ACRE Consulting's Guide to By-Name Lists in HIFIS 4

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ACRE Consulting

Introduction

One of the established best practices in ending homelessness is to have a **Coordinated Access System** (CAS or CA for just Coordinated Access) in place.

> "Coordinated Access is a way for communities to bring consistency to the process by which people experiencing or at risk of homelessness access housing and related services within a geographic area. Core components of a strong Coordinated Access system include a Housing First approach; real-time data about the supply of and demand for housing resources; and a streamlined service delivery approach with access points to service, a standardized workflow for triage and assessment; prioritization; and vacancy matching and referral." (Reaching Home Definition)

One of the important components of the Coordinated Access System is to maintain a **By-Name List** (BNL), which is a real-time list of all your clients who are **actively homeless**. In other words, clients that you know are homeless right now, excluding clients who you know were homeless previously but have since been housed, or who have become inactive. For general resources about BNLs, see Built for Zero Canada's By-Name List resource page.

This document is intended for local Coordinated Access System leads and service provision coordinators who are using HIFIS as their Homeless Management Information System, and want to know exactly how a By-Name List relates to their HIFIS system.

This guide walks through all aspects of the interrelationships between HIFIS and the BNL, including answering questions like:

- How do providers add to the list?
- How is unsheltered homelessness tracked in HIFIS?
- How can I indicate if a client has consented to participate in our Coordinated Access System?
- How can I review who my highest priority clients are?
- How can I tell whether more or fewer people are homeless this month versus the same month last year?

Provider Participation in Coordinated Access

Before we think about your BNL, the first question to answer is that of **provider participation**. You should be clear about which service providers in your community are expected to participate in your Coordinated Access system.

Typically, service providers are divided into:

- **Homelessness response providers**, which are organizations whose primary purpose is to serve the homeless population, and
- **Other service providers,** which may also serve homeless populations but it is not their primary purpose. Examples include: food banks, health providers, and services for those exiting correctional facilities.

> The gold standard is that every homelessness response provider, and as many other service providers as possible, participate in the Coordinated Access system.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends the gold standard above and confirms CAEH BNL and Coordinated Access Scorecards with a minimum 90%+ threshold participation.
> .

> Reaching Home funding expects that all Reaching Home-funded service providers participate in Coordinated Access.

> Ontario expects that all Service Managers must "aim to have as many homelessness response providers as possible" participating in Coordinated access, beyond just the provincially funded ones.

Once you've determined which providers are participating in your Coordinated Access system, they should all be onboarded onto HIFIS. You'll need to set up a designated **cluster** in HIFIS for your Coordinated Access system to operate in.

Create a designated cluster in HIFIS for the Coordinated Access system.

By default, HIFIS comes with one cluster named "Integrated." For the purposes of this document, we will be assuming that your Integrated cluster is utilized by your Coordinated Access system, but you could rename it, or have an alternate arrangement. Each of these participating providers should be set up as service providers in HIFIS, and should exist in the Integrated cluster.

- ☐ **Create equivalent service providers in HIFIS for all participating providers**
- ☐ **Add these service providers to the Integrated cluster in HIFIS**

Data Sharing Agreements & Consent

You will need common agreements and forms[1,2] to be utilized by all participating providers. Broadly speaking, these are legal forms that must adhere to all applicable privacy legislation. It's a good idea to consult with legal counsel when developing these.

One of the agreements you will need is a **data sharing agreement**, which is a provider-to-provider agreement that should be signed by all participating providers, that manages privacy and outlines data sharing expectations. This agreement essentially needs to state that participating providers will be storing information about clients and the services they've provided in a shared database that the other providers will also have access to.

> Reaching Home expects all Designated Communities to develop a set of local agreements to manage privacy, data sharing, and client consent in compliance to municipal, provincial and federal laws.

[1] Some resources from ACRE Consulting
[2] Some resources from Built for Zero Canada

> In addition, a condition for using HIFIS at all is to sign the Data Provision Agreement with Infrastructure Canada, which requires all HIFIS-using service providers to enter into a data sharing agreement with each other.

The second key document that is necessary is a common **client consent form**. Because all clients encountered by participating providers will be added to the Integrated cluster in HIFIS and their information will be shared with other providers, the only thing that makes sense is for all participating providers to use the same consent form. It simply doesn't make any sense for clients at provider A to sign a different form than clients at provider B, if they will ultimately end up going into the same shared system and being treated the same.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends that providers in the community collaborate on developing shared consent forms and have them utilized by as many providers as possible.

