

WHITE PAPER
Performance Ranking of Homeless Continuums of Care

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Overview:

Since 2014, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required Homeless Continuums of Care (CoCs) to submit System Performance Measure (SPM) data measuring their effectiveness in the delivery of key client outcome goals.¹ Measures include placement into permanent housing, income increases, homeless recidivism, permanent housing retention, and median program stay. SPMs were developed by HUD to promote and gauge improvements in the effectiveness of community homeless service systems.

The NHIP has developed this Performance Ranking, based on submitted performance measure data by Continuums throughout the country, in an effort to provide the public with information concerning which communities maintain effective systems of homeless services delivery and which communities are likely in need of improvement.

The intent of the ranking is to offer a general assessment, not a detailed evaluation. It is important to understand the challenges and resources of each Continuum before comparing it to the performance of another Continuum. The NHIP suggests caution against making bold statements about community performance based on the ranking. A full list of Continuum Rankings can be found in Appendix I.

Limitations of Ranking:

These rankings are calculated using only empirical data reported by each Continuum of Care for the 2016-17 HUD fiscal year and do not incorporate any qualitative assessment of a community's performance. It is also known that performance can be largely driven by the amount of resources provided to the homeless system. The rankings do not incorporate any measure of access to resources.

Since the rankings take data from HUD's SPM, the rankings are limited to the formulas mandated by HUD. SPM data do not take into consideration differences in the service population such as race/ethnicity, household type, age, or disability, characteristics which can significantly impact outcomes.

¹ For a full review of the system performance measures, see the HUD website at <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/system-performance-measures/#guidance>

Ranking Methodology:

The following five HUD SPM serve as components for the ranking methodology:

- 1) Measure 1: Median Days to Discharge for Emergency, Transitional, Safe Haven programs.
- 2) Measure 2: Percent returns to homelessness from permanent housing within 24 months after discharge (exits from Outreach Services, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Safe Haven, and Permanent Housing programs).
- 3) Measure 4: Percentage of leavers (exits) with increased income (Only HUD CoC-funded programs) from program intake to program discharge.
- 4) Measure 7a: Percentage with successful exits to permanent housing (Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Safe Haven, and Permanent Housing-Rapid Re-Housing programs)
- 5) Measure 7b: Percentage with successful retention in permanent housing or exit from permanent housing to another permanent housing location (Only HUD CoC-funded Permanent Housing programs)

Continuums that did not report data for each of these five measures were excluded from the analysis. See Appendix II listing the 30 excluded Continuums.

A set of two indices were developed to rank the Continuums. The first index scores performance from the five SPM using a three-tiered scale. Each of the five measures are scored either 2 = High, 1 = Average, or 0 = Low using the following cut-offs:

| Measure | Description | 2 = High | 1 = Average | 0 = Low |
|---------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| SPM 1 | Median days of program stay | <=90 days | 91 to 180 days | >180 days |
| SPM 2 | Percent returns after 24 months | <=15% | 16% to 29% | >=30% |
| SPM 4 | Percent leavers with increased income | >=50% | 25% to 49% | <=24% |
| SPM 7a | Percent successful exits | >=70% | 30 to 69% | <=29% |
| SPM 7b | Retention/successful exits | >=96% | 90 to 95% | <=89% |

The Index Score is the summation of the scores for each of the five measures. A range from 0 to 10 is possible. The cut-offs for each measure are selected based on both the distribution of measures and a key stakeholder interpretation of what is considered above average, average, and below average with homeless service programs. Trying to provide a more delineated ranking for Continuums is not feasible or appropriate since the program mix for each Continuum may be considerably different, especially the proportion of emergency shelters compared to transitional housing. Arguments can be made for different cut-offs. The intent of these cut-offs is to help define Continuums at the high and low spectrum of performance measure proficiency.

Continuum rankings are presented using the three size categories employed by HUD: 1) Large Cities, 2) Small Cities, and 3) Balance of State/State-wide categorization. Separation of ranking by size helps communities to compare progress with similar communities. The NHIP recognizes the limitations of the

size categorization, with some small cities having a larger homeless service system and greater homeless prevalence than large cities. The ranking is presented this way to be consistent with HUD.

The second index is the summation of the actual percentage² for measures two through five divided by the natural log of the median days. The second index adjusts for performance based on the median days, since achieving client outcomes in a shorter period of time is considered more proficient than after a longer program stay. This method also helps to account for the distribution of emergency versus transitional shelter exits in any CoC. The natural log of the median days works to normalize the distribution and is a common method in statistics. The range of the Adjusted Index is between 1.0 and 5.0, with most scores between 2.0 and 4.0.

The final ranking (shown in the first column) employs both indices. First, the Continuums are ranked by the nominal Index Score and divided into the three categories below:

- 1) High Performers = Score of 8,9 or 10.
- 2) Average Performers = Score of 6 or 7
- 3) Low Performers – Score of 5 or below

Continuums with the same Index Score are then sorted by the Adjusted Index (Index 2). This helps to differentiate two or more Continuums that receive the same Index Score. The second index can also offer a comparison of two CoCs when one community may be just under a cut-off point. Index 1 is ordinal, while Index 2 is nominal. Both have advantages and disadvantages. The ranking tables also include the reported yearly Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) count which represents the number of persons served by the CoC with data entered into the HMIS system.³ This offers an additional comparison between CoCs based on the size of the service system.

