



# Kings/Tulare HMIS Data Quality Plan

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## **I. Definition of Data Quality**

HMIS data quality refers to the extent that data recorded in the Kings/Tulare HMIS accurately reflects the same information in the real world. A perfect overlap between data and reality would result in a hypothetical data quality rating of 100 percent, while a data quality rating of 0 percent would indicate that there is no match between the information entered into an HMIS and the same information in the real world. No data collection system has a quality rating of 100%. However, to meet the Kings/Tulare HMIS goal of presenting accurate and consistent information on homelessness, it is critical that the Kings/Tulare HMIS have the best possible representation of reality as it relates to homeless people and the programs that serve them. Specifically, it should be our goal to record the most accurate, consistent and timely information in order to draw reasonable conclusions about the extent of homelessness and the impact of homeless services.

### ***Importance of Data Quality for HMIS Goals***

Data quality is greatly improved when the goals of data collection are clear. The goals of HMIS on a national level were stated by Congress:

“There has never been an overall review or comprehensive analysis on the extent of homelessness or how to address it. The Committee believes that it is essential to develop an unduplicated count of homeless people, and an analysis of their patterns of use of assistance ...including how they enter and exit the homeless assistance system and the effectiveness of assistance.”

Thus, the 2001 Congressional directive targets information to understand:

- The extent of homelessness,
- The nature of homelessness (implied in “comprehensive analysis” and necessary to know “how to address”),
- Homeless service use patterns, and
- The effectiveness of the homeless service system
- These goals are not only important on the federal level but also critical for understanding homelessness and program planning at the local level.

### ***Extent of Homelessness***

The number of homeless people has been at the center of debate for as long as homelessness has been acknowledged as a social problem. Due to inconsistent or no data collection, different estimation methods result in largely diverse numbers. One goal of HMIS is to estimate the number of homeless people that closely represents reality. By collecting personal information on all clients served, HUD hopes to generate an estimate of the unduplicated count of homeless people that access services nationally.

Achievement of this goal depends on high quality personal identifying data, such as Social Security Number, names, gender and date of birth, which are used to create unduplicated counts.

### ***Nature of Homelessness***

Additional HMIS data elements focus on the characteristics of those engaged in homeless services. Analyzing this information on a larger level will improve our understanding of the people experiencing homelessness, the issues they face, and their service needs. High quality data on gender, date of birth, race, ethnicity, veteran’s status and disability, and household composition are needed for this goal.

### ***Pattern of Homeless Service Utilization***

People who are homeless often use more than one of the programs that are available to help them access housing, resolve their crisis, support them, and link them with other services. Accurate program entry and exit dates and information on residence prior to program entry are critical in determining service use patterns that assess average length of stay and movement among different homeless programs. The collection of accurate identifying information at each program is also necessary in order to identify the extent to which clients appear in multiple programs, how clients move through the system, and to detect cycles of homelessness.

### ***Effectiveness of the Homeless Service System***

Assessing the effectiveness of the current homeless service system is critical to finding successful solutions to ending homelessness. For that reason, information at program exit, such as destination and income, are important to learn if and how the system has helped to resolve clients' housing crisis and to improve their overall stability. Data on returning clients also contribute to this goal. Comparing program entry data with program exit data at the aggregate level will also provide a picture of homeless program impacts on the clients they serve.

## **II. Data Quality Issues and Standards**

### ***Timeliness of Data***

To ensure the most up to date data, information should be entered as soon as it is collected. Information that tends to change periodically also needs to be regularly verified and/or updated, such as information on income sources and amounts. Information other than intake data needs to be updated monthly by the fifth day in the following month. Exceptions to the timeliness principle are made for domestic violence providers, which may wait until clients leave the shelter before entering data into the Kings/Tulare HMIS.

Reporting Submission Deadlines:

- Complete and accurate data for the month must be entered into the Kings/Tulare HMIS by the fifth working day of the month following the reporting period. For example, data for the month of April must be entered into ClientTrack by the fifth working day of May.
- Data Quality Reports will be run on the 6<sup>th</sup> working day of the month and will be sent out to agencies for review and corrections.
- Corrections and/or responses are to be made within 10 days.