> Reaching Home requires communities to have protocols for obtaining participant consent to retain and share information "for the purposes of assessing and referring participants."

> Ontario requires informed consent from all clients prior to adding them to the BNL, and further requires that the consent be documented.

The best way to make HIFIS work for you is to enable the **enforce consent** feature. This is a cluster setting; edit the Integrated cluster and set "Enforce Consent?" to "Yes." You can additionally set your HIFIS consent records to automatically expire after a set number of days has passed, which is a feature some communities utilize.

Turn on Enforce Consent for your Integrated cluster.

Some communities wish to have flexible consent forms that allow users to agree to share information with some providers but not others. While this is certainly a good practice from an ethical point of view, logistically it is difficult. HIFIS allows you to share information with all service providers in the Integrated cluster, or keep the client's information private to only one service provider. Therefore, the options are that one or all providers could access a client file; there's no way to share with "all but one" or "just these two."

At the time of writing[3], there are four types of consent in HIFIS:

- **Explicit**, which indicates that the client has affirmed consent by signing a form or providing it verbally,
- **Inherited**, which indicates that a parent or guardian is providing consent on this person's behalf,
- **Declined - Anonymous**, which indicates that the client wishes to keep their information private to only the service provider they shared it with, and,
- **Coordinated Access**, which indicates that the client has agreed to participate in the Coordinated Access system. Note that Explicit consent is a prerequisite for Coordinated Access consent, and for new clients there is an option to add Explicit + Coordinated Access consent all at once.

[3] October 2022. The HIFIS current version is 4.0.59.

⭐**The least amount of work for you** is to use the Explicit consent type to mark who is on your Level 2: By-Name List and use the Coordinated Access consent type to mark clients who are on your Level 3: Coordinated Access List. This is compatible with the Coordinated Access module (explained later) and will ensure that most things work as intended.

However, bear in mind that it's common for staff to be confused by the difference between Explicit consent and Coordinated Access consent, so it may be necessary to periodically audit to ensure there are no clients who have mistakenly been marked as only having Explicit consent when they actually have agreed to participate in the Coordinated Access system.

- ☐ **Develop and implement data sharing agreements**
- ☐ **Develop and implement common consent forms**
- ☐ **Turn on the Enforce Consent setting for the Integrated cluster**
- ☐ **Add consent records in HIFIS for all clients**

