Challenges of Merging CoCs and Connecting HMIS Systems

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Homeless Management Information Systems

- **≈20 HMIS and comparable database vendors**
- **382 CoCs nationwide**

- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that a Continuum of Care (CoC) must designate a single HMIS for the geographic area
  - The CoC is the collection of relevant organizations within a geographic area that carries out the responsibilities of the Continuum of Care program under 24 CFR 578
- The CoC must designate an eligible applicant to manage the HMIS, known at the HMIS Lead
- HMIS software is typically provided as commercial off the shelf systems
  - HUD-funded victim services providers use an HMIS comparable database rather than the CoC-designated HMIS

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Finding a Solution



- Consider the problem you are trying to solve:
  - Fragmented client service delivery
  - Incomplete or inconsistent data
  - Duplicative IT management
  - Limited data sharing and visibility

Possible pathways:

- CoC merger
- HMIS merger (multiple CoCs)
- Direct system connection
- Data integration and warehousing

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CoC Merger

Merging Continuums of Care can increase capacity, expand the resource base, improve regional planning, and strengthen leadership and governance.

CoC mergers necessitate HMIS mergers under HUD's CoC Program interim rule

Models for mergers may include:

- Smaller CoCs merging with a larger neighboring CoC
- Multiple CoCs forming a regional CoC (including cross-state CoCs like Omaha, NE and Council Bluffs, IA)
- Individual city/county CoCs joining a Balance of State CoC

Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Continuums of Care Mergers–What to Consider?

I. Background

HUD strongly encourages Continuums of Care (CoCs)–where appropriate–to merge with one or more existing CoCs. Such mergers can result in improved coordination of services, effective Homeless Management Information System implementation, more efficient resource allocation, and planning, and improved competitiveness for new resources. Merging smaller CoCs into a larger CoC also reduces the administrative burden of applying for funding at the local level and reviewing funding applications at the national level. HUD has developed this guide to assist CoCs with making informed decisions about whether to merge, understanding the implications of merging, and identifying the key first steps to accomplish when merging.

Tip: A side-by-side comparison of the benefits and challenges of a merger, like the one provided below related to governance, can be helpful in guiding the discussion for your CoCs. This could be completed as a group at a meeting related to merging to help guide the discussion and identify stakeholders' perceptions of benefits and concerns.

Potential Benefits	Potential Challenges
Increased ability to focus on coordination in a multi-county consortium	Planning efforts will increase significantly for a larger jurisdiction
Economies of scale: 1 annual CoC Program Competition application required instead of 2 or more	Potential reduction of local control over program decision-making
Maximize use of CoC Program funds	The transition of activities will require coordination among the CoCs
Performance and competitive edge likely to improve for metro region	A new project review and priority-setting process will be needed for the new multi-jurisdictional CoC
Regional planning enhanced	

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Multi-CoC HMIS Implementation

Minnesota

Shared HMIS for 10 statewide CoCs, the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the State of Minnesota (ICH and MN Housing)

North Carolina

- Four HMIS implementations for 12 CoCs across the State
- Two single CoC and two multi-CoC HMIS implementations
- CoCs retain local HMIS administrators to meet community data and reporting needs

New Jersey

NJ DCA Office of Homelessness Prevention serves as HMIS Lead for 13 of 16 CoCs in the State

- Multi-CoC HMIS implementations enable cross-CoC data sharing, HMIS administration, and cost-effective system implementation while service localized CoC geographies
- Each CoC designates the same HMIS Lead and HMIS software to meet HUD requirements
- Shared data governance and policies and procedures are necessary across CoCs
- Challenges appear when CoCs have diverging data and reporting needs, or dissatisfaction with the HMIS Lead and/or HMIS vendor
- Future goals: Transparent and well-resourced HMIS implementations advance the data priorities of participating CoCs

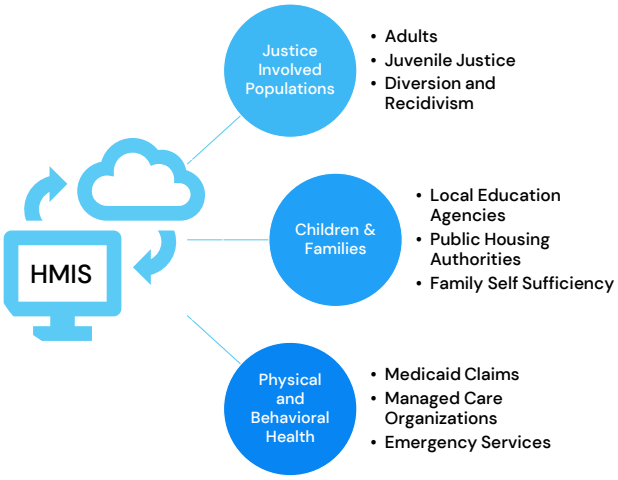
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Direct System Connection

- A one-time or small-scale data match
- Often used to examine client overlap across systems of care or support targeted research and evaluation
- Specific data use agreements are often used to enable data matching
- Effective for pilot programs or to improve resource allocation decisions
- May be a precursor to data and system integration between partners



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Data Integration and Warehousing

Texas

State-level Texas Homeless Data Sharing Network integrates HMIS data across 237 of 254 counties in the State

Massachusetts

11 CoCs across the State aggregate HMIS data via the Rehousing Data Collective, which allows Departments and Executive Offices to guide policy and assess needs

Washington

Washington Dept. Social and Health Services maintains an Integrated Client Database, with data from client eligibility, Medicaid claims, and HMIS systems

- Some States have developed integrated systems specific to HMIS data from CoCs
  - CoC uploads HMIS data to a managed repository for further processing and analyses
- Other States have developed enterprise data warehouses with multiple source systems providing regular feeds for operations, care coordination, and public health surveillance
  - Human services administrative data, including homelessness data from HMIS
- Future goals: Distributed data warehouses with low-friction and direct access to CoC-level HMIS

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A Practical Decision Framework

Outcomes

- Integration choices should be driven by outcomes, not by software
- Consider how outcomes can be attained with the least disruption

Governance

- Delegated authorities
- Cost sharing principles
- Centralized and decentralized models

Policy

- Policy alignment increases value of integrated data
- Privacy, security, and data quality

Data

- Common or variable data collection standards
- Data management protocols
- Data access and use to inform decisions

Platform

- A shared platform does not automatically create shared practices
- Universal data collection and reporting standards
- Custom capabilities and workflows

Services

- Administrative structures and resource requirements
- Shared services and roles/responsibilities
- Local control

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