Measure 2:

The Extent to Which Persons who Exit Homelessness Return to Homelessness

Ending homelessness in the U.S. by 2020 will require us to make significant improvements in the way our homelessness systems function. The department has developed a set of seven system-level measures to help communities understand their systems' performance. This video features Measure 2 of the seven, and explains why this measure is important, how it is calculated and how you might consider using this measure locally.

The goal for this measure is pretty simple—we'd like to see people exit your system and not return. Obviously, this concept is key to reducing overall homelessness.

So the question is "what percentage of people who move to permanent housing after being homeless end up experiencing homelessness again within the next 6, 12, and 24 months?" We're looking for reductions in that percentage from one year to the next.

We start by looking at returns within 6 and 12 months, and then later, we will add returns within the following year, or 12-24 months. We do this to be practical. We don't want to wait two years to get the data on 6 and 12 months and we want to encourage you to look at your returns data as soon as you can.

For each time period—at 6 months, 12 months and 24 months—we look at the system in two ways. First, we're looking at peoplewho exited homeless projects for permanent housing. Of those people, we want to know who returned to a shelter, safe haven, or transitional housing after the exit to a permanent housing destination. , We then add instances when they returned to homeless projects including permanent housing projects that are part of the Continuum's system and have homelessness as an eligibility criterion. In this latter case, even though a person is moving into a permanent housing project, we assume the person must have returned to homelessness if they are entering a program that requires homelessness to get in, so we want to count that person as returning to homelessness. To be clear, this does not include transfers from one permanent

housing project to another, nor does it include situations where a person has a very short break between exiting homeless projects and entering a permanent housing project. HUD understands that the timing of a placement in permanent housing isn't always perfect. Programming specifications will make sure these types of transfers are not counted as returns to homelessness.

So let's look at a simple scenario. Bob is living in an emergency shelter. He exits that shelter and moves into an apartment he rents. That's considered an exit to a permanent housing destination.

Now let's look at more homeless assistance projects. We have an emergency shelter, a safe haven, a transitional housing project, and a permanent supportive housing project. And there are people in all of those projects.

All the time, some of those people are moving to permanent housing destinations. These could be unassisted rental housing, permanent supportive housing, living with friends and family in a stable situation, public or assisted housing, and permanent housing with rapid re-housing assistance.

Here we see 10 people who have exited to a permanent housing destination.

Now we want to know how many of the 10 who exited return to homelessness over the next two years. Let's say two of those people return to a project that helps people who are homeless -- emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing or even permanent supportive housing. If 2 of our 10 people have returned to homelessness, that's a 20% return to homelessness rate.

So that's the basic concept. Now let's talk about how the timing works.

We will be looking at all the people who exit for a permanent housing destination in the previous year. If somebody has two exits to a permanent housing destination during that year, we will be looking at the first one.

Let's say Bob exited to his rental housing in March. We are going to be looking at three different time periods to see if he returns: 6, 12, and 24 months after his exit from the shelter to the rental housing. Let's say he returns to a shelter in

August, 5 months after he exited to rental housing. That will count as a return to homelessness within the 6 month period.

Now let's look at another example, Barbara. Barbara exits a transitional housing project to a permanent housing destination in April, and then she has a return to homelessness in June of the following year (14 months later). She would be counted as returning to homelessness within the 24 month measure. Now let's add 8 more individuals, all of these people exit homelessness to a permanent housing destination in July and do not enter another homeless project for at least 24 months. If we tally up returns then, our overall outcomes will be that 1 out of 10 or 10% of people returned to homelessness within 6 months. None of the 10 returned in the 6-12 month period. And 1 out of 10 or 10% returned to homelessness between 12 and 24 months after exit. That means that a total of 2 out of 10, or 20% of the cohort returned to homelessness within 2 years.

Now that you understand how this measure is calculated, let's talk about how you can use the results locally.

I want to be clear at this point—this isn't an analysis that HUD will be requiring, but it may help you identify where the problems and opportunities within your system lie so you can drive improvement from one year to the next.

Now that you can see which exits resulted in returns to homelessness, if you're able to do a deep dive into your HMIS data, you can look for patterns that might indicate how you can reduce the rate of returns to homelessness. So let's take a look at some scenarios. First, let's look at where people who returned are exiting from. We see in this example that a lot of people who are exiting from a particular safe haven project to permanent housing destinations are subsequently returning to homelessness. That might tell us that we should look at how this safe haven is placing people and see if there are areas we might improve.

It could also be that this project is serving a population with major challenges to housing stability, their rate of return is in line with other projects serving a similar population. It's up to each community locally to discuss the information and

decide if results are appropriate for those being served or whether results can be improved.

Let's look at a second way you can analyze your local data. So you can also look at the permanent housing destinations that people are exiting to. In our example, notice that a lot of the people who return to homelessness had originally exited to housing with family and friends. That may indicate, for example, that more follow up services are needed to make those housing placements work.

These examples only scratch the surface of what you can learn by looking at your data, and it is easy to get overwhelmed. Don't worry, your analysis doesn't have to be perfect. But please, just get started, so you can use the information you've been collecting to improve the outcomes of those experiencing homelessness in your community.

That was Measure 2, Returns to Homelessness. Next up is Measure 3, Number of Homeless People.