By-Name Lists in HIFIS

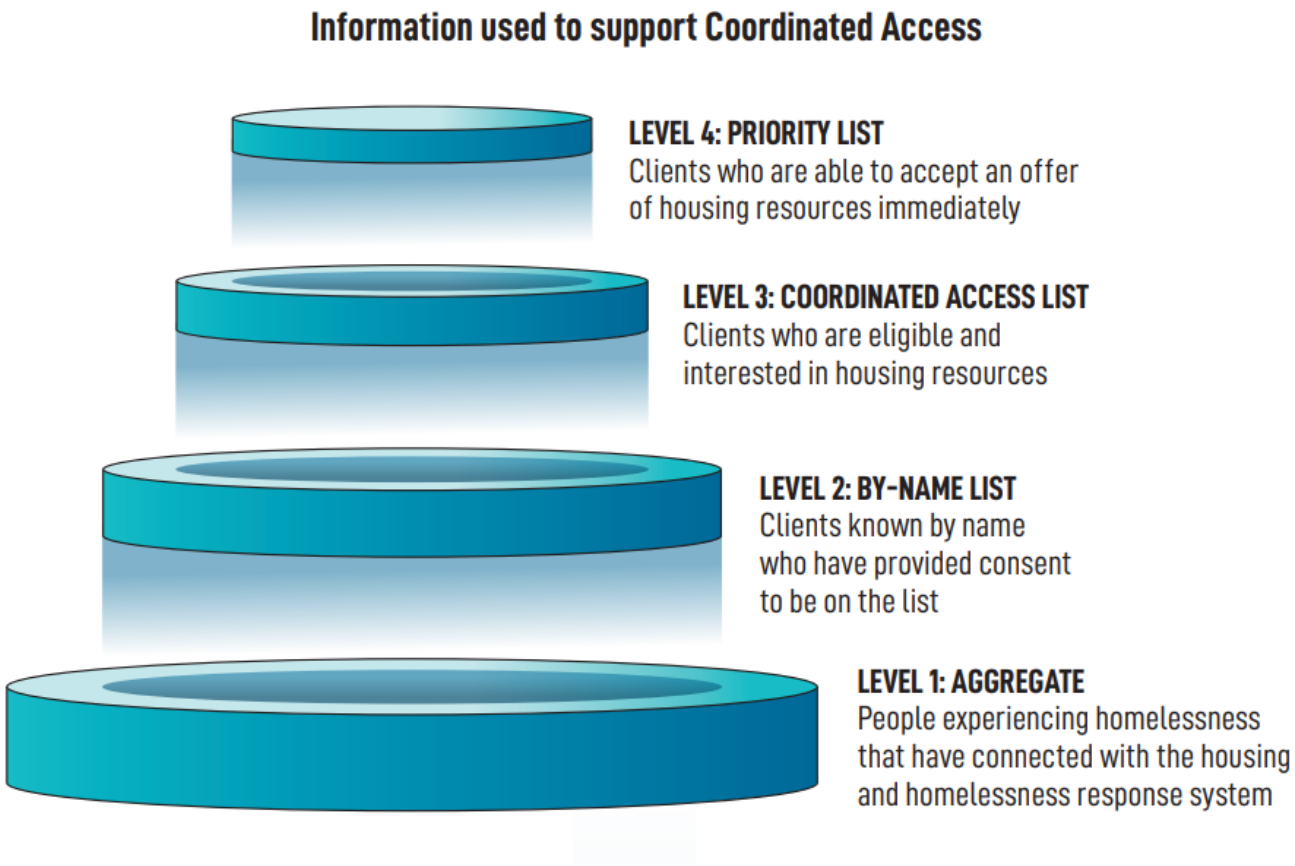
Once you've onboarded all of your participating providers onto HIFIS in the Integrated cluster, then the client pool for the Integrated cluster in HIFIS becomes the starting point for your BNL. You do not need to maintain a separate list in a spreadsheet or anywhere outside of HIFIS.

However, HIFIS itself is not quite your BNL. Why? HIFIS includes both homeless and housed clients (clients who were homeless and have recently been housed; at-risk households who've visited drop-in centres; etc.), and also clients who you haven't seen in years. So, you need a filtered version of your client pool to exclude the clients who are not actually on your BNL.

> Your BNL is simply a filtered version of the clients in your Integrated cluster in HIFIS.

By-Name Lists and Coordinated Access Lists

Before we go too much further, it will be important to answer one key question: what exactly is a By-Name List? The Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide describes 4 levels of lists, and each level has a slightly different definition for inclusion.



- **Level 1: Aggregate.** It is unlikely that you can use HIFIS to get an accurate number for this layer, since many people experiencing homelessness may decline to have their information being collected and shared within HIFIS.

- **Level 2: By-Name List.** In HIFIS terms, this would be approximately clients who are known to be actively homeless, and who have not declined consent. This is the first layer that you can use HIFIS to measure. You'd simply need to filter out anyone without consent (i.e. excluding Declined - Anonymous consent), anyone who is not active, and anyone you know to be housed.

- **Level 3: Coordinated Access List.** The key distinction between this layer and the previous layer is this layer only includes clients who are "eligible and interested in the housing resources in the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory." There's two halves here:
    - **Eligible** - while HIFIS cannot tell who is eligible for any given housing resource - some might be for seniors or veterans or youth only - there are some broad rules that can be applied here. For example, children in a family would not, themselves, be considered eligible for a housing resource. Their guardian would, but you would typically not consider a child in a homeless household to be on the Coordinated Access List. What you would typically do instead is indicate that the family head is on the Coordinated Access List and they have X other family members, or they require a housing unit that has Y number of bedrooms.
    - **Interested** - the way that HIFIS interprets this statement is through consent. Clients are expected to provide Coordinated Access consent if they are interested in participating in the Coordinated Access system.

Therefore, a client is on the Coordinated Access List if they are on the Level 2: By-Name List, and also have Coordinated Access consent, and are a family head or a single individual.

