

# **ShelterLink**

## **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**

### **Overview**

The Planning Council, Norfolk, Virginia administers the City of Norfolk's Homeless Management Information System, ShelterLink. The Project uses Internet-based technology to assist homeless service organizations to capture information about the clients that they serve. Bowman Internet Systems is the HMIS vendor. Bowman hosts Norfolk's database and provides the interface to users (ServicePoint). The Planning Council provides local management of the system.

An important goal of the HMIS project is to inform both local and statewide public policy about the extent and nature of homelessness. This is accomplished through analysis and release of data that are grounded in the actual experiences of homeless persons and the service providers who assist them in shelters and other homeless assistance. Information that is gathered via interviews, conducted by service providers with consumers, is analyzed for an unduplicated count, aggregated (void of any identifying client level information) and made available to policy makers, service providers, advocates, and consumers. The Project also provides a number of benefits.

#### **Potential benefits for homeless men, women, and children and case managers**

Case Managers can use the software, as they assess their clients' needs, to inform clients about services offered on site or available through referral. Case managers and clients can use on-line resource information to learn about resources that help clients find and keep permanent housing or meet other goals. With client consent, the system can also be used to support coordinated case management designed to streamline the service delivery system and generate improved outcomes for consumers.

#### **Potential benefits for agency and program managers**

When aggregated, information can be used to obtain a more complete understanding of clients' needs and outcomes, and then used to advocate for additional resources, complete grant applications, conduct evaluations of program services, and report to funders such as HUD. The software has the capability to generate the revised HUD Annual Progress Report (APR). Most importantly, routine use of the HMIS summary data can help programs identify processes that are problematic, support redesign efforts, and improve the quality of the services provided by the organization.

#### **Potential benefits for community-wide Continuums of Care and policy makers**

Involvement in the project provides the capability at the continua level to generate aggregate reports that can assist in completion of the HUD-required gaps chart and a multitude of other local needs assessments, to support community education regarding the number and characteristics of homeless populations as well as a variety of other issues related to poverty, and to inform policy decisions aimed at addressing and ending homelessness at local, state and federal levels.