### ***Data Completeness***

To release meaningful information from the Kings/Tulare HMIS, data needs to be as complete as possible, i.e. they should contain all required information on all people served in a certain type of program (i.e. emergency shelter) during a specified time period. On the macro level, the goal of achieving adequate HMIS coverage and participation by all local programs is essentially about ensuring that the records are representative of all the clients served by these programs. If a client record is missing, then aggregate reports may not accurately reflect the clients served by the program. Similarly, if an entire program is missing, data from the Kings/Tulare HMIS may not accurately reflect the homeless population in the community.

### ***Missing Client Records***

Even with all programs participating, it is possible that not every client served by the program is actually being entered. Missing client records from participating programs is particularly problematic since, unlike missing programs, the extent of those missing is difficult to quantify. In addition, like with missing programs, missing clients within a program might have characteristics that skew the data findings.

Agencies are strongly encouraged to address the issue of missing client records by comparing paper records (i.e. manual nightly shelter check-in lists) with the information entered into the Kings/Tulare HMIS.

### ***Incomplete Client Records***

The second type of incompleteness in a dataset is missing fields within particular client records. Standards have been set to ensure that all required fields are consistently answered. This has been accomplished by setting many fields as required in the software application and by publishing instructions for intake and discharge applications.

Where possible, if clients do not know or refuse to answer a particular question, this should be stored as an answer in the database, rather than leaving the field empty.

### ***Data Accuracy***

Information entered into the HMIS needs to be valid, i.e. it needs to accurately represent information on the people that enter any of the homeless service programs contributing data to the HMIS. Inaccurate data may be intentional or unintentional. In general, false or inaccurate information is worse than incomplete information, since with the latter, it is at least possible to acknowledge the gap. Thus, it should be emphasized to clients and staff that it is better to enter nothing (or preferably “don’t know” or “refused”) than to enter inaccurate information.

There are a number of unintentional errors that can occur during intake and data entry. These include:

- Accidentally selecting wrong response from dropdown;
- Misspelling (based on not knowing the proper spelling);
- Transposition of characters, or missed keys (accidental typographical errors);
- Swapped fields (e.g., first name in last name field, or intake date in exit date field);
- Use of nicknames instead of real names;
- Inaccuracies based on misunderstanding the question;
- Hearing the wrong information; and
- Transcription errors, including the inability to read handwriting.

### ***Incomplete Identifying Information***

Incomplete client identifying information - specifically, name, Social Security Number, and date of birth - will impede the Continuum’s ability to determine unique clients, hinder the client matching process, and throw off the unduplicated count of clients and households. If insufficient data is provided, it is impossible to verify whether two records represent the same client; thus, the count could appear higher than it is in reality. It could also be lower than it should be, if for example, there are two clients with the same name, but no Social Security Number is recorded for one of the clients. The Kings/Tulare HMIS staff or data analyst might assume they are the same client. However, a Social Security Number could have proven that they were different clients.

Homeless families also need to share a unique Household Identifier in order to link all of their members for analyses. If this information is missing, it is impossible to get accurate counts of families served, data on family composition will be invalid, and each family member may be incorrectly counted as a single individual served. Although the Household Identifier itself is usually system generated, users must enter clients in a particular way in order to ensure that the clients are related properly.

When possible, staff should note any third-party documentation that has been provided for verification purposes. Providing clients with access to review and correct the personal information that has been entered in the HMIS can improve data accuracy. This is also a client’s right, as published in the HUD Data and Technical Standards.

In addition, the following standards have been established to ensure maximum data integrity:

- All clients shall have unique ID numbers (Social Security Number or system-generated ID).
- Missing/unknown data in ClientTrack is less than 10% per month in required variable fields. The only data variable exception to accuracy, with respect to ‘Unknown’ is the variable Destination.

