Alaska Homeless Management Information System (AKHMIS) Strategic Plan

Contents

Introduction and Background

A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families at-risk of and experiencing homelessness. Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with the Department of Housing & Urban Development's (HUD) data collection, management, and reporting standards.[1]

In the State of Alaska, there are two HUD-defined Continuums of Care (CoCs) – the Alaska Balance of State CoC and the Anchorage CoC. The Alaska Balance of State CoC is overseen by the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (AKCH2) and the Anchorage CoC is overseen by the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH).

Together, AKCH2 and ACEH have designated WellSky's Community Services (formerly ServicePoint) as their HMIS. Therefore, the HMIS implementation used by organizations across the State of Alaska is called the Alaska Homeless Management Information System (AKHMIS).

The CoC Interim Rule lays out the following responsibilities of the CoCs as it relates to HMIS:
- Designate a single HMIS for the geographic area;
- Designate an eligible applicant to manage the CoC's HMIS, which will be known as the HMIS Lead;
- Review, revise, and approve a privacy plan, security plan, and data quality plan for HMIS;
- Ensure consistent participation of recipients and subrecipients in the HMIS; and
- Ensure the HMIS is administered in compliance with requirements prescribed by HUD.

Since June 2015, the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) has been responsible for the administration and management of AKHMIS. ICA is often referred to as the AKHMIS Lead and works with the statewide AKHMIS Advisory Board and the two CoCs to determine the direction and implementation of community priorities and data needs, while ensuring compliance with requirements prescribed by HUD and the federal partners.

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HUD, SNAPS, and HMIS

HUD and the federal partners are committed to assisting communities to end homelessness for individuals and families. Collecting complete and accurate data about those experiencing homelessness in communities is integral to achieving this goal. To end homelessness, communities must be able to analyze data at both the system and project levels, and to evaluate their efforts by subpopulations, across project types, and in other ways. Communities work to continue increasing their bed and system coverage in HMIS, improve data quality, and use data to gain a more holistic picture of the progress towards ending homelessness.[2]

In September 2018, the HUD Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) provided their Data TA Strategy to Improve Data and Performance. This document clearly lays out where HUD anticipates communities will be related to HMIS currently and within 3-5 years, as well as where they anticipated advanced communities will be in 3-5 years.

Over the last several years, HUD has emphasized the importance of HMIS more and more in their use of System Performance Measures (SPMs) and the Longitudinal System Analysis (LSA) when reviewing system-wide performance, as well as the Annual Performance Report (APR) and other federal partner reports at the project level.

Additionally, with the implementation of Coordinated Entry (CE) in communities across the country, data within HMIS is more directly affecting how clients are prioritized for the limited resources available to serve those experiencing homelessness in communities.

AKHMIS Strategic Plan

AKHMIS has seen substantial growth in recent years. As of the end of January 2020, the AKHMIS implementation has 203 end users and 274 projects, including the Coordinated Entry processes, which are much more than a typical "project" and really represent the homeless services system as a whole. At the request of the two CoCs, ICF, a national HUD Technical Assistance firm, conducted an assessment on AKHMIS, which was provided to the two CoCs in April 2019. The assessment recommended that the two CoCs and ICA create a multi-year strategic plan to determine community needs and goals for AKHMIS.

Over the last several months, the AKHMIS Advisory Board has reviewed the recommendations as laid out in the AKHMIS Assessment completed by ICF, as well as the timeline created to update or create processes related to various focus areas. Workgroups were created as ad hoc sub-committees of the AKHMIS Advisory Board to carry out this work.

