

HPRP Helped to Quickly Integrate HMIS into Washington State's Homeless and At-Risk Assistance

Positive Stories / Lessons Learned from HPRP: Community Success Story

HPRP Grantee:	Washington State Department of Commerce
CoC Name and Number:	WA-501 – Washington Balance of State CoC

Latest CoC Point-in-Time Count:

Total persons in ES:	1,391	Total persons in TH:	1,837
Total persons in Safe Haven:	0	Total unsheltered persons:	1,591
Total persons, sheltered and unsheltered:	4,819		

HPRP funds were used to expedite an already fast-tracked HMIS implementation plan for Washington State. The State's Department of Commerce recognized the value of collecting client-level data on all persons served, not only those served via federal funding, and had already mandated HMIS participation for all homeless assistance grants. A year prior to the release of HPRP, the State began phasing in installation and training for grantees on how to comply with reporting requirements and create interim and ad-hoc reports to drive their own program improvement. The State saw in HPRP an opportunity to integrate HMIS-based evaluation into homeless and at-risk assistance statewide at a much faster pace.

The State phased in HMIS reporting by engaging a small group of pilot agencies and then the rest of the subgrantees in three waves (over 90% of HPRP subgrantees, mainly rural counties, had never tried reporting out of HMIS). The State set tiered goals of participation: first focusing on reporting and data integration, then on user interface, and finally on system enhancements. This gradual rollout allowed State staff to work on the most challenging start-up issues with small amounts of subgrantees, continually

refine their training methods, and present subgrantees with manageable and realistic expectations throughout the process.

One of the first lessons learned was the oversight needed of the State's HMIS reports – staff had to stay engaged with the vendor, really understand the canned reports they received, and ensure that the reports met federal requirements if they wanted to submit data to HUD that they could defend. The monthly review of client data submitted by subgrantees that preceded reimbursement was tedious at the beginning, but beneficial for both subgrantees and State staff.

"For example, our familiarity with entering and reporting on rental assistance definitely increased since this model didn't have widespread implementation prior to HPRP," agreed Mary Schwartz and Kathy Kinard of the Department of Commerce. "We were able to report, with a high degree of confidence, accurate HPRP data on required HUD reports."

Three years later, all subgrantees will continue using HMIS after HPRP to report on data for their State-funded grants. Communities within each county – the same counties that entered HPRP brand new to HMIS – now share HMIS client-level data, which gives agencies more complete pictures of households' needs and helps them quickly identify next steps for service, while protecting client privacy. The competition for State funding is now aligned with HMIS, requiring all agencies to correlate the programs in their HMIS-based Housing Inventory Chart with their service benchmarks and requested funding, and communities keep track of inventory and client changes among their agencies to predict future needs. Agencies also take more ownership of their data and the State has an easier time developing performance measurements for internal grants.

"We're able to use their own data to explain our benchmarks for their performance, which provides lots of incentives for them to get the data right and then for them to use the data to help strategize services," Kinard added.

Engaging agencies Statewide in conversations about using their data to plan and justify strategies to assist the homeless or to identify those at risk is one of the enduring products of HPRP that has impacted Washington's homeless assistance and prevention system from the bottom up.

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