Measure 4:
Employment and Income Growth for Homeless Persons in CoC Program-funded Projects

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 4 of the seven, and explains why this measure is important, how it is calculated and how you might consider using this measure locally.

In this measure, we're looking at employment income and other sources of cash income. We know that most homeless projects primarily focus on housing placement, but we're also interested in whether people increase their income during their time in the homeless system. When your system is able to help people maximize their income, then they're better able to stay in their housing.

This measure uses HMIS data on adults' or heads of households' income when they enter projects, compared to their income at annual assessments, or when they exit. It's a little different than some of the other measures, because tracking income is only required for projects funded through the CoC Program, so only CoC Program-funded permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing projects are included in this measure.

Let's be clear about what we mean when we talk about "income." Bob here gets SSDI and has a small part-time job. Bob also gets SNAP. The money from his job and his SSDI both go into his bank account – so we consider those two sources to be cash income. His job represents his "employment income" and his SSDI is "non-employment cash income." Since the SNAP benefit is restricted to a specific use and doesn't hit Bob's bank account, we consider it a non-cash benefit and don't include it in this measure because again, we're just looking at cash income. We know the measure doesn't capture everything, but maximizing cash income is an important goal of CoC Program-funded projects.

So, to measure this goal, we're going to look at positive income changes in two different ways: changes *during the reporting period* for stayers and then changes from *project entry to exit* for leavers. I'll just note here that the measure looks solely at increases, so we don't learn about people who have maintained or decreased their income. So let's get started.

Let's start by looking at a few examples of people who were in the homeless service system during the reporting period. We're going to tackle this in two snapshots: one of stayers and then one of leavers. Brandon enters PSH in July with unemployment income. He gets a good case manager who helps him get SSDI and he stabilizes in his PSH and stays there. He is a stayer who has had at least one annual assessment, so you will want to look at the changes to his income *during the reporting period*. You'll do this by comparing his most recent income assessment with his previous income assessment, looking at employment income and non-employment cash income separately. In this case, he does not have an increase in employment income, but he does have an increase in non-employment income. We have a third category where we track increases in *either* type of income, so he would get counted there as well. Now let's add more people who were all in homeless projects and were still there at the end of the reporting period. The other four people here were in PSH and remained there, and all had been there long enough to have an annual assessment. Some have had increases in employment income and others have had increases in non-employment income. Some do not show an increase in either category.

When we total up all the stayers, we see that 1 of them has an employment income increase, and 2 have a non-employment increase. When we look at either income source, a total of 3 have an increase. For this measure, we don't know what happened to the others—they could have maintained or decreased their income. Both situations are noted here simply as a dash.

Now let's look at leavers. Barbara enters transitional housing in June with no income. She gets a case manager who helps her get on SSDI. She uses her SSDI income plus some income from a part-time job that she got to move into affordable housing after two months. Barbara is a leaver, so for her, you'll be looking at the change in income from project entry to exit. She has an employment income increase and a non-employment increase. We'll also note that she has an overall income increase here in the "either" column.

Now let's add more people who were all in homeless projects and exited during the reporting period. Bob was in emergency shelter, so he isn't included – Remember, this measure applies to CoC Program-funded projects only. The other three people were in PSH and exited during the reporting period. Just like the stayers, some have had increases in employment income and others have had increases in non-employment income. Some do not show an increase in either category.

Both parts of the measure exclude people who are still in a project at the end of the year, but haven't been there for a whole year. For example, let's say that Bud moved into a PSH project just a few months before the reporting period ended and stayed there, he hasn't had an annual assessment yet, so we'll wait to measure the change in his income until he's left the system completely or has stabilized in a project for at least a year. That means that next year he'll be captured whether he stays or exits.

Now we'll total these leavers. There are a total of 3 people here who meet the criteria of a leaver. 1, Barbara, has an employment income increase. Barbara also has a non-employment income increase. When we look at the results for the other clients on our list, we see that none of the other leavers had an increase in either employment or non-employment income, so only Barbara's increases are counted.

When we look at all of the CoC Program-funded projects, we can use the measure to get a picture of how your system is doing to help clients gain income. Once you understand the systemwide rate, you may wish to dive deeper into your HMIS data to understand how different project types drive progress on this measure. This isn't an analysis that HUD requires, but it may help you identify opportunities for system planning. You may see that in some project types, there is more opportunity for clients to go from no income – or temporary sources of a little income – to greater income, whether it's from a job or from cash benefits like SSI or SSDI. You may learn as much from what income sources clients are not accessing as those they are, and if you find underutilized cash benefits, it could be an opportunity for the CoC to do some training on how to improve access. In some project types where clients are likely to stay for a long time – PSH for example – you’re likely going to see newer clients increasing their income while the longer-term clients have more stable income. As your retention rates in PSH increase, you’re probably going to see fewer and fewer clients with income increases, which is fine and makes sense. At a local level, you may want to set different local targets for different project types, depending on the expected outcomes of the project.

It’s also important to remember that this measure is limited as a picture of systemwide income increases. Because it’s limited to only CoC Program-funded projects, it’s going to be a narrower view of those increases. The project types covered, though – permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing grants– are all project types where it’s important that providers help clients work on increasing their income.

So that was Measure 4, Income and Employment Growth. Next up is Measure 5, Number of People Who Become Homeless for the First Time.