take longer to resource and develop. Data can be shared in a single direction or bi-directionally.

Critical Data Systems and Elements

At a minimum, sharing data across child welfare and housing or homelessness systems is critical to effectively addressing the housing and service needs of families facing housing instability and are involved in the child welfare system. Across both systems – and all systems – identifying data is necessary to capture in order to conduct a match. This includes, at a minimum, first/middle/last names, date of birth, social security number, race/ethnicity, and gender.

The following tables provide descriptions and a list of data elements to consider to effectively plan and implement data-driven *Keeping Families Together* supportive housing using homelessness and child welfare systems data:

Homeless Management Information System

Homelessness system data is stored in the local and regional Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), administered by the Continuum of Care (CoC), which is a planning body charged with coordinating the community's response to homelessness.

Data is entered across service interventions, funding sources, and by different organizations. HMIS data are not subject to HIPAA privacy regulations but are required to adhere to federally mandated privacy standards.

A typical data sharing exercise with HMIS would include support and participation from both the HMIS lead agency

> **Tip:** *Avoid limiting client records shared based on known information about family or housing status. For example, individuals recorded as single in HMIS may be members of family households served by child welfare. Parents with children temporarily placed in out of home care settings, such as foster care, may not have disclosed this to a homelessness provider and may therefore show in the data as unaccompanied single individuals.*

and the CoC, a review of the privacy notice/release of information to see if it covers data sharing, and potentially, a CoC board vote on the effort.

HMIS Data Elements to Consider[1]

Field Name	Description
Client UID	Masked unique identifier to distinguish clients individually.
Household ID	Masked unique identifier to associate clients into a single household or family (of interest if your project is intending to serve families or to see if that individual was in services as a family at one point).
Relationship to the Head of Household	Indicator to distinguish who is the head of household and who are the members of the household.
Enrollment ID or Application ID	Masked unique identifier associated with a project or program enrollment.
Organization identifiers	For each client, which organization was the service provider. Only useful if you are interested in looking at which partners are seeing clients, for example to help determine an effective outreach strategy.
Project type	This is important for looking back in the pre-housing period for homeless system use.
Disabling condition/disability elements	These fields note if client has a physical disability, chronic health condition, mental health problem, developmental disability and/or substance use issue.
Project start date/exit date	These indicate when a program enrollment began and ended (or just when a family exited).
Prior living situation	The types of living situations families are entering homeless services from; includes broadly homeless situations, institutions (e.g. jail, treatment), temporary and permanent housing, and other (e.g. unknown).

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[1] For more information and a full list of data elements and standards, please visit HUD's HMIS web page: https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/hmis-data-and-technical-standards/

Field Name	Description
Date homelessness started	This field is meant to capture the approximate date homelessness started for a family or individual.
Destination	The types of living situations clients are exiting homeless services to; includes broadly homeless situations, institutions (e.g. jail), temporary and permanent housing, and other (e.g. deceased, unknown).
Housing move-in date	If a client has exited to permanent housing, rapid rehousing, or permanent supportive housing, this field captures that date. It could be useful for knowing what types of interventions a client has utilized.
Health Insurance	This is critical if health care partners are involved, for example MCOs, and want to know what plans homeless members have.
Bed night date	Within a shelter enrollment that has a start and end date, this field helps clarify the exact amount of nights within that enrollment a person was at a shelter.
Date of engagement	This field is populated by outreach providers, some shelters (those that enter in night by night stays), and some service providers, and is useful particular for looking at outreach contacts, which helps build out a potential target population by including unsheltered homeless individuals or families who may not seek other services through the CoC (though difficult to monitor for quality, especially given the street-based data entry session).
COVID-19 data elements	Though these fields are only recommended by HUD, many HMIS vendors made COVID-19 data elements available in their software. Potential data elements include symptoms along with testing, quarantine and isolation status and locations.[2]

Child Welfare System Data

The Children's Bureau, within the US Department of Health and Human Services, encourages the use of data to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state/tribe and local Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWA) as well as data sharing between systems to foster coordination and maximize resources across systems that are available for families and youth involved in the child welfare system and to support efforts to end family and youth homelessness.[3] PCWA data is collected through a state/tribe or local child welfare information system, with most states/tribes implementing systems adhering to federal Children's Bureau's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) regulations. [4] CCWIS is the child welfare technology tool to manage and track cases, meet federal reporting requirements, and manage operations.

CCWIS allows states and tribes flexibility to tailor their information system to a local context, including adding data elements related to housing stability. CCWIS promotes data sharing, interoperability, and collaboration that allows for data-driven service delivery and oversight. CCWIS requires new data exchanges with education, courts, and Medicaid systems and allows for optional data exchanges with service providers and agencies. Privacy and confidentiality are critical within child welfare work to protect families and children, and as such, system data is governed by several federal acts and state/tribe regulations[5]. However, with CCWIS mandatory and optional data sharing and the critical role of housing stability in keeping children safe and helping families thrive, a strong case can be made for the importance of sharing data related to housing instability and homelessness.

