

3. CLIENTS AND CASES

Two of the essential elements to understand about the InfoNet system are the terms “Clients” and “Cases.” The use of these two distinct and important elements is crucial to InfoNet’s flexible design, which allows agencies to record significant data on each person who comes in the door for services while maintaining accurate and unduplicated records. Over time, you will become adept at utilizing client and case data, but it takes a little getting used to at first!

Below is a brief explanation of Clients, Cases, and how the two terms work together to make InfoNet a versatile data collection system.

CLIENTS

In InfoNet, it is important to note that a “client” is a person, typically one who is a direct victim of crime and who has come to your agency for services. (There are a few exceptions, which we’ll discuss later in this chapter.) Client information is recorded via Intakes. An Intake is completed each time a new client comes into your agency for services. Your agency may complete a paper Intake form when a client comes into your agency, or you may enter the information directly into InfoNet via computer.

CLIENT ID: InfoNet does not collect identifying information about clients such as names or Social Security Numbers. In order to track clients, your agency must issue each client a non-identifying **Client ID number**. If your agency does not currently assign Client ID numbers, please keep in mind the following:

Client ID numbers may contain letters as well as numbers.

Client ID numbers may be up to 14 digits long.

Avoid using a protocol that puts a limit on how many clients you can possibly number – you never know over time how many clients your agency might serve, so leave your options open.

DO NOT include client identifying information in the Client ID number, such as any part of the client’s name or the client’s birth date. The point of the Client ID number is to guarantee client anonymity, and using identifying information in the ID number defeats the purpose!

Examples of Client ID protocols:

Good:

Program prefix, date of intake (mm/yy), and three digits in sequential order:

ERC-0506-001

ERC-0506-002

ERC-0506-003

ERC-0606-001

This protocol allows agencies to easily identify an intake number as their own (through the use of the program's initials at the beginning), differentiate client intakes according to time period (by using the intake month and year), and identify if a client intake has been missed or not entered (by using a sequential number at the end)

In addition, the three digit sequential number at the end allows that agency to enter up to 1,000 clients on any given day. If an agency were ever likely to receive more than 1,000 intakes on any given day, they could modify the above protocol by having that sequential number be four digits. A smaller agency might prefer to use two sequential digits instead.

Poor:

Client's initials and client's date of birth (mm/dd/yy)

MNG070172

EAB111271

There are several problems with this type of protocol. First, they contain identifying information. Second, you would run into problems if you ever tried to enter a client with the same initials and birth date as another client.

If you would like more information on client numbering protocols or if you need to change existing client ID numbers to a less identifying or better numbering system, please contact Nicky Gleason at nicky.gleason@commerce.wa.gov and she is happy to assist you.

CASES

On rare occasions, a client that has been seen by your agency before may return as a victim of a different crime. For example, a client who originally came to you for services as an adult victim of childhood sexual abuse may come to your agency as an adult victim of an unrelated sexual assault, or a victim of domestic violence may return after having been abused in a later relationship. In cases such as these, the original intake information may not apply to the second victimization – for example, the offender’s relationship to the victim may be different, or the length of time for when the incident occurred may be different. However, it would be useful to connect the two intakes for the same victim. In order to do this, InfoNet links the two intakes using **cases**. Cases allow you to submit two intakes for the same victim, using the same Client ID number.

Understanding the difference between Clients and Cases is critical when searching for existing records. When searching, you may search either using the agency selected Client ID number, or a computer generated Case ID number. When searching for an existing Client ID number, the system will offer you a choice of two options. You may view the client’s current **case**, which is a detailed record of all of the information you have entered about the client, their current services, and other details, which will be the most frequent use of the search function. The other option is that you may also select to begin a new case for an existing **Client**, in the event that a client has returned to your agency as a victim of a different crime. If you accidentally begin a new case instead of selecting the current one, you won’t find much of the information you entered into InfoNet, which can be frustrating and confusing! Not to worry, your information is still there, and can still be accessed, but to avoid this situation, be sure to read carefully over the section **Searching for Existing Clients and Cases** in the Client Intake chapter.

REQUIRED DATA

Entering a client intake will vary slightly according to your agency. There are a number of data elements collected in InfoNet, with many of those elements being optional. Each agency should decide which data elements would provide you the information you need. While it may be tempting to keep data collection at a bare minimum, there are many ways in which data collection can be very useful, and sometimes can be required for grants that are not administered by OCVA and DSHS.

However, for OCVA and DSHS reporting purposes, there are a few data elements that are absolutely mandatory to the reports we compile for our state and federal funding sources. This doesn't imply that any data outside of these elements is purely optional; there is an implication that agencies will continue to provide the best and most complete data that applies to their programs. By required data, we mean fields for which if you cannot provide an answer, the client cannot be counted in the InfoNet system **at all**. This is a pretty severe restriction, and consequently, we tried to keep the number of those elements as small as possible.

