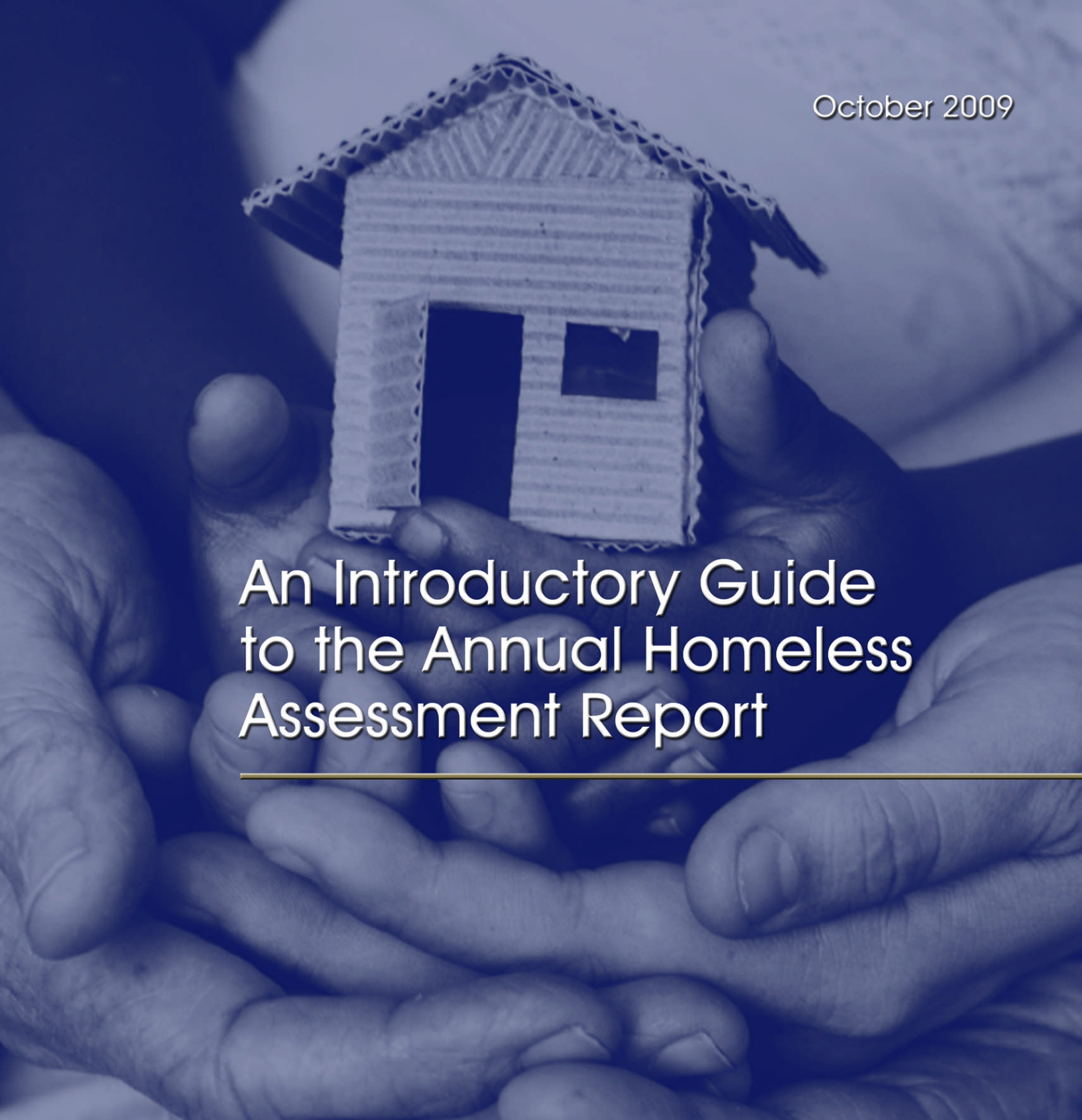


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An Introductory Guide to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Community Planning and Development

The logo for Abt, consisting of the word "Abt" in a white, serif font on a dark blue square background.

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1. Introduction

This guidebook provides background information and guidance on the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The guide describes the AHAR data reporting requirements and also reviews the data submission process via the AHAR Exchange, a web-based data collection tool designed specifically for the AHAR. The guide is designed primarily for communities that have never participated in the AHAR and wish to learn more about the AHAR process. It can also be used as a reference guide for communities that participated in previous AHARs.

This chapter provides a general overview of the AHAR, briefly discussing the origins of the project, the types of communities that participate in the AHAR, and the uses of AHAR data. The remainder of the guide proceeds as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the AHAR process.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the data submission process via the AHAR Exchange.
- Chapter 4 presents a list of AHAR resources.

1.1. What is the AHAR?

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) represents the first effort to use administrative data to produce national estimates of homelessness. In 2001, Congress directed HUD to help communities implement local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) and mandated that every Continuum of Care (CoC) jurisdiction implement client-level reporting within three years. Congress noted that HMIS data could be used to develop an unduplicated count of homeless people, as well as to analyze the use and effectiveness of homeless assistance services. To that end, Congress charged HUD with collecting and analyzing HMIS data from CoCs in order to understand the nature and extent of homelessness nationally.

What is the AHAR?

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is a report to the U.S. Congress on the extent and nature of homelessness in the United States. It provides counts of the homeless population and describes their demographic characteristics and service use patterns. The AHAR is based primarily on data from Homeless Management Information Systems.

HUD selected a research team from Abt Associates and the University of Pennsylvania to complete the AHAR. The research team collects, reviews, and analyzes aggregate HMIS data for the AHAR. The team also compiles Point-in-Time (PIT) counts and bed inventory information from each CoC's Exhibit 1 application. To collect the HMIS data, liaisons from the research team work one-on-one with community representatives to generate the data, review the quality of the data, facilitate the reporting process, and help resolve any data-quality issues. The research team analyzes the data and prepares the annual reports, which are published each summer and provide an overview of homelessness during the previous year. The findings from

the AHAR inform public policy and highlight the issue of homelessness among the American public.

1.2. Who participates in the AHAR?

Communities participate in the AHAR as either a *sample site* or a *contributing community*. There are 102 sample sites nationwide. Each sample site is a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) jurisdiction that was selected randomly to be part of a nationally representative sample of communities. CDBG jurisdictions include large cities, medium-sized cities, urban counties, and non-entitlement areas. Sample sites may geographically encompass an entire CoC or may be a smaller geographic area within a CoC. A list of the 102 sample sites is provided in Appendix A.