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[2] https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-HMIS-Setup-and-Data-Sharing.pdf
[3] Efforts by child welfare agencies, local communities, and federal agencies to end family and youth homelessness https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im1703.pdf
[4] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-06-02/pdf/2016-12509.pdf
[5] ACF Confidentiality Toolkit https://acfmain-stage.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acf_confidentiality_toolkit_final_08_12_2014_0.pdf

Child Welfare Data Elements to Consider

Field Name	Description
Person ID Household ID	Person level unique identifier. Child welfare data focuses on child level as primary in each case, and links parent/caregiver and siblings.
Assessment Composite Scores	Systems which conduct risk assessments, families' assessments, safety assessments may compile composite scores summarizing a determination. While individual question responses on child and parent/caregivers may also be important, a composite score can serve as a factor to determine priority populations.
Household Income	Level of income for entire family.
Household Income Sources	Sources of income for entire family (e.g., benefits, TANF, SSI, earned income).
Housing Status	Where a family/caregiver currently resides
Case Disposition or Permanency Goal	Identify families receiving prevention services, alternative response services, as well as open cases with both family preservation goals and family reunification permanency goals.
History of child welfare system involvement	Household or child episodes with child welfare and foster care systems (for child as well as for the parent/caregiver as children).
Placement history of child	Record of child's involvement in foster care, number of substantiated allegations; adoption, permanency achieved, independent living, reunification with caregivers, and homeless systems.
Race/Ethnicity	Race/Ethnicity of each household member as well as tribal membership, if applicable.
Ages	Age or year of birth for each child and parent/caregiver (may service as a factor to determine priority populations).
Child and family circumstances at removal	List of 34 multiple choice items, including: Inadequate housing. The child's or his or her family's housing is substandard, overcrowded, unsafe or otherwise inadequate which results in it being inappropriate for the child to reside. Homelessness. The child or his or her family has no regular or adequate place to live. This includes living in a car, or on the street, or staying in a homeless or other temporary shelter. [6]

Data Matching in 10 Steps

CSH has worked with communities across the country to support cross-systems data matching and has developed a 10- step checklist to help community leaders get started. Getting from idea to execution of a data match and analysis can take months, sometimes years, from start to finish, but the results can serve as a catalyst for increased coordination and resources to better serve families. The checklist below can help organize and plan your efforts. These steps can be done in order, although many may be occurring at the same time.

10-STEP PROCESS DATA MATCH CHECK LIST

1	**Review your CoC and PCWA privacy documents and Release of Information.** If too restrictive, you will not be able to conduct matching using identifiable data but may be able to explore other approaches that don't involve using identified data, such as hashing approaches.

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[6] AFCARS federal requirements updated with implementation required by 10/1/2022, including addition of 'Homelessness.'
https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/05/12/2020-09817/adoption-and-foster-care-analysis-and-reporting-system

2	**Engage leadership** of cross sector partner(s) at child welfare, the local Continuum of Care, state Medicaid managed care organizations, schools, and other systems; meet regularly to continue discussing and refining the purpose of the matching project. Draft a document stating the purpose on which all parties can agree.
3	**Learn about data matching processes already happening locally**, as there may be agreements in place to leverage or note as precedent.
4	**Figure out exactly who needs to be a party to an agreement, and what type of agreement is necessary for the match** (BAA, DUA, MOU).
5	**Determine the party that will do the actual data matching** – will it be the child welfare or HMIS agency, or a third party, like a university partner.
6	**Request legal review of the data sharing purpose document by your agency legal counsel**.
7	**Determine the data sharing process** through meetings between stakeholder system data leads and CoC data leads – including what fields will be needed to do the match, what fields will be needed for the analysis related to the agreed upon purpose, and how data extracts will be obtained and transferred.
8	**Present on the data sharing exercise to the HMIS committee and/or other key decision makers in your community** – check your privacy policies and other requirements to see who needs to approve the matching project before the HMIS lead agency and PCWA, and their partners can move forward.
9	**Draft the data sharing agreement or MOU**. Note that this will likely go through several edits between each partner's legal counsel, so starting with a draft – even an imperfect one – will kick start the process.
10	**Sign the agreement and begin the sharing process**. Stick to the purpose and the specific processes outlined in the agreement when discussing and sharing information about the matching, reviewing and updating the agreement when needed.

Additional Resources

- Cross Systems Data to Support Outcomes Focused Financing, CSH
- Data Collection Strategies for Identifying Families Facing Child Welfare Involvement and Homelessness, CSH
- National Supportive Housing Needs Assessment and Racial Disparities and Disproportionality Index, CSH
- Child Welfare Policy Manual – Data Exchange FAQ, HHS
- Federal Child Welfare Data and Research, HHS
- Federal Child Welfare Data Webinars and Training Materials, HHS
- CCWIS Status by State/Tribe, HHS

For more information and resources visit csh.org and 1RoofFamilies.org, or contact 1Roof@csh.org.