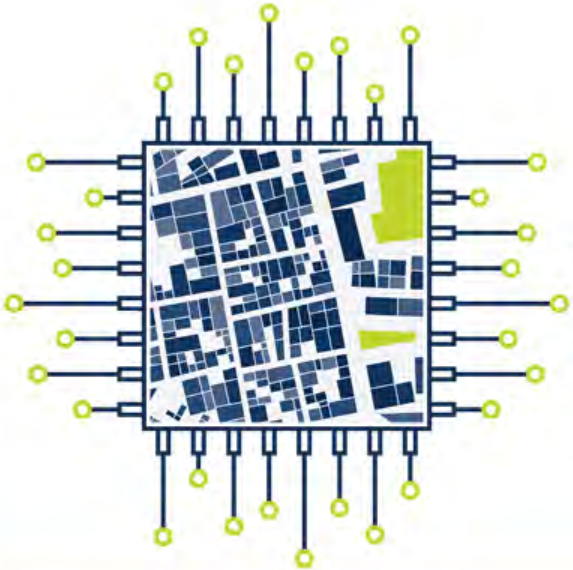
Ending Youth Homelessness: Making the Federal Benchmarks & Criteria Measurable and Meaningful

Liz Schoenfeld | Chief Research Officer, LifeWorks
Melissa Wheeler | Director of HMIS, ECHO



Solving Problems & Impacting Communities With Data

A Little Context

- The goal of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program is to effectively prevent and end youth homelessness by 2020
  - Youth are defined as any individual under the age of 25 who is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian and who meets any federal definition of homelessness
- The first 10 YHDP communities were selected in January 2017
- To date, 44 communities have been funded

What are the Federal Benchmarks & Criteria?

- The goal of the federal benchmarks and criteria is to help guide YHDP communities toward developing a coordinated community response to end youth homelessness
- Criteria are more qualitative in nature
  - Describe the key elements of a community's response
- Benchmarks are more quantitative in nature
  - Assess whether and how the system is working

Criteria

- The community identifies all unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.
- The community uses prevention and diversion tactics whenever possible, and otherwise provides immediate access to low-barrier crisis housing and services to any youth who needs and wants it.
- The community uses coordinated entry processes to effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to housing and service solutions that are tailored to their needs.
- The community acts with urgency to swiftly assist youth to move in to permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and supports.
- The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among youth.

Benchmarks

- There are few youth experiencing homelessness at any given time.
  - The community's census of youth experiencing homelessness includes all unaccompanied youth under 25 that meet any federal definition of homelessness.
  - No unaccompanied youth are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
  - No unaccompanied youth seeking emergency shelter are turned away unless they can be successfully diverted to another safe living environment of their choosing.

Benchmarks

- There are few youth experiencing homelessness at any given time (cont'd).
  - All youth identified as experiencing homelessness are offered connections to appropriate services on an ongoing basis to support sustainable exits from homelessness.
  - The number of unaccompanied youth currently experiencing sheltered homelessness demonstrates the community's capacity to address emerging needs through exits to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing destinations, including reunification.
  - The community's census of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness is not increasing over time.

Benchmarks

- Youth experiencing homelessness are swiftly connected to safe and stable housing opportunities and to permanent housing options.
  - Unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness (including emergency shelter or basic center programs) exit to permanent or non-time-limited safe and stable housing within a community-wide average of 30 days, and no longer than 90 days from the point of identification.

Our Experiences to Date

- Began considering how to operationalize the YHPD benchmarks in February 2017
- Regular participation in monthly community calls
- One of 12 communities to participate in USICH/Abt Associates pilot project of the benchmarks & criteria
- Had the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations to USICH based on our experiences

What We Learned:
Be Strategic with your Community Plan

- All YHDP communities are required to develop a coordinated community plan outlining their systemic approach to prevent and end youth homelessness
- Use USICH's criteria to structure your coordinated community plan
  - Keeps the focus on what is required
  - Allows for purposeful action planning

What We Learned:
Greater Need for Cross-System Collaboration

- All YHDP communities are required to develop a coordinated community plan outlining their systemic approach to prevent and end youth homelessness
- Use USICH's criteria to structure your coordinated community plan
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What We Learned:
Greater Need for Cross-System Collaboration

- Key partners include local school districts, child welfare, and juvenile justice
- Progress to date has been largely relationship-based
- These systems have no broader incentive or mandate to collaborate on the project
- Accessing data from these systems remains illusive

What We Learned: HMIS is Key

- There was no expectation that the benchmarks be measured using existing HMIS data elements
- Made the executive decision to rely on existing HMIS data elements and create our own tool
- Identified some proxy variables:
  - "Number of youth that requested shelter"
    - Treating the census as the number of youth who are "requesting shelter"
  - "Number of youth with first offer of permanent housing more than 30 days from identification"
    - Strictly using move-in date (not the date that the offer is "accepted")

What We Learned: HMIS is Key

- Some of the benchmarks would require tracking data elements that would be fairly burdensome to collect:
  - "Number of youth receiving connections to appropriate service during the lookback period"
  - "Number of youth who refused an offer of emergency shelter"
  - "Number of youth with first offer of permanent housing more than 30 days from identification"
- Consistently tracking such data community-wide would require a federal mandate
- Highlighted a need for broader standardization (e.g., timing of program dismissals)

What We Learned: HMIS is Key

- Benefits of using HMIS to monitor progress toward the benchmarks:
  - Incentivize (consistent!) data collection
  - Allows for centralized data storage
  - Reduces the cost to communities
  - Increases transparency
  - Supports cross-community learning
  - Supports the certification process

What We Learned:
Expanded Definition of Homelessness = More Resources

- YHPD communities are expected to prevent and end homelessness for youth experiencing any federal definition of homelessness
- Additional funding and resources need to be allocated to Coordinated Entry teams to support communities' ability to meet this expectation

Questions?

Liz Schoenfeld, PhD
Chief Research Officer | LifeWorks
liz.Schoenfeld@lifeworksaustin.org

Melissa Wheeler, MSW
Director of HMIS | ECHO
melissawheeler@austinecho.org