Contributing communities are CoCs that voluntarily submit their data to be included in the AHAR. The number of contributing communities participating in the AHAR has grown considerably since HUD completed the first AHAR in February 2007. A list of contributing communities is presented in an appendix to each report.

Both sample sites and contributing communities must meet certain criteria to participate in the AHAR. Communities must have a functioning HMIS with client-level data that are entered consistently and accurately into HMIS. Also, communities must have at least 50 percent of their community-wide inventory (i.e., HUD- and non-HUD funded providers) represented in HMIS. Lastly, communities are expected to have reasonable bed utilization (or occupancy) rates, typically above 65 percent or below 105 percent. The participation requirements are described in more detail throughout the guide.

Criteria for Participating in the AHAR

Participating communities must:

- Generate their AHAR data from an HMIS;
- Have at least 50 percent of beds represented in the HMIS;¹
- Have reasonable bed utilization (or occupancy) rates, typically between 65 percent and 105 percent.
- Have relatively low missing values.

¹ The 50 percent bed coverage rate is calculated separately for each AHAR reporting category, and a community must achieve this threshold in one or more categories to participate in the AHAR. The reporting categories are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.3. What data are reported to the AHAR?

The AHAR contains data from two sources. The first source is HMIS data. The AHAR is based largely on the universal data elements in HUD’s HMIS Data and Technical Standards. All HMIS data are reported in the aggregate for each community to the research team. At present, the data represent any person who enters an emergency shelter or transitional housing program during a 12-month reporting period, from October 1 to September 30 of the following year. (The 2010 AHAR will include persons served in permanent supportive housing programs and Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Programs.) Data are reported separately for individuals and persons in families in these program types.

HMIS data is submitted to the AHAR research team via the *AHAR Exchange*, a dynamic web-based tool designed specifically for the AHAR. The AHAR Exchange is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The AHAR also includes information from CoC Exhibit 1 applications. Point-in-Time (PIT) counts of homeless populations offer a “snapshot” of homelessness on a single night in January and include counts or statistically reliable estimates of the unsheltered homeless population. The annual PIT counts also provide information on the numbers of homeless persons within particular subpopulations, such as persons who are chronically homeless, severely mentally ill, substance abusers, veterans, unaccompanied youth, or living with HIV/AIDS.

1.4. How is the AHAR used?

The AHAR is the only source of data that is available annually on the extent and nature of homelessness nationwide. As such, the AHAR provides federal and local policymakers with a deeper understanding of who is homeless and how homelessness changes over time. This information can be used to inform public policy and the public, craft appropriate intervention strategies, and address the persistent issue of homelessness in America.

Participation in the AHAR is particularly beneficial to local communities because data gathered for the AHAR helps quantify the number, characteristics, and service needs of those who accessed homeless services. This provides a data driven understanding of the community’s homeless population to inform local homeless assistance planning. Communities can also use AHAR data for the CoC application, community planning, strategic plans to end homelessness, consolidated plans, and funding applications.

2. Overview of the AHAR Process

This chapter provides an overview of the AHAR process. The chapter describes the AHAR schedule, the AHAR reporting requirements, and the data submission process. It also discusses some of the most common data quality issues encountered by communities when submitting data to the AHAR.

2.1. AHAR Schedule

The AHAR reports data on persons served during a 12-month period, from October 1 through September 30. Beginning on October 1st of each year, AHAR team members (or AHAR liaisons) contact participating communities to collect their data. Thus, October 1 is an important date because it marks both the start of a new AHAR data cycle and the collection of data for the previous 12 months.

The schedule for submitting data to the AHAR is:

- **November 15:** draft data must be submitted to the AHAR Exchange.
- **December 15:** final data must be completed. Data are deemed final when the community has done everything it can to resolve any data quality issues *and* the community has confirmed the data as accurate.

The data are compiled and analyzed by the research team between January and March, and the final report is released in June. A series of AHAR trainings are conducted between July and September to introduce the AHAR process to communities that are new to the AHAR. These trainings provide an overview of the AHAR process, review the data reporting requirements, and introduce communities to the AHAR Exchange. For more experienced communities, a second series of trainings are offered to improve the quality of AHAR data and increase the capacity of communities to participate fully.

Each major milestone throughout the AHAR schedule is associated with several key activities that communities should conduct. During the data submission period (from October to December), communities should focus on compiling their data, running HMIS queries to generate the data required for reporting, reviewing their data quality, submitting the data via the AHAR Exchange, resolving any data quality issues, and finalizing the data submission. From January to the September, communities should focus on expanding their HMIS implementation to increase provider coverage in their HMIS, conducting routine data quality checks, and participating in AHAR trainings as needed.

2.2. The AHAR Reporting Requirements

Communities submit aggregate HMIS data into one or more of the following reporting categories:

1. Emergency Shelters for Individuals (ES-IND)
2. Emergency Shelters for Persons in Families (ES-FAM)
3. Transitional Housing for Individuals (TH-IND)
4. Transitional Housing for Persons in Families (TH-FAM)

Each reporting category represents an unduplicated count of persons within that category, but a client may be reported in multiple categories as appropriate. For example, a client who enters an emergency shelter for individuals in October, stays for several months, exits, and then re-enters the same shelter in February should be

counted in the ES-IND reporting category once only. If the same client subsequently enters a transitional housing program for individuals, then he should also be reported in the TH-IND category once only. Clients who use multiple programs during the AHAR reporting period will be de-duplicated automatically through the AHAR submission process.

What is the definition of a “family” in the AHAR?

For the purposes of the AHAR, a family is defined as two or more persons who present together for services and at least one person is an adult *and* one person is a child. All other household configurations—such as two married adults or a juvenile parent and her children—are reported in the IND reporting categories.

Communities may not be able to report data across all four reporting categories if: (a) the community does not have a particular provider type, e.g., there are no emergency shelters for families in the community; or (b) the data quality

for a particular reporting category does not meet several key thresholds (discussed in more detail below). Regardless, all data must be generated from a community’s HMIS.