Presented below is a table representing the focus areas, the priorities for updating or creating processes related to the focus areas, the target date for completing the updates, and the timeline for implementation, which is the strategy component of all this work. The implementation timeline

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spans over the next three fiscal years (starting July 1, 2020). Prioritizing the implementation of one process over another is based on the following factors:

- How the process may benefit the clients served
- Degree of difficulty in implementation
- How much the process benefits the system as a whole
- Staff capacity both within the CoCs and within ICA to support the implementation of the process
- User and project capacity
- Estimated cost of implementation and funding available

Strategic Plan Timeline

While the timeline is not a full strategic plan, it lays out the processes and documents that have been updated and created through the ad hoc sub-committees and defines the priorities for the next 3 fiscal years and beyond. For the "Implementation Timeline" column, the following will be used:

- Year 1: July 2020 – June 2021
- Year 2: July 2021 – June 2022
- Year 3: July 2022 – June 2023

Focus Area	Process to Update/Create	Anticipated Start Date	Implementation Timeline
Governance	Build up AKHMIS Advisory Board and review shared statewide mission and vision	July 2020	Year 1
	Update AKHMIS Governing documents	July 2020	Year 1 - **COMPLETE**
	Revamp AKHMIS Governance Structure	August 2020	Year 1
	Define Roles and Responsibilities related to AKHMIS (CoC, ICA, Participating Organizations, End Users, etc.)	August 2020	Year 1
	Educate CoC Boards on responsibilities and define CoC board reporting structure	September 2020	Year 1
	Provide quarterly progress updates on the Strategic Plan implementation to the CoC Boards	October 2020 and on	Year 1
	Define quarterly HMIS performance reporting structure with each CoC	July 2020	Year 1
Data Management	Create Systemwide Data Quality Plan (rolled out gradually by data quality component statewide)	July 2020	Year 2 – **PLAN COMPLETE**, ROLLOUT SOON
	Community-wide discussions around HMIS software functionality – determine non-negotiables and priorities for the HMIS software	July 2021	Year 2
	Determine whether a new HMIS software is needed and if so, complete RFP process and select new software	July 2022	Year 3

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	Review other definitions of homelessness used in Alaska to align HMIS and federal definitions of homelessness with other definitions	July 2021	Year 2
	Create a plan to increase homelessness prevention and diversion data in HMIS	August 2020	Year 1
	Work to define how to consistently collect, enter, and report on employment and income outcomes for all clients accessing the homeless services system	July 2021	Year 2
	Annual review of the Alaska "Universal Data Elements" by the AKHMIS Advisory Board and CoCs (review to begin in March/April of each year and any changes to be completed in conjunction with the federal fiscal year (October)	July 2020	Year 1 and Annually – **DOCUMENT COMPLETE**, PROCESS ONGOING
Training and Technical Assistance	Update the New User Training Process (pieces of data entry/workflows gradually built out into interactive trainings available online 24/7/365)	October 2020	Year 2
	Create plan for ongoing expectations related to user training for AKHMIS	July 2020	Year 2
Data Analysis	Determine priorities for data analysis and expectations	September 2020	Year 2
	Discuss costs associated with in-depth data analysis and cross-sector data sharing/matching	July 2022	Year 3
Reporting Capacity	Evaluate community reporting needs and develop priorities for AKHMIS reporting	September 2020	Year 2
	Update Custom Report Request process	July 2020	Year 1 – **DOCUMENT COMPLETE**
	Discuss costs associated with in-depth report requests from external stakeholders	July 2022	Year 3
	Review policy for external stakeholders accessing data in HMIS, how data will be provided, in what format, and how requests are prioritized	July 2021	Year 2
Communication and Education	Create an AKHMIS Communications Strategy (includes diverse communication for various stakeholders)	November 2020	Year 2
	Actively utilize data dashboards and public reports to operationalize communication	July 2022	Year 3
	Determine what type of reporting and dashboards are needed for which stakeholders	July 2021	Year 2
	Define a short-term funding strategy and staffing structure to support AKHMIS	February 2020	Year 1
	Define a long-term, multi-year funding strategy and staffing structure to support AKHMIS	July 2022	Year 3

[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/
[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/data-strategy-usability/