- **Level 4: Priority List.** The Priority List is a subset of the Level 3: Coordinated Access List who are immediately able to accept an offer of housing resources. Typically, this is referred to as "document readiness" or "housing readiness" because it suggests that the client has all the necessary paperwork available. Unfortunately, HIFIS does not track paper readiness very well (although some communities have come up with creative workarounds), so it may be difficult to use HIFIS to get an accurate list for this layer.

Despite these differences, it is fairly common for the practice of identifying people who are homeless and keeping them on a list to be described as "having a By-Name List." If you hear someone talking about their By-Name List or BNL, or adding someone to the BNL, it's possible that they might be referring to any of the four different variations listed above. We know, this leads to some confusion. In this document, we will sometimes use the term "BNL" or "By-Name List" or simply "List" when we are referring to generally the practice of keeping track of your clients. When it's important to differentiate between the different levels, we will be sure to indicate whether it's a "Level 3: Coordinated Access List" or a "Level 1: Aggregate."

Who is on my List?

The Coordinated Access module in HIFIS provides you with a list of clients who:

1. Are in the Integrated cluster,
2. Are active (as opposed to deceased or inactive),
3. Are not known to be housed (so, homeless or unknown), and
4. Have Coordinated Access consent.

This is roughly equivalent to your **Level 3: Coordinated Access List**. The only thing that is different is it does not filter out family members. However, you are unlikely to be in the habit of recording that children in families have provided Coordinated Access consent, so it is pretty similar. The only main remaining difference would be that partners of two-adult households would be included in the Coordinated Access module but would be typically excluded from the Coordinated Access List. See also Families and Singles.

Using this module has the advantage of being built-in, which means that it works out of the box and you don't need to do anything. It also is most likely to be compatible with other resources, such as federal or provincial reports or reports created by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. However, it is not perfect.

If you do not like that set of filters, you could instead define your own set of criteria. For example, you may only wish to include clients who have been homeless for at least two weeks, or only clients with a specific type of assessment completed. You may wish to specifically include or specifically exclude clients in transitional housing or correctional facilities. You could wish to filter out clients who have already been assigned a caseworker. If you want to use additional or different criteria, you will need to create a custom data export, usually taking the form of a custom Crystal Report file. This is more of an advanced usage of HIFIS and is not recommended for communities just starting out with HIFIS.

As we have alluded to, the Coordinated Access module is generally equivalent to your Coordinated Access List. So what about your **Level 2: By-Name List**?

We're so glad you asked.

HIFIS does not provide an easy or convenient way to filter and display your BNL. This isn't exactly to say that you don't have one, but we would argue that, perhaps, **it's not terribly important to generate a list of all the clients who are on your Level 2: By-Name List**.

Yes, you read that right.

We know there's a lot of emphasis from various sources placed on having and maintaining a BNL. But, we maintain that there is some conflation of terms and ideas here which can lead to general confusion. Yes, it's important to know who is homeless in your community. But that data is already in HIFIS, so you are collecting this information. And yes, it's important to know how many people are homeless in your community. But is it more useful to say "there are 300 people" or to say "here are 300 names?"

You would want to know a lot of information about those near the top of your Level 4: Priority List. There is a lot of value in accessing lots of relevant data about your chronically homeless clients with the highest acuity, but you would never try to count how many people are "high" on the list - that can be a fluctuating definition, and you'd only want to look at your top 10 or 25 most relevant clients at any one time.

And yes, you would want to know how many people are homeless today, or who experienced homelessness last year, but that would be an aggregated value - you want to count them, not list them. For example, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' Monthly Inflow/Outflow Report shows you how many people are known to be homeless at the end of any given month. And the Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report shows you how many people were on your By-Name List at some point during a period.

⭐**The least amount of work for you** is to use the **Coordinated Access module** to act as your Level 3: Coordinated Access List, and not bother maintaining a Level 2: By-Name List. Instead, rely on some reports that count the number of people who are homeless, when you need that information.

You may want to rely on a different definition of criteria to determine who is on your Level 3: Coordinated Access List (and optionally, Level 4: Priority List), and you may want to also track who is and who isn't on your Level 2: By-Name List. Regardless of your approach, you'll need to:

- ☐ **Define your filters/criteria that determine which of your HIFIS clients you want to include for your various lists**

Families and Singles

Many communities struggle to answer the question: should children be included on my BNL? There is a general lack of guidance from the authorities on the subject, but that often comes out of a broader misunderstanding about the different levels and the different lists.