Key HMIS Reporting Capabilities

A community’s HMIS must have certain capabilities in order to submit data for the AHAR. The HMIS must be able to:

- (1) ***Produce accurate, de-duplicated counts of sheltered homeless persons on any given day, on an average day, and during a one-year period.*** The accuracy of these counts depends on the ability of service providers to capture entry and exit dates for all clients served, as well as sufficient personally identifying information to properly de-duplicate all client records.
- (2) ***Identify client overlap across reporting categories.*** An HMIS must be able to account for persons who are served in multiple reporting categories and produce counts of persons using any combination of reporting categories. For instance, the HMIS must be able to tabulate how many people were served in ES-IND only; ES-IND and ES-FAM; ES-IND and TH-IND; ES-IND, ES-FAM, and TH-IND; and so on. This information is used to adjust for persons who use multiple programs and to generate a de-duplicate count of homeless persons.

- (3) **Count persons by household type.** The AHAR counts different types of households: individual adults; adults in families with children; children in families with adults; households with only adults; households with only children (i.e. households with multiple children and no adults); and unaccompanied youth.
- (4) **Generate counts of persons with certain demographic characteristics and previous housing situations.** The AHAR tabulates persons by ethnicity, race, gender, age categories, veteran status, disability status, household type, household size, and previous living situations. The demographic characteristics of persons served during the AHAR reporting period are based on the first program entry date within each reporting category. For example, if a person accesses multiple ES-IND providers during the AHAR reporting period, his demographic characteristics reported to the AHAR should be based on his first program entry into an ES-IND provider.

Similarly, if a person enters a TH-IND provider on February 1 and then joins his family in a TH-FAM provider on June 1, the demographic characteristics reported in the TH-IND category should be based on his status on February 1 and the characteristics reported in the TH-FAM category should be based on his status on June 1.

- (5) **Generate total lengths of stay for each person by reporting category and cross tabulate the data by gender and age.** The total length of stay by reporting category is equal to the cumulative sum of nights spent in any provider within that category. For instance, if a client stays for 14 nights in an ES-IND provider, 20 nights in a different ES-IND provider, and then 30 nights in the original ES-IND provider, then the total length of stay is 64 nights (or $14 + 20 + 30 = 64$).
- (6) **Count the total number of households with children by reporting category.** Counting households can be challenging because household compositions are fluid and communities have many different ways to identify a family household. For the purposes of the AHAR, a family household must always include at least one adult and one child. The methodology for counting households is currently based on the household composition associated with each person's first program entry. (Note: the current approach may change in future AHARs). Future guidance will be provided on how to count family households accurately for AHAR reporting. Your AHAR liaison can assist you with any immediate questions.



Tip: Many HMIS software providers have pre-programmed (or "canned") AHAR reports that generate the required data automatically. Contact your vendor representative about the availability of a canned AHAR report.

Communities that wish to view the AHAR reporting requirements can visit the “AHAR Exchange Sandbox” at sandbox.hmis.info. After creating a username and password, community representatives can use the AHAR Exchange Sandbox to view the AHAR reporting requirements, enter data into the Sandbox, view any data validation problems that are automated in the Sandbox, and generate local reports. The Sandbox is a place for communities to “play” with their data and gauge the quality of their AHAR submission; it is not the place to submit a community’s official AHAR data.

2.3. Criteria for Participating in the AHAR

There are four criteria for participating in the AHAR:

- (1). ***A community’s AHAR data must be generated from an HMIS.*** HUD requires that all AHAR data submissions be generated from an HMIS. Data generated from hard copy records or electronic systems that do not fully constitute an HMIS will not be accepted into the AHAR.
- (2). ***Communities must have at least 50 percent of beds community-wide represented in their HMIS, excluding domestic violence provider beds.*** A community’s HMIS bed coverage rate is equal to the total number of beds in HMIS divided by the total number of beds in the community. The bed coverage rate should account for all beds in the community, including both HUD and non-HUD funded beds. For the purposes of reporting to the AHAR, bed coverage rates are calculated separately by reporting category and any reporting category below 50 percent is excluded from the AHAR. As the example below demonstrates, two reporting categories (i.e., ES-IND and TH-FAM) are below 50 percent and thus ineligible for the AHAR. The other reporting categories would still be used in the AHAR.

Determining AHAR Eligibility Based on HMIS coverage rates				
Program Type	Beds in HMIS	Total Inventory	Bed Coverage Rate	Sufficient Bed Coverage for AHAR Participation?
ES-IND	5	15	33%	NO
ES-FAM	15	20	75%	YES
TH-IND	20	30	67%	YES
TH-FAM	0	30	0%	NO

The AHAR Exchange has built-in extrapolation factors to account for service providers that do not participate in HMIS. The extrapolation factors are based on a community's bed inventory and are designed to provide an accurate count of sheltered homeless persons community-wide even though some providers do not participate in HMIS.



Tip: Communities should review their housing inventory with an AHAR Liaison before entering data into the AHAR Exchange.

- (3). ***Communities must have reasonable bed utilization (or occupancy) rates, typically above 65 percent and below 105 percent.*** A bed utilization rate is equal to the total number of persons served on any given day divided by the total number of beds available on that day. In the AHAR, bed utilization rates are calculated separately by reporting category (ES-IND, ES-FAM, TH-IND, and TH-FAM). Reporting categories with unreasonably low or high rates that cannot be explained by the community are excluded from the AHAR.

Utilization rates are a critical indicator of data quality. Low bed utilization rates (e.g., below 65 percent) may suggest that service providers did not enter all clients into the HMIS. Missing entry dates results in under counts of homeless persons. High bed utilization rates (e.g., above 105 percent) may suggest that providers did not exit clients from HMIS. Missing exit dates results in over counts of homeless persons.

However, there are valid explanations for low or high utilization rates. Family programs may have low *bed* utilization rates but high *unit* utilization rates if all the units are full but family sizes are smaller than the program's bed inventory. High utilization rates may occur during the winter months when providers offer cots or mats to shelter as many persons as possible. Reporting categories with low or high bed utilization rates that are adequately explained by the community can be included in the AHAR.

- (4). ***Communities must have reasonably low missing values.*** Data completeness is an important measure of data quality, and communities that submit reporting categories that are mostly blank or missing will not be accepted into the AHAR.