Data Accuracy:

Homeless service providers bear a large burden in collecting and reporting on numerous characteristics of persons and households served. Many communities and their agencies lack sufficient resources or sufficiently-trained individuals that can give confidence to the collection of highly accurate data. In addition, data on outcomes such as housing placement and household income rely heavily on self-reported information and often this information is not verified. For both reasons, the data presented must be interpreted with caution. Due to problems with varying data quality by Continuum, the NHIP has attempted to give general ratings that do not attempt to further delineate performance based on small differences.

² Measure SPM 2 is modified by subtract the percentage from 1.0 to express the percentage in a similar direction (the higher number is better) as the other three measures to allow summation of the four measures.

³ HUD reports that 82% of all non-domestic violence shelter programs enter client intake and discharge data into their local HMIS. All HUD-funded permanent housing programs enter data into an HMIS.

Final Thoughts:

The rankings produced by the NHIP in the report are the first known attempt at providing the public with information on the performance of communities in delivering homeless services. The ranking focuses solely on the proficiency of services to persons entering homeless programs. The ranking does not attempt to address the performance of communities in engaging all unsheltered homeless persons who may reside in their communities or any progress in reducing the general numbers of homeless individuals in their areas. HUD data are very limited in assessing the proficiency of outreach to and engagement of the unsheltered population, and sufficient measures do not exist to incorporate them into the ranking. Progress on reducing total homelessness in a community represents a goal that is far beyond the mission and capabilities of the homeless service provider community since it reflects macro-economic and social trends that it cannot impact. Communities with poorly run homeless systems may experience decreases in total homelessness, while well-run systems can show increases, regardless of the effectiveness of the community's homeless service providers.

The NHIP hopes this initial national ranking can help build discussion on improving performance in the delivery of homeless services and identify communities that can serve as models for others and communities in need of additional assistance. The goal is to have effective service systems in all communities.

Citation:

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Author's Bio

Dr. Michael D. Ullman has over 20 years of experience as a researcher and non-profit administrator in the field of homeless services. From 2004 to 2015, he served as National Development and Program Evaluation Specialist for U.S.VETS, the largest non-profit specializing in residential services for homeless veterans. Dr. Ullman has co-authored multiple peer-reviewed publications in addition to guest commentaries in major metropolitan newspapers. He is currently writing a book called "Household Deformation," which takes a broader ecological approach to understanding the rise of modern homelessness and the punitive, anti-family administrative rules of HUD that have fueled both homelessness and much of public housing pathology. Dr. Ullman serves as the volunteer Editor for the NHIP initiative. He holds a Doctorate in Social Welfare from the University of Hawaii-Manoa.

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APPENDIX II
Continuums Excluded from the Ranking

| | | |
|----|---|--------|
| AL | Florence/Northwest Alabama CoC | AL-502 |
| AL | Tuscaloosa City & County CoC | AL-506 |
| AR | Southeast Arkansas CoC | AR-505 |
| AR | Fort Smith CoC | AR-508 |
| CA | Imperial County CoC | CA-613 |
| CA | Yuba City & County/Sutter County CoC | CA-524 |
| CA | Redding/Shasta, Siskiyou, Lassen, Plumas, Del Norte, Modoc, Sierra Counties CoC | CA-516 |
| CA | Alpine, Inyo, Mono Counties CoC | CA-530 |
| CA | Tehama County CoC | CA-527 |
| CA | Colusa, Glenn, Trinity Counties CoC | CA-523 |
| CA | El Dorado County CoC | CA-525 |
| FL | Pasco County CoC | FL-519 |
| FL | Hendry, Hardee, Highlands Counties CoC | FL-517 |
| FL | Columbia, Hamilton, Lafayette, Suwannee Counties CoC | FL-518 |
| FL | Panama City/Bay, Jackson Counties CoC | FL-515 |
| MA | Attleboro, Taunton/Bristol County CoC | MA-519 |
| MD | Cecil County CoC | MD-507 |
| MI | Battle Creek/Calhoun County CoC | MI-514 |
| MI | Flint/Genesee County CoC | MI-505 |
| MP | Northern Mariana Islands CoC | MP-500 |
| NJ | Salem County CoC | NJ-512 |
| NY | Clinton County CoC | NY-516 |
| NY | Columbia, Greene Counties CoC | NY-519 |
| NY | Newburgh, Middletown/Orange County CoC | NY-602 |
| NY | Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates Counties CoC | NY-513 |
| OK | Southwest Oklahoma Regional CoC | OK-506 |
| TN | Morristown/Blount, Sevier, Campbell, Cocke Counties CoC | TN-512 |
| TX | Bryan, College Station/Brazos Valley CoC | TX-701 |
| TX | Amarillo CoC | TX-611 |
| VA | Portsmouth CoC | VA-507 |