In general, you want to know about children and other dependents who are experiencing homelessness. You would include them for any purpose where you'd want to know how many people are homeless or were experiencing homelessness at a particular point in time. They would be on your Level 2: By-Name List.

However, when listing clients to consider for housing resources, you would generally not need the children and other dependents to be listed. What we recommend that you do, instead, is have a Level 3: Coordinated Access List that only lists family heads and singles, along with a column indicating how large the household is and/or a column indicating how many bedrooms would be required.

> Record information about children and other family members in HIFIS.
>
> When counting how many people are homeless, include children.
>
> When considering who should be matched to an available housing unit, look at the family head and note how many other people are in the household.

Adding to the List

When someone new is discovered to be homeless, who was not previously on the list, and who meets your filters, they must be added to the list.

> Adding a client to the list simply means adding a client file to HIFIS and ensuring there is sufficient information in their file to show that they should be on the BNL.

Given that your BNL is simply a filtered list of clients in HIFIS, then all that is required to happen to add a client to the list is to create a client file in HIFIS. Consider above what your filters are, and once those filters would include your client, they have been added. For example, if one of your filters says that clients are considered on the BNL if they have a VI-SPDAT assessment, then add the client to HIFIS and conduct a VI-SPDAT assessment in HIFIS. Then the client has been added.

> The gold standard is that every participating service provider uses HIFIS for their-day-to-day work and is adding information in real time. The minimum requirement is to update it monthly.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends that your community have a comprehensive protocol for keeping the BNL accurate and up-to-date, ideally in real-time, but with a minimum of monthly data submissions.

> Reaching Home funding expects that all Reaching Home-funded service providers participate in Coordinated Access. It also requires that the list is kept up-to-date, and must be updated regularly, monthly at minimum.

> Ontario's minimum standard is that participating providers are adding clients at least once per month. At a minimum, therefore, once a month a staff needs to login to HIFIS and add new client files along with all the mandatory minimum information that would consider the client added to and updated in the BNL.

You may wish to have additional processes in place. For example, you may require staff to notify a particular staff member or group when a client that meets the requirements has been added to HIFIS. However, any such additional processes are just that - additional - and so simply adding clients to HIFIS is likely sufficient to meet a minimum requirement for adding to the list.

When a client file is added, HIFIS automatically creates a unique identifier for each client (the "Client ID"). If a duplicated client file is discovered, two client files could be merged if necessary.

- ☐ **Ensure that everyone who should be adding to the list has a user account for HIFIS**
- ☐ **Ensure that these staff have the ability to add new clients**
- ☐ **Provide these staff training on how to add clients to HIFIS**

Common Questions & Information

There is a minimum set of information that needs to be collected about clients in your BNL. Consider, to begin with, your filters/criteria to determine who is on the list. For example, if one of your filters says that clients need to be homeless for at least 2 weeks to be added to the list, you would need to ensure that you're collecting some data about the client's history of homelessness.

In addition to those data points which you use for filtering who is on the list, it's very common that you would also require the following pieces of information:

- The client's name, since it is a By-Name List, and a unique identifier to prevent duplication;
- Other members of a client's household, since this would be used to determine what sort of housing they may be eligible for;
- The client's date of birth, which is mandatory, helps with deduplication, and also determines whether a client is a youth, adult, or senior, which can affect what services they would be eligible for;
- The client's gender identity, which is mandatory and often affects what shelters they can access;
- The client's indigenous identity, which is mandatory and also affects available services;
- The client's veteran status, which is also mandatory and affects available services and eligibility; and,
- The client's history of homelessness, which is used to determine who is chronically homeless.

> The gold standard is to have a consistent basic intake form used by all providers, which includes all the mandatory information that is required for all program participants, regardless of the type of services they're accessing.
>
> Communities may also come up with secondary, program-specific intake forms that ask additional questions that are only relevant to their service area.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends the gold standard above and in the CAEH BNL Scorecard identifies that at minimum communities collect population data about: length of homelessness, gender identity, age, indigenous identity, veteran status, race/ethnicity, family composition, whether the client is first time homeless/returning to homelessness, if people entered/returned to homelessness immediately after exiting an institution, and any other population groups for which your community might have special resources available for, if any.

> Reaching Home funded communities are expected to collect data and report on veteran status, indigenous identity, chronicity, age groups, family composition, and gender identity.