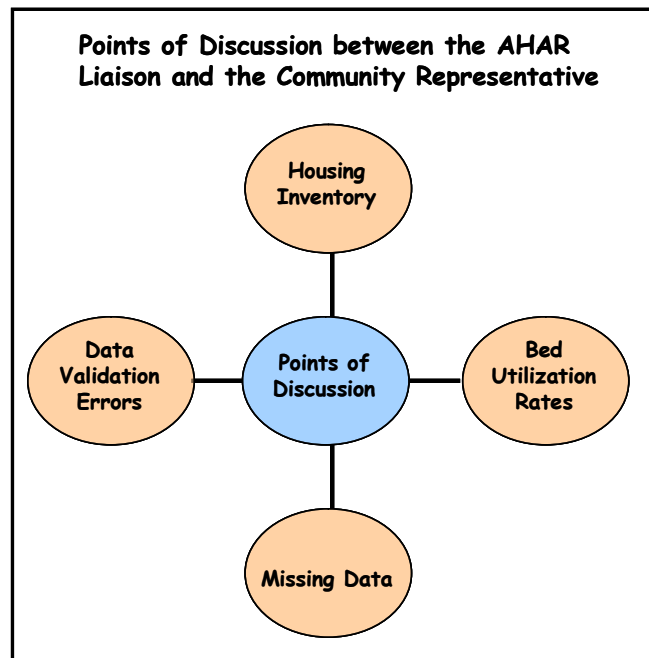
2.4. Data Submission Process

This section provides a general overview of the data submission process, from the initial submission of data to the final determination of whether the data can be used in the report. The details of how to navigate and submit data via the AHAR Exchange are described in Chapter 3.

There are six basic steps in the data submission process:

- (1). **Initial data entry.** Enter draft data into the AHAR Exchange for review by the AHAR team. Data entry can be completed manually or can be automatically uploaded using the AHAR XML schema. Data entry should be completed for each reporting category with at least 50 percent bed coverage. At this point, draft data are saved in the AHAR Exchange for review by the community; the data have not been submitted to the AHAR team for review
- (2). **Community review.** Communities should review their data for accuracy and completeness prior to submitting it to the AHAR team. Community representatives who generate the AHAR data are advised to share the data with other members in the community, including the HMIS administrator, the CoC lead, and local providers as appropriate.
- (3). **Draft data submission.** Draft data (by reporting category) that have been entered in the AHAR Exchange and reviewed by the community should be submitted to the AHAR team for review.
- (4). **AHAR liaison review.** Once the data are submitted to the AHAR Exchange, the AHAR liaison assigned to the community is automatically informed via email that data have been submitted for review. The AHAR liaison will review the data submission and contact the community representative to resolve any data issues. The most common issues addressed during these reviews include: (a) the accuracy of a community's housing inventory; (b) the reasonableness of a community's bed utilization rates; (c) large amounts of missing data; and (d) correcting data validation errors detected in the AHAR Exchange—described in more detail in Chapter 3.

The AHAR liaison may ask the community to recheck their data, and it is common for a community to submit multiple drafts of their data. If changes are necessary, the community will investigate potential sources of the discrepancies. This may include talking with providers, working with the HMIS system, or requesting vendor support. (Some of the most common data quality issues are presented at the end of this chapter.)



- (5). ***Final submission and confirmation of data.*** After the community and the AHAR liaison agree that the data are final, the community representative should review the data with other members in the community, such as CoC representatives or service providers, to confirm the accuracy of the final data. Communities are asked to explicitly confirm the final data in the AHAR Exchange and have the option to pull the data from the AHAR. Put differently, the AHAR will not include data that have not been confirmed by the community.



Tip: Discussing the AHAR data with a wide range of stakeholders helps ensure that the final submission represents a community's homeless population accurately.

- (6). ***Final review and determination of usability.*** The AHAR liaison will conduct a final review of the data and, based on both the quality of the data and the criteria for participation, will make a final determination about the usability of the data. The usability of each reporting category is assessed independently. Once the usability of the data is determined, the AHAR liaison will then send an e-mail to the community confirming the final usability status of each reporting category.

2.5. Common Data Quality Issues

The most common data quality issues identified during the AHAR process are: missing entry dates, missing exit dates, missing data, and low provider coverage in the HMIS (see exhibit on next page). These issues are particularly problematic because they either result in an inaccurate count of homeless persons or provide an incomplete portrait of homelessness.

AHAR liaisons work with each community throughout the data submission process to identify and rectify these issues as needed. In many cases, there are reasonable explanations for the data quality issues and, where this is the case, communities should document the issue in an explanatory note. The explanatory notes are a feature of the AHAR Exchange and are attached to the data submission.

Common Data Quality Issues Identified During the AHAR Process

Data Quality Issue	Symptom	Why is this problematic?
Missing entry dates	Low bed utilization rates ^a	Results in an under count of people served. Clients are not entered into the HMIS upon entering the program. System incorrectly appears to be under utilized.
Missing exit dates	High bed utilization rates ^a	Results in an over count of people served. Clients appear in the system, but are not currently receiving services. System incorrectly appears to be over capacity.
Missing data	High missing rates	Missing data creates an incomplete picture of homelessness. Communities may need to work with their providers to ensure all the universal data elements are captured.
Low provider coverage	Bed coverage rates of less than 50%	Any data extrapolated from this limited information is not considered reliable enough to use in the AHAR.

^a Bed utilization rates of under 65 percent or over 105 percent require explanation. Bed utilization rates within the 65 to 105 percent bounds do not mean they are accurate. The research team relies on communities' knowledge to determine whether the reported bed utilization rates are correct.

