

Avoiding Inconsistencies and Unintentional Errors

In addition to false information, front-line staff also should be on guard against unintentional errors or inconsistencies. Several types of unintentional errors can occur during the intake process. Additionally, if data entry is done at a different time, other errors could occur, especially if a different person who did the intake is doing the data entry.

If filling out information on an intake form, please make your writing legible!

Some types of general unintentional errors are:

- The **client misunderstands the question**. A common example of this is misunderstanding what is meant by the “Prior Residence” question. A client might wish to give the residence where they lived for years prior to the night before coming to the shelter as opposed to the place they stayed for one night prior to shelter entry.
 - **Inconsistent interpretation** of the actual meaning of a field, such as “disability.” Two people with the same condition might give totally different answers regarding whether they have a disability. It is up to the front-line staff to query further to determine which answer is most accurate.
 - **Language barriers** can also contribute to misunderstanding the question. If many clients speak only Spanish, for example, it is helpful to have a copy of the questions and answers in Spanish available so clients can read along.
 - Staff members may also sometimes **hear the wrong answer**, especially when working with clients with strong accents or language barriers. It is quite easy to hear “No” when someone says “Don’t Know.” The intake space should be quiet and private to ensure that staff can hear clearly and follow up on sensitive questions to make sure they understand the response.
 - Use of **nicknames and aliases** is another place where misunderstanding and inconsistency causes problems. Clients who are asked “What is your name” are more likely to provide the name by which they are called than their legal name. Consistency problems occur when the client gives their legal name in one interview and their nickname in a subsequent interview.
 - **Misspellings** of names and other fields are common but easy to guard against by following a simple rule of always confirming the spelling. Even a common name like “Adams” could sometimes be spelled “Addams.” Also, circling or highlighting an unusual spelling can help ensure that the data entry staff notices it.
 - **Transposing numbers** in dates, zip codes, income, etc.
 - Accidentally **selecting the wrong response** from a dropdown list.
 - **Incorrect dates!** Make sure that dates are correct before saving data.
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Common Data Element Errors

This section shows some common errors to watch out for when entering data into HMIS.

Name

- First and Last name are not normally the same.
- No numerals in name fields.
- Suffixes not in last name field.
- First name is not “Husband,” “Wife,” “Man,” “Woman,” “Boy,” “Girl,” “Child,” “Baby,” “Baby Girl,” “Baby Boy” or similar.
- Always confirm the spelling of client first and last names.
- Legal first name (do not add nicknames in “quotes” – those are not searchable elements, add a nickname to the Alias field).

Social Security Number

- SSN is all numbers, no letters can be entered.
- 9 digits indicates complete; less than 9 digits indicates a partial (last 4 digits) SSN.
- If client does not know or refuses to provide their SSN, **DO NOT enter a fake social security number** such as 123-45-6789, 999-99-9999, or xxx-xx-xxxx.

Date of Birth/Age

- Cannot be earlier than current date or program entry date.
 - Client cannot be younger than 0, or older than 114 years of age.
 - If client cannot remember the year of birth, ask the person’s age and calculate the approximate year of birth.
 - If client cannot remember the month or day of birth, record an approximate date of “01” for month and “01” for day. Approximate dates for month and day will allow calculation of a person’s age within one year of their actual age.
 - Date of Birth should be the client’s date of birth, not the current date or date entering the program (or service).
 - Adults are defined as any person over 18 years of age.
 - Client’s entry date into a program cannot be before they were born.
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Race/Ethnicity

- Secondary Race ONLY has to be answered if the client self-identifies as more than one race.
- Primary and Secondary race CAN be the same, for example white/white is allowed, but it saves time to not even choose a Secondary Race.
- Secondary race is not required and may be left blank.
- If either Refused or Don't Know is reported, this data is counted as missing in some reports.

Gender

- Men cannot be pregnant.
- No male in woman's shelter or woman in men's shelter.

Veteran Status

- Client under 18 cannot be a Veteran.
- Only veterans in Veteran shelter.
- Those receiving veteran's pension are marked as "Veteran."

Disabling Condition

- Those receiving SSDI are marked as having a disability.
- Those indicating substance abuse, mental health, physical disability, developmental disability, or HIV/AIDS are marked as having disability.

Residence Prior to Program Entry / How Long at Place

- Self-reported, not contradicted by other HMIS data.
- Where they slept last night.

Zip Code of Last Permanent Address

- The zip code of the client's last permanent residence of 90 days or more.
- Look up the zip code if the client knows the city, but not the specific zip code.
- Entering a partial zip code is better than no zip code.
- Zip code has only numbers and is valid.

Program Entry Date/Program Exit Date

- All clients have a program entry date.
- Program Entry Date later than Birth Date.
- Program Entry Date prior to Exit Date.
- Entry and Exit Date not the same in residential shelter.

Households

- No single person in family shelter.
 - No family in individual shelter.
 - Clients under age 18 cannot be Head of Household (HOH).
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- Try to enter all people in the family at the same time, if possible.

Pregnancy

- No female under age 15 or over age 55.
- No pregnant males.

Income/Cash Benefits

- Enter cash benefits under the person who, if they leave, money goes with them.
- Income needs to be updated annually for permanent housing and permanent supportive housing programs.
- Income must be updated upon exit.

Non-Cash Benefits

- Non-Cash Benefits must be updated upon exit.
- Non-Cash Benefits need to be updated annually for permanent housing and permanent supportive housing programs.

Unaccompanied Youth Errors

- No minor in adult shelter; no adult in youth shelter
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ART Reports to use for Data Quality

0252 Data Completeness Report Card (EE) v17

This report is a data completeness monitoring tool that produces a letter grade for the system as well as the individual providers. Prompts allow the user to specify a date range and to select the provider(s) on which to base the report as well as the option to include services or not. The report includes a detail section to assist users in finding and fixing data entry omissions. (Does not include the Chronic Homelessness Fields) Can be run for a month period or more.

0260 HUD Coc APR Data Quality/Completeness Report

This report is a HUD CoC APR Data Quality and Completeness monitoring tool. It provides information about both missing data (Data Completeness) and accuracy (Data Quality). Prompts allow the user to specify a date range and to select the provider(s) on which to base the report. The report includes a detail section to assist users in finding and fixing data entry omissions. Also includes the Chronic Homelessness Fields. The report should be run for a year time frame.

0640 – HUD Data Quality Report Framework v5

This report is a HUD CoC APR Data Quality and Completeness monitoring tool. It provides information about both missing data (Data Completeness) and accuracy (Data Quality). Prompts allow the user to specify a date range and to select the provider(s) on which to base the report. The report includes a detail section to assist users in finding and fixing data entry omissions. This report includes all of the UDE's however, it does not look at the Chronic Homelessness fields as fields but rather as total number of people considered to be Chronic. The report should be run for a year time frame. It is also a part of the HUD System Performance Measures.

Canned Reports to use for Data Quality

There are a couple of canned reports that are useful for looking at Data Quality. Canned reports are easy and quick to run and have the advantage of being immediate – if you make a change to a client record and run the report, you will see the change reflected.

CoC APR

The CoC APR should also be run for a year's time period. It displays all of the UDE's, HUD Verification fields, Veteran Information, and information on Chronically Homeless clients.

ESG CAPER (HDS v5)

The ESG Caper should also be run for a year's time period. The CAPER also includes the UDE's, HUD Verification fields, and Length of time in shelter.