> Ontario requires Service Managers to collect information about people transitioning from provincial institutions, including corrections, health facilities, and child welfare systems, in addition to length of time homeless (to determine chronicity), age, indigenous identity, gender identity, and family composition.

Once common questions are established, you should map these data points to the specific fields in HIFIS that will be used to track them. For example, family composition would be tracked through the Family module. Then, for all of these common data points, design user rights templates to ensure that users have the ability to collect this information. Finally, ensure that staff are trained on how to enter this data into HIFIS.

- ☐ **Define your common data points**
- ☐ **Map these data points to fields/modules in HIFIS**
- ☐ **Design user rights templates that make use of these fields/modules**
- ☐ **Ensure that staff are trained on how to collect and enter this information as expected**

Common Assessment Tool

One form of common questions utilized by communities is a **common assessment tool**, which are a series of questions used to determine a client's strengths, challenges and type of service needs. The answers to those questions are often used in the process to prioritize and match clients to housing resources.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness confirms the CAEH Coordinated Access Scorecard when a common set of questions/intake/assessment tool is being used by at least 90% of providers who "should" be using it. In addition, CAEH recommends that adequate training, including refresher training, should be provided to all staff who will be using the Common Assessment Tool.

> Reaching Home requires communities to use a common assessment tool for all population groups, although "the questions and approaches used to conduct the assessment can be adjusted for specific populations." The tool can be selected by the community, but needs to be tested, valid, and reliable (so, it's not recommended that communities just make it up).

> Ontario requires Service Managers to utilize a common assessment tool, although which one is utilized should depend on local needs.

At the time of writing[4], the assessment tools that are built in to HIFIS are:

- VAT
- SPDAT v3 and v4, F-SPDAT v1 and v2, and Y-SPDAT v1
- VI-SPDAT v1 and v2, F-VI-SPDAT v1 and v2, and TAY-VI-SPDAT v1

[4] October 2022. The HIFIS current version is 4.0.59.

⭐ **The least amount of work for you** is to simply select one of those available assessment tools, even if it's not your first choice.

Any other assessment tool could be used, but you'd be adding it to HIFIS as a custom form, which means it wouldn't integrate well with other aspects of HIFIS. For example, the Coordinated Access module includes a column to indicate the client's most recent assessment date, type, and score. If you utilized a different assessment tool not listed above, the column in the Coordinated Access module would be blank for all your clients.

Note that the VI-SPDAT v3 suite of assessment tools are expected to be in a software update in the near future.

- ☐ **Select a common assessment tool**
- ☐ **Decide how it will be added to HIFIS - either using the default tools or being added as a custom form**
- ☐ **Ensure that staff who are expected to conduct the common assessment have rights to be able to do so in HIFIS**
- ☐ **Ensure that staff who are expected to enter it into HIFIS have training on how to do so properly**

Unsheltered and Hidden Homelessness

It's very easy to keep track of which of your clients stayed in shelters when, so HIFIS is pretty reliable when it comes to sheltered homelessness.

Use Housing History to record nights of homelessness outside shelters.

With clients who are not staying in shelters but who are homeless or precariously housed, use the Housing History to indicate their accommodations. Each Housing History record has a start date and an end date, so you could indicate that a client was living in "Makeshift/Street" accommodations from April to September.

> The gold standard is to use the Housing History to track every day of a client's homelessness experience. The Housing History should include experiences of hidden homelessness, unsheltered homelessness, time in correctional facilities and hospitals, time in foster care, time spent in shelters that are not part of your Coordinated Access system (i.e. shelters in other communities), and periods of housing.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends that your community have a process to include on the BNL clients who are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, transitionally housed, experiencing hidden homelessness, or in a public institution.

> Reaching Home requires BNLs to include individuals and families served through outreach who are living unsheltered, along with people experiencing hidden homelessness, those staying in transitional housing, and those in public institutions with no fixed address.

> Ontario requires Service Managers to ensure that people who are unsheltered or provisionally accommodated be included on the BNL, along with those who are emergency sheltered.

When a client has a current Housing History record or a current shelter Admission, HIFIS knows that they are homeless. When there is no current record, the client is listed as "Unknown." They'll still be included in the Coordinated Access module and could be on your BNL if they meet your filters/criteria, but if you aren't doing a good job of adding Housing History records, you could end up with a high percentage of clients with unknown housing status, and that could be messy or confusing when trying to determine who needs housing and who doesn't. For example, if twenty clients all go to a drop-in centre on the same day and none of them have a Housing History record, HIFIS has no way of knowing which of them should be on the BNL and which should not (unless some of them are also staying in a shelter), so all of them would be treated in the same way. Some of those clients could be housed but appear on your BNL anyway because HIFIS doesn't know that they have other housing.

