

About the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

To fulfill Strategy 4 of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, to "improve our data and systems knowledge," the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) is looking to begin the process of co-developing a system with homeless serving agencies, funders, public systems and clients. It will be the first of its kind in Canada.

The approach will involve community engagement to work out:

- software choices
- implementation issues, particularly relating to capacity building
- ethics and privacy protocols
- shared data sets and standards, etc.

What is an HMIS?

A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a locally administered, electronic data collection system that stores longitudinal person-level information about persons who access the homeless serving system. An HMIS is absolutely essential to the effective implementation of any 10 year plan to end homelessness.

The CHF is committed to engaging key stakeholders in a community process to develop a Calgary-specific HMIS. This approach is based on over 20 years of learning and best practices from the US and Canada that points to the critical role of community buy-in and local leadership as pre-requisites for success.

What's the value of an HMIS?

One of the 'value-adds' of an HMIS approach is its capacity to replace a variety of partial funder driven data systems into one locally developed and administered system focused on ending homelessness, no matter who the funder is.

Rather than simply providing a means of tracking clients in a particular funded program, homeless management information systems are the nerve-centers of a community of care focused on ending homelessness. They incorporate the points of contact between a homeless person and the system of care, such as shelters, housing and prevention programs, housing providers, drop-ins, and outreach, as well as mainstream systems (child welfare, health, corrections, police, etc.).

The value of an HMIS is its capacity to track clients through systems as well as within systems. For agencies, the benefits of an HMIS include:

- Improved agency effectiveness through tracking client outcomes
- Improved service co-ordination, internally among agency programs, and externally with other providers
- Reduced administrative burden through simplified preparation of financial and program reports for funders, boards, and other stakeholders
- Dramatically improved client data to inform program design decisions

An HMIS will assist the community to:

- Gather accurate, real-time data regarding the total number of homeless, length and causes of homelessness, demographic characteristics and needs, in order to understand the basic dynamics of homelessness;
- Streamline client access to necessary services through a common intake and assessment process;
- Increase understanding regarding the flow of homeless people through systems of care and their use of services;
- Collect up-to-date information regarding services and programs available to address client needs and their real-time capacity for referrals.

Next Steps

- Employ a facilitator with significant successful experience in developing a community-based HMIS, to ensure that local agencies have input at every stage of the process.
- Select a facilitator based on an RFP process by mid-January. We would like to **invite four interested community agencies to help in the selection process** – please email Alina Tanasescu at alina@calgaryhomeless.com if you are interested.
- In 2010 we will host a series of workshops, community conversations/focus groups, and prepare the recommendations and finally the plan for the HMIS.
- We hope to begin implementation of a local HMIS within the next 12 months.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information. We look forward to working together to achieve a first in Canada!