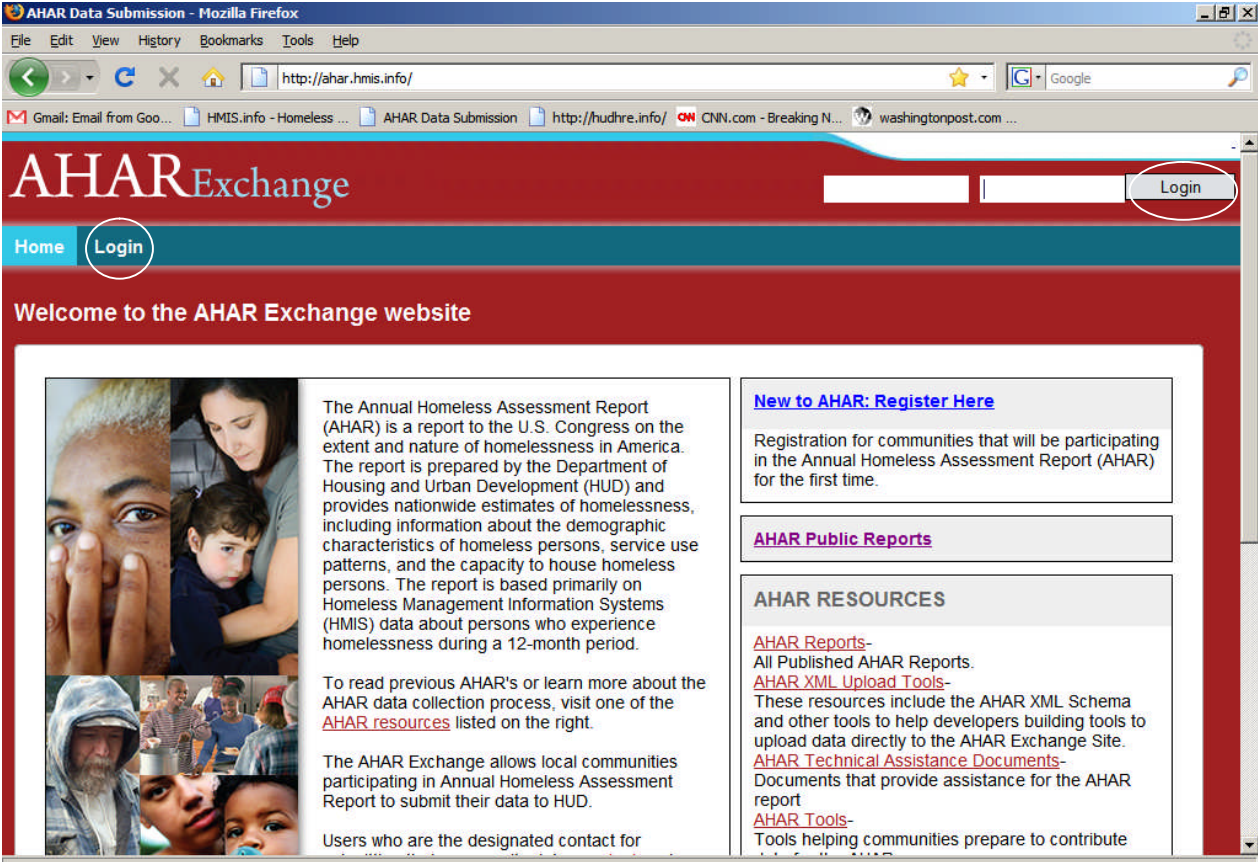
3. Submitting Data via the AHAR Exchange

This chapter provides an overview of the AHAR Exchange. The AHAR Exchange is a dynamic, web-based data collection tool that was designed specifically for the AHAR. All data submission to the AHAR occurs through the AHAR Exchange.

3.1. What is the AHAR Exchange?

The AHAR Exchange is the web-based data collection tool used to compile AHAR data. It can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week at ahar.hmis.info. The tool also allows communities to generate local reports based on AHAR data for any community that participates in the AHAR. The local reports display a community’s data compared to the national data for comparative purposes, which may highlight important differences between a community’s homeless population and the national profile of homelessness.

Screenshot of AHAR Exchange Homepage



To use AHAR Exchange, users must log in to the website. To log in, enter your username and password in the upper right-hand corner of the webpage or choose the “Login” button. If you have an account with hmis.info, your AHAR Exchange login

username and password are the same. If not, you can open an account with the link provided below the login box, the “New to AHAR: Register Here” link.

A primary contact is designated for each community. The primary user can add other users to the AHAR Exchange and assign read/write privileges to the additional users. The primary user is the only person who can submit the data to the AHAR team for review and confirm the data as accurate and final. Also, a primary user may be responsible for more than one participating AHAR community. In these cases, the primary user can toggle between sites by using the “Change Site” link in the top-middle of the page.

Levels of Access in the AHAR Exchange

- (1). **Primary Contact:** Primary contact can view, edit, or add data and is the only person who can add other users for a particular community. The primary contact also serves as the point-of-contact for the AHAR liaison.
- (2). **Write:** Users can view, edit, or add data for submission.
- (3). **Read:** Users can review the data but cannot edit data in the AHAR Exchange.

3.2. Navigating AHAR Exchange

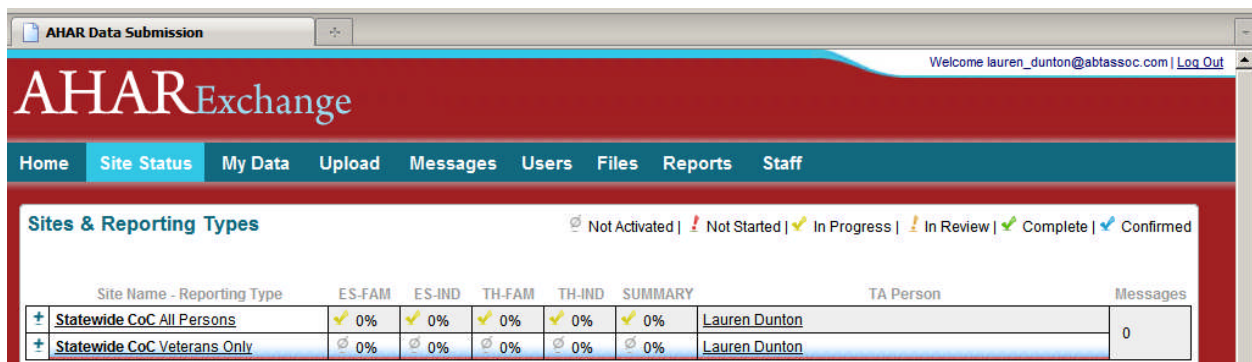
This section explains how users can navigate the AHAR Exchange website and submit data. Each heading corresponds with a page of the AHAR Exchange website.

Home

This page has two main purposes. First, it briefly describes the AHAR and the purpose of AHAR Exchange. Second, the “Home” page contains links to many additional resources that explain the AHAR process and describe how to use AHAR Exchange effectively.

Site Status

On the “Site Status” tab, users can view summaries of their AHAR data. The current status of each reporting category is displayed here, as well as the name of the AHAR liaison. (A community’s reporting status is discussed later in this chapter.) The screenshot below displays a sample Site Status page



My Data

The “My Data” page is the central page of the AHAR Exchange. It is where users will spend the majority of their time. This page is where the community representative will enter and review data on utilization of emergency shelter (ES) and transitional housing (TH) for individual and families.

Upload

The “Upload” portion of AHAR Exchange is designed to make reporting easier for communities. This page allows users to upload draft data directly from some HMIS-supported vendors that have developed XML upload capabilities. Not all HMIS vendors have developed this capability yet, so users should consult with their HMIS vendor about the availability of this feature.