- ☐ **Ensure that all staff have the ability to add and update clients' Housing History**
- ☐ **Train staff on adding Housing History records**
- ☐ **Add questions about where the client has been staying recently to common questions and intake forms**

Chronic Homelessness

HIFIS combines the data found in the shelter Admissions module with the client's Housing History to make a comprehensive picture of where a client has stayed every night. Because both of these modules are governed by a start date and an end date field, it's quite a simple calculation for HIFIS to simply count the number of days in each record and add them up to determine whether a client is chronically homeless or not. In fact, HIFIS does this automatically, and clients who are chronically homeless gain that as their Housing Status, along with a datestamp of when they became chronically homeless.

As previously discussed, when clients are staying in shelter, HIFIS is pretty reliable. But for clients who are not in shelter every night, it is important to note that **when calculating who is chronically homeless and who isn't, HIFIS only counts known dates**. So if a client is in a shelter for 10 days, then misses 5, then is in shelter for 10 more, then misses 5, then is in shelter for 10 more, that client has accumulated a total of 30 days of homelessness, not 40.

Housing History. Housing History. Housing History.

It's extremely important to use the Housing History to fill in any gaps between clients' shelter stays, as well as documenting the duration of unsheltered and hidden homelessness, in order to provide HIFIS enough data to determine who is chronically homeless and who isn't.

> The absolute gold standard is to have, at all times, complete data about every single place that every single client has stayed at in the last three years, with no gaps, in order to comprehensively know exactly which clients are chronically homeless and which ones are not. However, this is practically impossible, so instead a lesser - more feasible - benchmark is what is more reasonably expected.

The first time a client experiences homelessness and enters the Coordinated Access system, staff should have a meaningful diversion conversation and attempt to understand, in broad strokes, what the client's living situation has been over the past year or so. This should be translated as best as possible into the Housing History. For returning clients, every single time a non-shelter sees a client, one of their first goals should be to update the client's Housing History. Every single time a shelter books a client in, one of their first questions should be "where did you stay last night" and update the Housing History if the answer is not in a shelter.

Reaching Home uses the federal definition of chronic homelessness: 6 months homeless in the last 12 months, or 18 months homeless in the last 36 months. HIFIS uses this definition to indicate which clients are chronically homeless.

Ontario's definition of chronic homelessness is only 6 months homeless in the last 12 months. In order to rigorously determine which clients meet this definition, you would need to perform additional custom computations in HIFIS, such as through a custom report.

Note that while HIFIS has a status that indicates whether a client is chronically homeless or not, if the client's current information is missing (i.e. they're not currently in shelter and don't have a current Housing History record), then the client's status will be listed as "Unknown" and **not** "Chronically Homeless," even if the client was "Chronically Homeless" yesterday. Gaps are bad.

Housing History, Housing History, Housing History!

- ☐ **Ensure that protocols solidify the practice of asking clients for information about their housing history**
- ☐ **Train staff to understand the value of this data piece**

Updating the List

Your BNL lives in HIFIS and it consists of all the client files that meet your filters. Updating the list simply entails updating individual client files in HIFIS. For example, if a homeless client becomes housed, a staff member should update the client's HIFIS file, via the Housing History or a Housing Placement, to indicate that they are now known to be housed. If a client without an assessment gets assessed, this assessment should be added to HIFIS. If a client on the BNL is assigned to a case manager, the case manager should open a case file in HIFIS to indicate that they are now working with the client.

Simply use HIFIS for your day-to-day work, making updates organically as required.

The gold standard is that every participating service provider uses HIFIS for their-day-to-day work and is adding information in real time.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends that your community have a comprehensive protocol for keeping the BNL accurate and up-to-date, ideally in real-time, but with a minimum of monthly data updates.

> Reaching Home requires that the list is kept up-to-date, and must be updated regularly, monthly at minimum.

> Ontario's minimum standard is that participating providers are updating clients on the BNL at least once per month. At a minimum, therefore, once a month a staff member needs to login to HIFIS and make any relevant updates to the client file.