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Staffing Model and Structure	Determine the needs of the system and the current use of the system, as well as projected use of the system	July 2021	Year 2
Resourcing, Funding, and Fee Structure	Create a funding diversification strategy	July 2021	Year 2
	Discuss different models for funding AKHMIS, including user fees, custom report fees, data analysis fees, etc.	July 2021	Year 2
	Determine structure for building capacity for new funding and projects based on both unanticipated crises (i.e. COVID-19) and anticipated growth of the system	July 2021	Year 2
AKHMIS Administration	Determine proper AKHMIS staffing based on current system use and projected system use (includes system administration, report writing, data analysis, and management/oversight)	July 2020	Year 1
	Secure appropriate funding for 2020 HMIS Lead Contract	July 2020	Year 1
	Discuss appropriate funding for future HMIS Lead contracts	July 2022	Year 3
Coordinated Entry	Implement AKHMIS Statewide Coordinated Entry Workgroup	July 2022	Year 3
	Discuss ways in which the Coordinated Entry processes across the State could better align to serve clients moving around the State	July 2022	Year 3

Processes, Documents, and Strategy

As mentioned previously, the AKHMIS Advisory Board has spent the last couple of months working through various processes, documents, and deliverables related to the AKHMIS Strategic Plan through ad hoc sub-committees. The focus areas laid out in the Strategic Plan Timeline were divided into three workgroups, based on similarities among the focus areas, the AKHMIS Advisory Board members interested in participating in the workgroups, and the timeline within which a deliverable was to be provided. The workgroups were as follows:

- Communication, Training, Technical Assistance, and Education
- Data Analysis, Data Management, and Reporting Capacity
- Staffing Model, Resourcing, Funding, and Fee Structure

Any supporting documents listed will be reviewed, updated, and approved annually.

[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/
[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/data-strategy-usability/

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Governance

The first focus area listed in the Strategic Plan Timeline – Governance – was addressed by both CoCs and their respective Boards.

What has been done?	What is left to do?	Why was it a priority?	Supporting Documents Created/Updated, if applicable
Initial conversations about the purpose of the AKHMIS Advisory Board and its mission and vision for AKHMIS	Consensus on a shared mission and vision for AKHMIS	Without a shared mission and vision for AKHMIS, the AKHMIS Advisory Board was becoming ineffective in its role as an advising body to the CoCs	AKHMIS Advisory Board Governance Charter
Created process for inviting new board members to join the AKHMIS Advisory Board	Codify the process in governance documents	AKHMIS Advisory Board membership was not consistently determined	AKHMIS Advisory Board Governance Charter
Updates to AKHMIS Governance Charter	Review of AKHMIS Governance Charter by AKHMIS Advisory Board; approval of updates by CoCs	The AKHMIS Governance Charter had last been updated in 2017 (but not fully executed at that time)	AKHMIS Governance Charter
Conversations around roles and responsibilities have come up as they fit into other work being done related to governance	Continued conversations around roles and responsibilities and how to move forward solidifying those	Unclear roles and responsibilities causes frustration, duplicative work, missed work, and inconsistency in processes	AKHMIS Policies & Procedures, AKHMIS Governance Charter, Data Quality Plan

Staffing Model, Resourcing, Funding, and Fee Structure

The last workgroup listed – Staffing Model, Resourcing, Funding, and Fee Structure – has not met as a group, as the two CoCs are taking on the initial conversations about these focus areas.

What has been done?	What is left to do?	Why was it a priority?	Supporting Documents Created/Updated, if applicable
The two CoCs have had conversations with stakeholders and funders about	Continued conversations and presenting the need in quantifiable ways	AKHMIS has grown tremendously over the last 5 years, in both users and projects, as well as sophistication in how HMIS is being used and report requests about data in HMIS – capacity to support the growth has not kept up with the demand	AKHMIS Strategic Plan Timeline, AKHMIS Strategic Assessment (completed by ICF), ICA Capacity Pitch

Communication, Training, Technical Assistance, and Education

This workgroup has met consistently over the last couple of months and have worked through creating and updating several processes listed as focus areas and priorities for the AKHMIS Strategic Plan.