If your system allows uploading XML-formatted data, it can be done in a few quick steps:

- (1). Click on the “Browse” button and then select the XML file you have saved on your computer.
- (2). Hit the “Validate” button.
- (3). Select the reporting categories you would like to upload and hit “Upload Existing Categories.” The data are then uploaded into AHAR Exchange.
- (4). Please review your uploaded data in the “My Data” section of AHAR Exchange before submitting it for review by your AHAR liaison.

Remember that the XML upload feature will overwrite any existing data your community already submitted to the AHAR Exchange. If you receive an error message that your XML file cannot be uploaded, you should proceed to the Messages portion of the website to notify your AHAR liaison. Also, the upload feature streamlines the data entry process, but communities should review the data prior to submitting the data to the AHAR team for review.

Messages

The “Messages” portion of AHAR Exchange allows you to ask questions or send messages directly to your AHAR liaison. This internal messaging system also offers a way to troubleshoot the website, as well as request technical assistance related to AHAR participation.

Users

In the “Users” section, the primary user can change access rights for other users in the community. Primary contacts may give other users (e.g., a CoC representative) write or read privileges or can make another user the primary contact. While communities’ data submissions may be improved by allowing a broader range of stakeholders to view and comment on the data, each continuum should limit the number of users that can edit their data to ensure that the data remain secure and accurate.

Files

The “Files” tab allows users to upload important files related to the AHAR as well as to access files that are uploaded by the AHAR research team. The Files section already includes the continuum’s Housing Inventory as reported in the CoC application.

Reports

The “Reports” section of the AHAR Exchange allows users to print their AHAR data by reporting category and to create various reports about homelessness in their communities. These reports are useful to confirm a community’s AHAR data and also for local purposes, such as program planning or to solicit other sources of funding. A list of available reports is described below.

Reports Available in the AHAR Exchange	
Name of AHAR Exchange Report	Description
Local Report	This report provides a comprehensive look at the data submitted by a community. It features tables, graphs, and charts that present the data reported for the year, as well as comparisons to previous year’s data (if available). The report includes a cover, introduction, and table of contents, making it ideal for distribution to local stakeholders.
Data Summary Report	Designed to help communities review their AHAR data, this report provides unduplicated counts of homeless persons, bed and family unit utilization rates, and length of stay data for each of the four reporting categories.
Extrapolated Counts	For jurisdictions that do not have 100 percent bed coverage, this report provides homeless counts that include estimates for those providers that do not participate in HMIS. Communities should also review this report as part of the data confirmation process.
Demographics Report	For jurisdictions that do not have 100 percent bed coverage, this report provides homeless counts that include estimates for those providers that do not participate in HMIS.
Prior Living Situation	This report categorizes the prior living situations of the homeless people counted in the AHAR data for the community.
Length of Stay Report	This report focuses on clients’ length of stay during the AHAR reporting period.
Long Term Stay Report	This report presents demographic data on individuals who used emergency shelter for more than 180 days during the AHAR reporting period and compares these numbers to the total number of homeless people that used homeless shelters in the community during the AHAR reporting period.

3.3. Using the AHAR Exchange

The AHAR data collection process is not a one-time data submission by a community. Rather, it is an ongoing collaborative partnership between the AHAR liaisons and community representatives. The goal is to compile the most complete and accurate data possible, which will improve the precision of the AHAR and provide reliable data for communities to use for local purposes. This section details how to enter data and the process for confirming and finalizing data.







The “My Data” section of AHAR Exchange is the cornerstone of the AHAR data submission process. This is where you can separately enter and view data for all four reporting categories (ES-FAM, ES-IND, TH-FAM, and TH-IND), as well as enter and view data in the summary reporting category. Under each reporting category, several data fields indicate the status of your data: not started, in progress, in review, completed, and confirmed. The data submission process is mostly linear through these status fields—that is, each reporting category begins at “not started” and progresses through the “confirmed” status—although there is typically some back-and-forth between the “in progress” and “in review” status fields.

Shell - Reporting Type	% Complete	Validation	Reporting Status	Status	Used in Final AHAR
ES-FAM Emergency Shelters for Families	0%	23 Errors Validation Report	Reporting New Message	In Progress	TBD
ES-IND Emergency Shelters for Individuals	0%	0 Errors	Not Selected New Message	Not Started	TBD
TH-FAM Transitional Housing for Families	0%	0 Errors	Not Selected New Message	Not Started	TBD
TH-IND Transitional Housing for Individuals	0%	0 Errors	Not Selected New Message	Not Started	TBD
Summary Summary of the four reporting categories	0%	0 Errors	Not Selected New Message	Not Started	TBD

Not Started

To begin entering data, navigate to the “My Data” section of the AHAR Exchange website. Select the reporting category you would like to enter data for and click on “Enter Data.” This will open the data entry screen. To start data entry, select the

Data Status Fields in the AHAR Exchange

Symbol	Status Field
 (gray)	Not Activated
 (red)	Not Started
 (yellow)	In Progress
 (orange)	In Review
 (green)	Complete
 (blue)	Confirmed

question you would like to work on from the dropdown menu on the toolbar by clicking on the desired question. AHAR Exchange will then allow you to enter information for the selected question in the white boxes located next to each question in the main screen.

After you start entering data into a reporting category, the status will automatically change to “In Progress.” When you are finished entering data, make sure to hit the gray “Save and Next” button in the upper right corner of the screen. To switch back to an earlier question, hit the gray “Save and Previous” button in the upper right corner.

In Progress

The “in progress” status field indicates that the user is working on the data submission. Throughout the data submission process, you may see yellow “Warning” boxes on the screen after you provide data in each question. These warning boxes are part of the built-in validation tool and indicate that there appears to be an error in the inputted data. You can continue to enter data without addressing these error messages, but they will remain flagged for the final validation report. If you believe that the data are indeed correct, please use the “Notes” link in the upper right corner of each screen to provide the AHAR liaison with the reason why you believe the data are correct. The “Notes” field can also be used to explain unusual situations or clarify how the data element was calculated. For example, if there is a reason for unusually low or high bed utilization, a note can be entered so the AHAR liaison understands there is an explanation for the unusual rate.

In addition to the yellow “Warning” boxes, Questions 1 and 2 in each reporting category may generate “Usability Warnings.” These “Usability Warnings” inform the user that their data may not be able to be used in the AHAR because the bed coverage rate is below 50 percent (Question 1) or high or low bed utilization rates (Question 2).