- All data entered is compatible with the agency's program in ClientTrack. For example, a family cannot be entered at a single men's shelter or a single women's shelter.
- Data in the Kings/Tulare HMIS must accurately reflect client data recorded in the agency's client file and known information about the client and services provided to the client. For example, 'Exit Date' should be the date the client physically exited the shelter.
- Data for active clients should be reviewed and updated monthly.
- Each agency program will establish procedures, controls and audit trails to ensure that all clients are entered into ClientTrack.

There are two main approaches to ensuring that all required fields are completed consistently: software validation and data quality reporting:

- With software validation, records are not saved unless all required fields are entered. This approach is effective at capturing something for every field but may also lead to staff entering inaccurate information just so they can save the data.
- Data quality reporting that occurs after the fact. Reports of actual client lists are generated that highlight missing or questionable data. These reports are the catalyst for staff to go back and actually fill in the missing records or make corrections.

### ***Data Consistency***

Consistency of data collection and data entry refers to a shared understanding of what data needs to be collected and in which way. Agencies are to refer to the HUD Data Dictionary for a complete description of each data element.

Much of the data in the Kings/Tulare HMIS is self-reported by people seeking homeless services. Often people in the vulnerable position of being homeless may give incorrect information intentionally or unintentionally for a host of reasons. Inaccurate information can be minimized by establishing a rapport with the consumer. Consumers often are not aware of the critical connection between funding and services. Communicating why the client's information is being collected, how it will be used, and how it helps the agency secure and sustain funding for the program may also be a valuable way to build understanding and support from the client. It is advisable for all staff to agree on a minimal level of information that all clients should receive. The agency may want to write out talking points and/or train users on how to consistently explain the HMIS and data collection.

### ***Entering Data***

Ideally, the same person who collects HMIS data should enter that data into ClientTrack. This assures consistent interpretation of the questions, the answers, and handwriting. At many service agencies having one person do both is not possible; e.g., day shifts might collect the data, night staff might enter it when things are less hectic. Also, the same people who are good at interviewing clients may not be good at entering data, or vice versa.

When it is not possible to have the same person collect and enter data, a clear process and communication between data intake and entry staff is essential. This will minimize any misinterpretations. Staff members doing these two tasks should meet before they begin and consistently check-in to resolve any confusion over notes on the intake form, agree on shorthand usage, clarify confusing questions, and discuss anything else that comes up. Supervisors should ensure that this communication happens regularly at each agency.

Intake and data entry staff should meet regularly to resolve any confusion over notes on the intake form, agree on shorthand, and clarify confusing questions. A data quality log can track open questions.

### ***Ongoing Training for Staff***

Ongoing training in ClientTrack is needed periodically for data entry staff to ensure ongoing data quality. The need can vary depending on the number of changes/upgrades to the software and the overall complexity of the software. It also depends on the skills of the users. Staff that is less comfortable with computers in general should consider refresher trainings to catch mistakes they may be making and affirm correct usage. All staff can benefit from trainings that go deeper into software. K/T HMIS will have at least one data quality focused training annually.

### ***Monitoring***

Monitoring data quality is a crucial part of the success of K/T HMIS. All participating agencies shall develop protocols for monitoring the quality of the data entered into the K/T HMIS. In addition, the Executive Director of each participating agency shall complete an Agency Directors Compliance Checklist on a quarterly basis. The findings from the self-evaluation shall be used to assist the agency in improving its data in the K/T HMIS.

Annually, the K/T HMIS staff will conduct a site visit to ensure that the agency is compliant with all K/T HMIS compliance standards.

### ***Accountability***

Each agency that agrees to participate in the K/T HMIS will be held accountable to follow all HUD regulations regarding HMIS including, but not limited to, privacy standards and data quality. All agencies seeking funding through the Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care on Homelessness will be ranked according to their participation in HMIS and how well they comply with the K/T HMIS Policy and Procedures and Data Quality Plan.

# Appendix 1: Agency Directors' Compliance Checklist

## Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care & Kings United Way Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Agency Directors' Compliance Checklist

The Agency Directors' Compliance Checklist is a tool, developed to assist in the Homeless Management Information System process. The purpose of the survey is:

- To highlight standard issues noted and discussed during the site visit interviews, and
- To orient and prepare the agency and its users for the site visit interviews.

