



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

AHAR Update: October 2008

Prepared by the AHAR Team

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In this AHAR update we:

- 1) Release the 2007 Annual Homeless Assessment Report
- 2) Introduce the AHAR Exchange
- 2) Provide details about the AHAR Exchange Data Collection System
- 3) Discuss content changes in the upcoming 2008 AHAR

Release of the 2007 AHAR

In July 2008, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released the 2007 AHAR. The report represents an important milestone in the nation's understanding of homelessness. It is the first report based on Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data for a full year (October 1, 2006 – September 30, 2007). More than 284,000 records were used to develop the national estimates reported in the 2007 AHAR. According to the report, an estimated 1.6 million persons used an emergency shelter or transitional housing program during the twelve-month period, or about 1 in every 200 persons in the U.S. The report also contains data reported by each CoC to HUD on their funding applications.

A summary of key findings and the full report are available at: www.hmis.info

Introducing the AHAR Exchange

Beginning this year, information about the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) will be centralized within a new web portal called the **AHAR Exchange**. The AHAR Exchange will be a “one-stop shop” for materials and guidance about the AHAR, including Frequently Asked Questions, AHAR Updates, technical assistance materials, conference presentations, and past reports. The AHAR Exchange will also feature a new method for submitting community-level data to the AHAR. Beginning with the upcoming 2008 AHAR, the use of the AHAR Excel table shells will be discontinued and replaced with an online data entry and collection process.

Details about the AHAR Exchange Data Collection System

The AHAR Exchange data collection system will allow communities participating in the AHAR to submit their data on-line to the AHAR

Team. The AHAR Exchange will include several enhancements to the data collection process:

- **Permissions and Login:** Logins are based on user logins to HMIS.info. Only representatives from each community will be granted permission to edit data for their AHAR site(s).
- **Workflow Process:** The online system will allow users to easily navigate through the process of submitting the data to the research team, receiving feedback from the team, revising the data as needed, and finalizing the data for submission the AHAR. Each data exchange between the community representative and the AHAR staff member will trigger automatic alerts to inform both parties about the status of the data.
- **Easy-to-Use Interface:** The interface will allow users to enter, save and submit data for the AHAR. The interface will also contain information and guidance about the reporting requirements (e.g., definitions of key terms) and will allow users to jump back-and-forth through the reporting process as needed.
- **Validation:** The online system will feature built-in validation checks to review the quality of data prior to submission. For example, the system will check for data discrepancies—or inconsistencies in the number of persons reported throughout the AHAR reporting requirements—as users enter the data. Other validation checks include automated data calculations and data quality reports.
- **Reporting:** Users will be able to print reports that summarize their community’s data, display the validation checks, and review the quality of the data.
- **Annotations:** Users will be able to insert notes alongside reporting requirements to provide additional context and explanation. AHAR staff will be able to review these notes and respond as needed.
- **Audit:** An internal audit system will maintain a log of changes made to each

community’s data after the first submission. The audit trail will keep track of: which user(s) made changes; which changes were made; and when changes were made.

- **Automated Uploads:** A standard data format and process will be developed to enable the automatic transfer of data generated from a local HMIS to the AHAR Exchange. This will limit the need to manually enter data that already exists in a community’s HMIS.

Main Navigation

The overall navigation bar will have four main menu items:

- **Home/Status:** This link is used to directly add, view and edit AHAR data, as well as navigate the website.
- **Upload Shells:** This link is used to automatically populate data from files that have been downloaded directly from HMIS.
- **Reports:** This link is used to view reports available in the system.
- **Contact:** This link is used to contact the appropriate AHAR staff member directly for assistance.

A sample screen shot of the main navigation window is provided below. The four main reporting categories are consistent with previous AHARs: emergency shelters serving individuals (ES-IND); emergency shelters serving persons in families (ES-FAM); transitional housing serving individuals (TH-IND); and transitional housing serving persons in families (TH-FAM).

A series of AHAR Exchange trainings were held from October 1-10, 2008. The trainings demonstrated how to complete and submit data to the AHAR. Materials from the training can be downloaded at HMIS.info.

Content Changes Included in the AHAR 4

The core reporting requirements will not change for the upcoming 2008 AHAR. However, there are four slight modifications to the reporting requirements:

1. The six-month count of homeless persons has been removed from each program reporting category. The reporting requirement was formerly on Worksheet Tab 2 page 1 of each AHAR table shell and was intended solely to compare data from the 2006 and 2007 AHARs.
2. The denominator for the calculation of the average number of persons per night has change. The denominator for the 2008 AHAR is 366 nights instead of 365 because 2008 is a leap year.
3. Third, the maximum number of days for all length of stay categories will change to account for the 2008 leap year. The maximum number of days for all length of stay categories is 361-366 instead of 361-365.
4. The days associated with each point-in-time count of homeless persons shift each year. In the 2008 AHAR, the last Wednesday of the first month in each quarter is:
 - October 31, 2007
 - January 30 2008
 - April 30, 2008
 - July 30, 2008

Contacting the AHAR Research Team

If you have any questions, please call (1-877-789-2427) or e-mail the AHAR research team (AHAR@abtassoc.com).

The screenshot shows the AHAR Data Submission SANDBOX web application. The page title is "AHAR Data Submission SANDBOX" and the user is logged in as "cortes". The navigation menu includes "Home", "My Data", "Upload", and "Contact". The main content area is titled "AHAR4" and shows the site name "Testsite for cortes" and contact information "Contact: cortes".

The "My Data" section displays dynamic status information for four reporting categories: ES-FAM, ES-IND, TH-FAM, and TH-IND. Each category has a "Summary" box with the following information:

| Category | Status | Data Quality | Confirmed | Validation | % Complete | Actions |
|--|-------------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| ES-FAM (Emergency Shelters for Families) | In Progress | TBD | No | 0 Errors | 55% | Enter Data |
| ES-IND (Emergency Shelters for Individuals) | In Progress | TBD | No | 0 Errors | 55% | Enter Data |
| TH-FAM (Transitional Housing for Families) | In Progress | TBD | No | 0 Errors | 55% | Enter Data |
| TH-IND (Transitional Housing for Individuals) | In Progress | TBD | No | 0 Errors | 55% | Enter Data |
| Summary (Summary of the four reporting categories) | In Progress | TBD | No | 0 Errors | 55% | Enter Data |

The page also includes a "Last Update" field (N/A) and an "Update By" field (N/A) for each category. The browser address bar shows "http://sandbox.hmis.info/Default.aspx".