Once all of the data are entered into the last question, you should generate the data validation report by clicking on the “Validation Report” button at the top right-hand side of the screen. The built-in validation system identifies potential errors in the AHAR data you have just entered. To address any validation issue in the report,

double-click on the AHAR question identified in the validation report and the AHAR Exchange will return you to that question automatically.

It is important to remember that the validation report identifies many, but not all, types of data errors. The system detects differences in the number of persons reported across different categories and makes sure all numbers add up to the proper totals. The report also checks for unreasonable bed coverage or bed utilization rates. However, the validation report cannot suggest whether the data accurately represent homeless persons in your community. For example, the report cannot detect unusual patterns in your data (e.g., an unexpected number of unaccompanied youth or unusually longer lengths of stay in emergency shelters). Therefore, it is important that you review all the data and make sure it is reasonable before submitting it to your AHAR liaison.



Tip: Footnotes clarifying AHAR questions or terms are located below the data entry questions in the "Help" box.

In Review

Once you have reviewed the data validation report and corrected any data errors, you can submit your data to the AHAR liaison for review by clicking the gray “Submit Data” button. The status of each submitted reporting category will change to “In Review,” and the AHAR liaison will be notified automatically to review your data. The AHAR liaison will respond with feedback on your data as soon as possible, usually within two business days. You will not be able to edit your data while it is under review.

Complete

After reviewing your AHAR data, your AHAR liaison will contact you to discuss the data that you submitted. If your liaison determines that the data need additional work, then the status will be changed back to “In Progress” and you will be able to make any necessary changes. After you correct the data, you should submit the data back to the AHAR liaison for review by clicking the gray “Submit Data” button. The AHAR liaison will mark the reporting category as “Complete” when the data have been deemed final. At that point, your liaison will generate an email through the AHAR Exchange that asks you to discuss your data submission with other stakeholders in your community. A Data Summary Report generated by the AHAR Exchange will be attached to the email to facilitate your discussions with stakeholders.

Confirmed

Once data for all submitted reporting categories are complete and you have reviewed the data with the appropriate stakeholders, select the “Confirm Data” button to indicate that the data are considered final and confirmed. If you need to make changes to your data, simply change the status of the reporting category back to “In Progress.” Once the changes are made, you can resubmit the data for review and the data submission process proceeds as described above.

The AHAR liaison, in conjunction with other members of the AHAR team, will make the final determination regarding the usability of data for the AHAR. In general, data are deemed usable if they meet the AHAR criteria for participation and the data have been confirmed by the community. Your liaison will generate an email through the AHAR Exchange that indicates which reporting categories will be utilized in the AHAR.

4. AHAR Resources

The AHAR team has developed numerous resources with information on participating in the AHAR. Places to look for this information include:

- [AHAR Exchange](http://ahar.hmis.info) (ahar.hmis.info) provides links to XML Upload tools, AHAR technical assistance documents, AHAR tools, and regular AHAR updates from the AHAR data collection team.
- Hmis.info provides information on HMIS implementation and allows users to network with other HMIS staff to share ideas and information.
- Hudhre.info contains detailed information on all HUD homeless programs, as well as funding allocations for each program and CoC.

There are several technical assistance documents that communities may find helpful in beginning the AHAR process. A description of each document and a link to each is provided below.

- [Bed Utilization Tool](#): The bed utilization tool helps communities track monthly shelter usage by provider. Monitoring these data can help avoid missing or inaccurate entry and exit dates.
- [HMIS Self Assessment Process](#): This Community HMIS Self-Assessment Process can help CoCs identify problems they may be experiencing with HMIS and find TA resources to address the challenges.
- [Garbage In, Garbage Out: Strategies to Ensure Data Quality](#): Entering bad data generates bad reports and misrepresents the homeless population in your community. This presentation provides tips and tricks to collecting, entering, and reporting valid, reliable data. It includes real world examples of effective data quality monitoring strategies, and incentives to encourage users to enter quality data.
- [List of HMIS and AHAR Acronyms and Definitions](#): Sometimes the jargon of the AHAR can be daunting. Download this list to refer to while you familiarize yourself with key HMIS and AHAR concepts.
- [AHAR Data Quality: Tips and Strategies](#): This presentation defines data quality, reviews why it is important, and explains how best to monitor data quality.
- [AHAR Memo on Improving Missing Data Rates](#): This AHAR update provides specific strategies for reducing missing rates for disability status, veteran status, and prior living situation. It also includes system-level approaches to

address data completion including technical fixes, workflow solutions, and incentives for case managers and data entry staff.

In addition to the above resources, you can always contact the AHAR Data Collection Team to get more information on AHAR participation or technical assistance for your community.

To Request AHAR TA

There are four easy ways to request AHAR TA assistance:

1. Email: AHAR@abtassoc.com
2. Call the AHAR Hotline: 1-877-789-2427
3. Submit a question via [Ask the Expert](#) on hmis.info.
4. Submit a question to your AHAR Liaison on the AHAR Exchange.

Appendix A: List of Sample Sites in the AHAR

CoC Code	Continuum of Care Name	AHAR Jurisdiction Name
AK-501	Alaska Balance of State	Hoonah-Angoon
AL-502	Northwest	Lawrence County
AZ-500	Rural Arizona CoC	Flagstaff
AZ-502	Maricopa CoC	Phoenix
CA-501	City and County of San Francisco	San Francisco
CA-506	Monterrey County	Seaside
CA-507	Marin County CoC	Marin County
CA-510	Modesto/Stanslaus County Collaborative	Modesto
CA-514	Fresno Madera CoC	Fresno
CA-600	County of Los Angeles	Los Angeles
CA-600	County of Los Angeles	Los Angeles County
CA-600	County of Los Angeles	Pico Rivera
CA-601	City of San Diego	San Diego
CA-602	Orange County CoC	Mission Viejo
CA-607	Pasadena CoC	Pasadena
CA-608	County of Riverside CoC	Moreno Valley
CO-500	State of Colorado CoC	Crowley County
CO-500	Colorado Balance of State	Saguache County
CO-503	Metro Denver Homeless Initiative	Adams County
CT-502	Hartford CoC	Hartford
CT-503	Bridgeport CoC	Stratford
DC-500	District of Columbia Homeless Services	Washington DC
DE-500	Wilmington CoC	Wilmington
DE-500	Delaware Statewide	Sussex County
FL-500	Sarasota/Bradenton/ Manatee Counties	Sarasota
FL-503	Polk/Hardee/Highland CoC	Polk County
FL-504	Volusia County CoC	Deltona
FL-514	Ocala/Marion County	Marion County
GA-500	Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative	Atlanta
GA-501	Georgia BofS CoC	Macon County
GA-501	Georgia BofS CoC	Oconee County
GA-501	Georgia Balance of State	Putnam County
GA-501	Georgia	Seminole County
GA-504	Augusta-Richmond County	Augusta-Richmond
CO-500	Colorado Balance of State	Saguache County
CO-503	Metro Denver Homeless Initiative	Adams County
CT-502	Hartford CoC	Hartford
CT-503	Bridgeport CoC	Stratford
DC-500	District of Columbia Homeless Services	Washington DC
DE-500	Wilmington CoC	Wilmington
DE-500	Delaware Statewide	Sussex County
FL-500	Sarasota/Bradenton/ Manatee Counties	Sarasota
FL-503	Polk/Hardee/Highland CoC	Polk County
FL-504	Volusia County CoC	Deltona
FL-514	Ocala/Marion County	Marion County
GA-500	Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative	Atlanta