### Instructions for completing the Survey

The Executive Director, along with one or more agency staff members, should complete the written survey. A meeting to discuss the survey answers should be attended by agency staff planning to participate in the site visit interviews. During the meeting, those items that are tagged "Needs Work", "No", or "N/A" should be highlighted and details shared as needed. The KTHMIS lead agency will receive a copy of the completed survey, and the responses will provide a basis for dialogue during the one-to-one interviews at the site visit.

Responses to each statement and definitions are as follows:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Yes           | The agency has completed and can demonstrate that all criteria related to this statement are met. |
| Action Needed | Some work has been done related to this statement, but not all criteria are met.                  |
| N/A           | Statement is not applicable to the agency.  |

Upon review of your completed Compliance Checklist, the KTHMIS lead agency will rate your responses according to the following categories:

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| A - Meets Guidelines            | Agency is in compliance with the KTHMIS guidelines relating to this item.  |
| S - Needs Work                  | Agency is not in compliance with KTHMIS guidelines relating to this item but is currently working toward compliance. These items do not affect client confidentiality. |
| N - Needs Immediate Improvement | Agency is not in compliance with KTHMIS guidelines relating to this item. These items affect client confidentiality and must be corrected immediately.                 |

**Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care & Kings United Way  
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)  
Agency Directors' Compliance Checklist**

Each agency director must ensure their agency is compliant with the following:

| Compliance Standard  | Yes | Action Needed | N/A | Rating<br>(for CoC use) |
|--|-----|---------------|-----|-------------------------|
| 1. The agency's executive director has read, signed and agrees to the Agency Agreement. User agreements are up-to-date and on file for each user.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 2. Agency has a designated Site Administrator(s). This person has a mechanism to ensure staff participates in HMIS training and/or can disseminate information.                          |     |               |     |                         |
| 3. The agency regularly attends CoC general membership meetings and strives to have a representative on the HMIS Steering Committee.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 4. Does the agency have a policy regarding background checks on employees and volunteers? If so, is the policy followed with regards to HMIS end users?                                  |     |               |     |                         |
| 5. Agency reports all written client complaints and/or any security incidents concerning the KTHMIS to the HMIS Committee.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 6. Agency has read and is in compliance with the KTHMIS Privacy Policy.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 7. Agency clearly displays the Privacy Policy at all intake areas and provides a copy to each client, upon request.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 8. All users have completed applicable HMIS user training and any applicable CoC training.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 9. Program descriptor data elements have been submitted with complete and accurate information for each project.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 10. Agency ensures that all computers accessing the KTHMIS are private and secure.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 11. HMIS equipment is used solely for HMIS and continues to work properly.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 12. Agency limits access to information provided by the KTHMIS database to authorized employees/volunteers only.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 13. All staff entering/viewing KTHMIS data in the KTHMIS system have a unique username/password and maintain a secure workstation.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 14. Hard copy data from the KTHMIS is secured.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 15. The KTHMIS Specialist is immediately notified when an employee leaves so that their KTHMIS user account can be inactivated.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 16. Agency regularly updates virus and firewall protections.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 17. The agency's participating programs collect and enter data on 100% of clients served.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 18. Agency maintains a minimum of 90% completeness for all required data fields.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 19. Agency accurately enters all client data, including Program entry, exit and services as close to real time as possible but no later than the 5th working day of the following month. |     |               |     |                         |
| 20. Agency reviews data quality reports for accuracy and completeness monthly. Requested changes are made within 10 days.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 21. Client forms are retained for seven years. Agency has a procedure to securely store and destroy client data.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 22. The agency has a process that verifies that Client Consent forms were obtained. Relevant documentation is available for review.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 23. Agency collects and enters all HUD required Data Elements into the KTHMIS.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 24. Client data collected in the KTHMIS accurately represents the case characteristics, demographics, service transactions, and history.   |     |               |     |                         |

**Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care & Kings United Way  
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)  
Agency Directors' Compliance Checklist**

**Overview**

Each agency must perform a compliance review of their HMIS practices on a quarterly basis. Quarterly compliance results will be reported to the HMIS Committee at the February, May, August and November meetings.