[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/
[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/data-strategy-usability/

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What has been done?	What is left to do?	Why was it a priority?	Supporting Documents Created/Updated, if applicable
Updates to the New User Training Process, including a written process outside of the AKHMIS Policies & Procedures	Approval of the Process by the CoCs, adoption and implementation of the Process	While the new user training process is currently embedded in the AKHMIS Policies & Procedures, an easy-to-reference Process document was needed to show potential end users the steps related to new user training	New User Training Flowchart, Training Timeline
Discussions about definitions for "beginner", "intermediate", and "advanced" use of AKHMIS	Further refine these definitions and connect the user level to appropriate training opportunities	New user training is just the beginning – further user levels need advanced training opportunities to enhance the use of AKHMIS	AKHMIS User Levels Flowchart, User Levels
Reviews of examples of communication about HMIS used in other communities	Creation of communication materials that work for various stakeholders (multiple materials will be created to meet multiple stakeholder needs)	Education around what AKHMIS is and is not is a priority due to the interest in AKHMIS and the data captured within the system	What is HMIS, Baseline and Additional Features HMIS, FAQs, Common Acronyms
Review of current data dashboard and reports available, initial discussions of what is wanted and for which stakeholders	Ongoing discussions about data dashboards, data analysis, reports	AKHMIS is meant to be used to help inform communities about how they are doing at addressing and ending homelessness	AK Data Dashboard, revamp of dashboard in process

Data Analysis, Data Management, and Reporting Capacity

This workgroup has also met consistently over the last couple of months and have worked through creating and updating several processes listed as focus areas and priorities for the AKHMIS Strategic Plan.

What has been done?	What is left to do?	Why was it a priority?	Supporting Documents Created/Updated, if applicable
Creation of Systemwide Data Quality Plan	Approval of the Plan by the CoCs, adoption and implementation of the Plan	Not only is data quality an emphasis by HUD, it is also important at the local level to be able to accurately tell the story of homelessness and prioritize clients most in need of limited services available	Data Quality Plan, supporting documents related to the Data Quality Plan
Initial discussions about HMIS software functionality and whether or not it is the best fit for AKHMIS	Deeper discussions to understand what is and is not needed from AKHMIS and what the current	Frustrations have been expressed about the HMIS software functionality – understanding what is	ICA Internal RFI Process and Results

	software can and cannot do	needed that the system can't currently do is a priority to ensure the system is useful at the local level	
Organizations have provided information about reports they use/need most often	Working through the feedback received and providing recommendations about how that affects reporting	Limited capacity within ICA to create ad hoc reports necessitates prioritizing what is most needed across the system	Survey results from outreach to organizations
Initial discussions about how custom reports should be prioritized to be created by ICA	Continue conversations about this and work with ICA to fully understand what happens currently and how the CoCs and/or AKHMIS Advisory Board should be more involved in that prioritization process	The perception currently is that ICA prioritizes custom report requests independently and while this is not true, defining the process further would help alleviate that perception	Custom Report Request, Introduction to ART Reports
Discussions about the "Alaska Universal Data Elements" and creation of a process for implementing those into AKHMIS	Approval of the process by the CoCs, adoption and implementation of the process	Stakeholders are interested in capturing locally relevant data in HMIS systemwide and a process by which that occurs	New Alaska UDEs Process

[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/
[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/data-strategy-usability/

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Several documents were created during the AKHMIS Strategic Plan process to support the rollout of the Plan over the next three years. What follows are links to the supporting documents, which may change over time as AKHMIS adapts and grows.

AKHMIS Governance Charter

AKHMIS Graphic – What is HMIS?

AKHMIS New User Training Flowchart

AKHMIS User Levels

New Report Requests & Reporting Priorities

Request for New Alaska-Specific Data Elements

AKHMIS Data Quality Plan

AKHMIS System Quarterly Review Flowchart

The **ICF AKHMIS Strategic Assessment**, completed in April 2019, is the supporting document that began the AKHMIS Strategic Plan process.

[1] https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/
[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/data-strategy-usability/