CoC Code	Continuum of Care Name	AHAR Jurisdiction Name
GA-501	Georgia BofS CoC	Macon County
GA-501	Georgia BofS CoC	Oconee County
GA-501	Georgia Balance of State	Putnam County
GA-501	Georgia	Seminole County
GA-504	Augusta-Richmond County	Augusta-Richmond
IA-501	Iowa Balance of State	Monona County
ID-501	Idaho Balance of State	Oneida County
IL-510	Chicago CoC	Chicago
IL-511	Cook County CoC	Cook County
IL-513	Springfield	Sangamon County
KS-507	Kansas Balance of State	Barton County
KY-500	Hardin County Commonwealth of Kentucky	Hardin County
LA-502	Northwest Louisiana	Bossier City
LA-506	Northlake Homeless Coalition	Slidell
LA-506	Slidell/Livingston/Saint Helena	St. Tammany Parish
MA-500	Boston	Boston
MA-512	Lawrence/Burlington CoC	Lawrence
MA-519	Greater Attleboro/Taunton CoC	Attleboro
MD-601	Montgomery County CoC	Montgomery County
ME-500	Maine Balance of State	York County
MI-500	Michigan Balance of State	Delta County
IA-501	Iowa Balance of State	Monona County
ID-501	Idaho Balance of State	Oneida County
IL-510	Chicago CoC	Chicago
IL-511	Cook County CoC	Cook County
IL-513	Springfield	Sangamon County
KS-507	Kansas Balance of State	Barton County
KY-500	Hardin County Commonwealth of Kentucky	Hardin County
LA-502	Northwest Louisiana	Bossier City
LA-506	Northlake Homeless Coalition	Slidell
LA-506	Slidell/Livingston/Saint Helena	St. Tammany Parish
MA-500	Boston	Boston
MA-512	Lawrence/Burlington CoC	Lawrence
MA-519	Greater Attleboro/Taunton CoC	Attleboro
MD-601	Montgomery County CoC	Montgomery County
ME-500	Maine Balance of State	York County
MI-500	Michigan Balance of State	Delta County
MA-512	Lawrence/Burlington CoC	Lawrence
MI-500	Michigan Balance of State	Berrien County
MI-501	City of Detroit CoC	Detroit
MI-503	Macomb County CoC	Macomb County
MI-504	Farmington Hills	Farmington Hills
MI-508	Lansing/East Lansing/Ingham County CoC	Lansing
MI-509	Washtenaw County CoC	Washtenaw County
MN-500	Minneapolis/Hennepin County CoC	Hennepin County
MN-501	St. Paul/Ramsey County CoC	St. Paul
MN-502	Southeast and South Central Regional Network	Rochester
MN-506	Northwest Minnesota CoC	Norman County
MN-508	West Central Minnesota CoC	Moorhead

CoC Code	Continuum of Care Name	AHAR Jurisdiction Name
MN-512	Washington County CoC	Washington County
MS-501	Mississippi Balance of State CoC	Hattiesburg
MS-501	Mississippi Balance of State CoC	Humphreys County
MS-501	Mississippi Balance of State	Sunflower County
MT-500	State of Montana CoC	Billings
MT-500	State of Montana CoC	Great Falls
NE-501	City of Omaha	Council Bluffs
NE-501	Omaha/Council Bluffs	Douglas County
NJ-501	Bergen County	Bergen County
NJ-503	Camden City/Camden County	Camden
NJ-510	Ocean County CoC	Brick Township
NV-500	Southern Nevada CoC	Clark County
NY-501	Chemung County CoC	Elmira
NY-505	Syracuse County CoC	Onondaga County
NY-509	Troy/ Rensselaer County	Rensselaer County
NY-509	Allegany County	Allegany County
NY-600	New York City Coalition/CoC	New York City
NY-603	Nassau/Suffolk Coalition for the Homeless	Islip Town
OH-502	Cleveland/Cuyahoga County/Cleveland CoC	Cleveland
OH-507	Lancaster/Ohio Balance of State	Lancaster
OH-507	Springfield/Ohio Balance of State	Springfield
OH-507	Putnam/Ohio Balance of State	Putnam County
OK-500	North Central Oklahoma	Pawnee County
OK-503	Midwest City/State of Oklahoma	Midwest City
PA-500	Philadelphia/City of Philadelphia	Philadelphia
PA-507	Central-Harrisburg Region of Pennsylvania	Lycoming County
PA-507	Central Harrisburg Region of Pennsylvania	Snyder County
PA-601	Southwest Region PA	Westmoreland County
SD-500	South Dakota	Hamlin County
TX-600	Dallas/Dallas Homeless CoC	Dallas
TX-602	Houston/Harris County	Houston
TX-603	El Paso/El Paso CoC	El Paso
VA-500	Chesterfield County VA	Chesterfield County
VA-507	Portsmouth/Portsmouth CoC	Portsmouth
VT-501	Chittenden County	Chittenden County
WA-500	Seattle-King County CoC	Seattle
WA-501	State of Washington CoC	Skagit County
WA-501	Washington Balance of State	Franklin County
WA-501	State of Washington CoC	Adams County
WA-507	Yakima City and County	Yakima
WI-500	Forest County/State of Wisconsin CoC	Forest County