**Feedback**

Please record any feedback or concerns with regards to the HMIS system here:

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**Certification**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (agency director) hereby certify that the above information is true and accurate. I further certify that I conducted the compliance evaluation.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 2: Annual Site Visit Compliance Checklist

## Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care & Kings United Way Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Annual Site Visit Compliance Checklist

HMIS Partner Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Project(s): \_\_\_\_\_

A KTHMIS representative must ensure that the agency is compliant with the following:

| Compliance Standard  | Yes | Action Needed | N/A | Rating<br>(for CoC use) |
|--|-----|---------------|-----|-------------------------|
| 1. The agency's executive director has read, signed and agrees to the Agency Agreement. User agreements are up-to-date and on file for each user.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 2. Agency has a designated Site Administrator(s). This person has a mechanism to ensure staff participates in HMIS training and/or can disseminate information.                          |     |               |     |                         |
| 3. The agency regularly attends CoC general membership meetings and strives to have a representative on the HMIS Steering Committee.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 4. Does the agency have a policy regarding background checks on employees and volunteers? If so, is the policy followed with regards to HMIS end users?                                  |     |               |     |                         |
| 5. Agency reports all written client complaints and/or any security incidents concerning the KTHMIS to the HMIS Committee.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 6. Agency has read and is in compliance with the KTHMIS Privacy Policy.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 7. Agency clearly displays the Privacy Policy at all intake areas and provides a copy to each client, upon request.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 8. All users have completed applicable HMIS user training and any applicable CoC training.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 9. Program descriptor data elements have been submitted with complete and accurate information for each project.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 10. Agency ensures that all computers accessing the KTHMIS are private and secure.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 11. HMIS equipment is used solely for HMIS and continues to work properly.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 12. Agency limits access to information provided by the KTHMIS database to authorized employees/volunteers only.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 13. All staff entering/viewing KTHMIS data in the KTHMIS system have a unique username/password and maintain a secure workstation.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 14. Hard copy data from the KTHMIS is secured.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 15. The KTHMIS Specialist is immediately notified when an employee leaves so that their KTHMIS user account can be inactivated.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 16. Agency regularly updates virus and firewall protections.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 17. The agency's participating programs collect and enter data on 100% of clients served.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 18. Agency maintains a minimum of 90% completeness for all required data fields.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 19. Agency accurately enters all client data, including Program entry, exit and services as close to real time as possible but no later than the 5th working day of the following month. |     |               |     |                         |
| 20. Agency reviews data quality reports for accuracy and completeness monthly. Requested changes are made within 10 days.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 21. Client forms are retained for seven years. Agency has a procedure to securely store and destroy client data.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 22. The agency has a process that verifies that Client Consent forms were obtained. Relevant documentation is available for review.  |     |               |     |                         |
| 23. Agency collects and enters all HUD required Data Elements into the KTHMIS.   |     |               |     |                         |
| 24. Client data collected in the KTHMIS accurately represents the case characteristics, demographics, service transactions, and history.   |     |               |     |                         |

## Overview

A KTHMIS representative will perform a compliance review of each HMIS participating agency on an annual basis. Results will be shared with the agency along with the HMIS Steering Committee. The agency's Executive Director agrees that any item marked as "Action Needed" will be immediately corrected.

## Feedback

Please record any feedback or concerns with regards to the agency's HMIS compliance results and/or HMIS participation here:

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## Certification

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (KTHMIS Representative) hereby certify that the above information is true and accurate. I further certify that I conducted the compliance evaluation of \_\_\_\_\_ (agency name).

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

## HMIS Partner Agency Acknowledgement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (Agency Executive Director) hereby acknowledge receiving of a copy of the Annual Site Visit Compliance Checklist conducted on my agency. All items marked with "Action Needed" will be addressed and corrected immediately.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_