

## Frequently Asked Questions about WA Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

### What is HMIS, and who must participate in it?

Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS, is a generic term for an electronic record system that enables information-gathering about and continuous case management of homeless persons across agencies in a particular jurisdiction (city, county, and/or state). Homeless service providers collect information about their clients and input it in an HMIS so that it can be matched with information from other providers in the state to get accurate counts of homeless clients and the services they need. In order to be eligible for federal homeless assistance funding, agencies must participate in an HMIS that allows them to collect and report on the specific data elements outlined in the [HMIS Data and Technical Standards](#).

As mandated by the [Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act](#) (ESSHB 2163 - 2005), the [Department of Commerce](#) is responsible for operating an HMIS for counties that do not operate their own compliant system. Commerce has chosen BitFocus to provide the statewide HMIS database (herein “statewide HMIS”). Commerce also works with counties with an established HMIS (Pierce, Clark, King, Snohomish and Spokane) to ensure that their systems are compatible with the state system so that data is collected and reported accurately.

If you are not sure whether your community has an existing HMIS, or are interested in using HMIS, please contact Nick Mondau at [nick.mondau@commerce.wa.gov](mailto:nick.mondau@commerce.wa.gov).

### What information is going to be accessible to stakeholders?

No individual, identified client data will be accessible at any time to anyone not authorized through the Department of Commerce to access the database. Aggregate reports regarding demographics and service trends will be available to stakeholders upon request and as they are created.

### What are the benefits of the HMIS Commerce provides?

- **Coordinated data entry & region-wide data sharing** – Using advanced enterprise technology, the statewide HMIS supports a community’s need for robust centralized intake across multiple program and can support coordinated case management functionality to better serve the homeless population.
- **No experience necessary** – The statewide HMIS is a web-based program that is managed by Commerce. Training is provided for all your staff by Commerce. There is no software to buy, and the statewide HMIS is designed to meet HUD, HIPAA, and local provider needs.
- **Automated reporting** – The statewide HMIS allows you to complete monthly, quarterly, and annual reports for key funders (including local funders & HUD) with just a few clicks. The statewide HMIS is customizable to your program or agency’s specific needs, and captures changes in clients’ needs over time.
- **Security** – The statewide HMIS is protected by a host of security features, including an enhanced web browser, two-factor authentication, and password encryption.

**Are there any costs associated with using the HMIS?**

The cost of using the statewide HMIS is minimal. Commerce pays for the hosting and licensing fees associated with HMIS use as long as quality data is entered in a timely fashion. In some cases, counties or provider agencies may incur related costs in the form of staff time, training, or meeting minimum software/hardware requirements (below) to successfully implement HMIS. County portions of 2163 funding may be applied to this purpose.

**Where do I go to find more information regarding Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) information or contacts?**

The Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) combines state homeless resources into a single grant opportunity for county governments and other designated entities under the administration of the [Washington State Department of Commerce \(Commerce\)](#). Visit our [Consolidated Homeless Grant](#) webpage to find out more about CHG and who to contact in your county.

**My agency needs to start using HMIS. What is the process?**

Please contact one of our [HMIS Technical Assistance \(TA\) staff](#), and notify the [CHG Manger](#) for you county, to ask them for HMIS access. You will be provided with a form to fill out called an [Agency Agreement](#). If your county is data sharing with other agencies, you will need to do a [Data Sharing agreement](#). Also, you will receive a Program Set-Up Tool which is a form to fill out for setting up your programs in HMIS. The process can take up to a few weeks depending on how timely forms and required information is returned to our TA staff. All staff that will be using HMIS will need to take HMIS training and upon first access to HMIS agree to a new [User Policy, Responsibility Statement and Code of Ethics](#). Please review our [HMIS Training Catalog](#) for details on requirements for new staff needing access to HMIS. The HMIS Training Registration Callendar has a schedule of available trainings and is found on the [HMIS webpage](#).

**I'm an existing HMIS user, who do I contact for HMIS technical assistance (TA) and support?**

A list of contacts for HMIS TA can be found on the [HMIS webpage](#) under [Technical Assistance](#).