In addition to their extensive work in helping to develop the InfoNet system, the InfoNet User Group developed the required fields. The InfoNet User Group was comprised of twelve individuals representing victim service providers from across the state as well as representatives from the state coalitions, OCVA, and DSHS. They represented sexual assault, domestic violence, and crime victim service centers programs both large and small, from both urban and rural areas. The User Group determined which fields were essential for all agencies to collect while avoiding placing an unnecessary burden on agencies to collect data that may not be relevant to their services.

The absolutely mandatory required elements for client intakes in InfoNet are essentially the same for all program types and contract types, and are as follows:

Client ID Number: This is essential to being able to track the client in the InfoNet system, since no identifying information such as name, date of birth, or social security number of the client are ever stored in the system. The Client ID number is generated by your agency and must be unique.

First Contact Date: This information is crucial to determining how many new clients were served in a given period of time. This date should represent your agency's very first contact with a client. A first contact date should be entered only once. If a client comes in for additional services, or for an additional case, their first contact date remains the same.

Client's Race: Race was selected as a mandatory field because all of our state and federal reports ask for the race of the clients served. While Race is a mandatory field, there are options for those individual cases where recording the client's race is not possible, whether because of individual intake issues or because your agency has concerns about confidentiality. In such cases, there are "unspecified" and "not reported" options for this question.

Client's Ethnicity: Like Race, Ethnicity is mandatory but also includes "not reported" and "unspecified" options for instances where client confidentiality is a concern in reporting this data.

Client's Gender: Like Race and Ethnicity, Gender is also mandatory but also includes an "unspecified" option. There is also an "Other" option for individuals who do not identify as either Male or Female.

Client's Year of Birth: Client Year of Birth is mandatory because it allows us to categorize clients into age groups. It is also an important demographic to collect as it allows the system to

differentiate between child and adult clients, each of which may be counted toward different reports—for example, STOP grant services are applicable only to clients over age 18. Year of Birth is used, as it is less identifying than date of birth, but still provides enough detail that the client can be categorized into age ranges.

Crime Type: Crime Type is mandatory because it is how we categorize clients according to service provision. It is essential to record the primary crime for which a client sought services. Some clients may receive different services for multiple crime types at different points in their life. A client who was a victim of domestic violence may come back to an agency to receive services for sexual assault, and thus have a second case that has a different crime type.

Client Type: Client Type is most applicable to Sexual Assault Clients, and is how we differentiate Adult victims of Sexual Assault, Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Assault, and Child victims. For Crime Victim Service Center clients, Client Type is used to differentiate between children and adults, and for Domestic Violence clients, client type is not used.

Client's Disability: If a client is not disabled, there is an option to select “None” under Disability; in addition, there are “not reported” and “unspecified” options.

Client's Homelessness: This is a Yes/No question regarding whether or not a client is homeless, with additional options for “not reported” and “unspecified.”

UNSPECIFIED, NOT REPORTED, AND NOT APPLICABLE

Many of the questions in the Client Intake have options for Unspecified, Not Reported, and Not Applicable. At first glance, these may seem like interchangeable answers, but in fact they are offered for very different purposes.

Unspecified: The term Unspecified in InfoNet refers to questions that your agency does not ask clients as a matter of policy. This may be because those questions do not apply to the client's you serve, or because your agency does not find the answers to those questions useful. The implication of selecting "Unspecified" is that your agency doesn't collect this information from anyone.

Unspecified should never be selected on required fields. The reason Unspecified is shown as an option under questions like Gender is that these questions are asked later in the intake about other individuals, such as Secondary Victims or Offenders, where selecting Unspecified is allowable. If, for confidentiality reasons, you do not want to select an answer for your client's Race, you should select Not Reported.

Not Reported: The term Not Reported in InfoNet refers to questions that your client did not disclose the answer to. This may be because she was unable or unwilling to answer the question, or because she was able to give your advocate only limited information at the time the intake was completed. The implication of selecting "Not Reported" is that your agency asks the question, but that the client did not provide an answer for this intake.

Not Applicable: The term Not Applicable in InfoNet refers to questions that may apply to some clients but would not apply to this one. An example of a question for which you might answer "Not Applicable" would be Employment if you were filling out an Intake for a child who was not old enough to be employed. Consequently, Not Applicable is not an option for every question – for example, there is not a "Not Applicable" option for Race, Ethnicity, or Gender.

There's a very specific reason that we offer these three options for many questions. Over time, the data that agencies enter into InfoNet will be available for use in compiling statistics on the clients we serve. If the data from all agencies was used, regardless of whether or not those agencies answered the question based on client response or on agency policy, we could come up with skewed and invalid data.