Inactivity Policy

Since HIFIS' list of clients includes many clients who would have been homeless some time ago, but who you haven't seen in months or years, it is relevant to exclude those clients from consideration. They are no longer considered to be "actively homeless" and instead are removed from the BNL due to inactivity. Should they encounter the homeless-serving system again, they will be reactivated, but at the current time, there's no way of knowing what their situation is.

Modify the Inactivity Threshold for your Integrated cluster.

HIFIS includes an automated inactivity function. There is a set list of actions which constitute activity (such as staying in shelter or having a case management session), and any time one of these actions occurs in HIFIS, the client's date of most recent activity is updated. When no such activity has happened for a long enough period of time, the client automatically becomes inactive, and is removed from the BNL. The number of days required for inactivity is termed the "Inactivity Threshold" in HIFIS, and can be set in the cluster settings for the Integrated cluster. This value should be 90 days or less.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends having a comprehensive inactivity policy/protocol, not to exceed 90 days, that includes clients who left the community, are deceased, have entered public institutions, no longer meet criteria, and those who have lost contact.

> Reaching Home requires that an inactivity policy exists, and HIFIS sets it to 90 days by default, but the program does not specify any parameters about minimum or maximum.

> Ontario requires communities' inactivity thresholds to be not more than 90 days.

Some communities occasionally experience situations in which active clients are becoming inactive in HIFIS, despite actively receiving services recently. This is usually an indicator that some service providers are not using HIFIS regularly.

For example, a case manager may prefer to keep their case notes in an app on their phone or in a Word document. They are working with a client experiencing homelessness, and open a case file in HIFIS, and meet with them regularly, but fail to make updates in HIFIS. The client would ultimately become inactive after a period of time, despite regularly meeting with the case manager, if no activity is recorded in the client file.

> The gold standard is to use HIFIS for your daily work, which will ensure that clients remain active when they should and become inactive after no contact.

> If this is not possible or practical, implement minimum standards. For example, if a caseworker is working with a client, they must update the client file once every month to ensure that the client remains active in HIFIS.

- ☐ **Modify the Inactivity Threshold for your Integrated cluster to be 90 days or less**

Move-Ins

In HIFIS, there are typically two ways in which a move-in is recorded.

The first is through a simple update to the Housing History. For example, the client was staying in a shelter but informs the shelter worker they have somewhere to stay tonight. The shelter worker books the client out and then adds a Housing History record with a start date of today and a blank end date, to indicate it is now a current Housing History record. HIFIS interprets this and knows that the client is no longer homeless and is now housed, and adjusts the client's housing status accordingly. The client would be removed from the BNL. Typically, this method would be used to track clients who self-resolve their housing situation, or who require minimal supports: clients accessing shelters for the short term, drop-in centres, and housing resource centres.

> Use the Housing Placements module for your intensive housing-based case management programs.

The second method is more labour-intensive, but reflects the workflow of housing programs such as Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing more accurately. A Housing Placement record is created when the client is matched to a housing-based caseworker who is tasked with assisting the client in finding and securing housing. The Housing Placement module is used to track the client's search process and ultimately secure a housing unit and move in, and record follow-ups after move-in. This more robust module allows for HIFIS to measure how long it takes housing-based case managers to find housing for their clients, and whether a client has been matched to an appropriate housing resource, and so on. In addition, it allows HIFIS to understand that the client was housed with supports from a particular program, whether Reaching Home, HPP, or some other funding source. Note that once a move-in has been recorded through the Housing Placement module, it automatically adds a record in the Housing History. Typically, this method is used for more intensive housing-based case management programs.

> The gold standard is to utilize the Housing Placements module for your intensive housing-based case management programs, but not for your light-touch supportive services. Instead, for light-touch programs, simply update the client's Housing History after they inform a staff they have obtained housing.

> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends tracking your housing move-ins.

> Reaching Home requires communities to track and report on move-ins, along with people who were moved into housing through support from Reaching Home.

> Ontario requires communities to track people on the BNL who moved to housing, including market housing (with or without rent supplements or housing allowances), community housing,

supportive housing, and transitional housing. Communities are also required to report on the number of people housed with support from HPP.

- ☐ **Equip intensive housing-based case managers with rights to access the Housing Placements module in HIFIS**
- ☐ **Provide training to these staff about the Housing Placement module**

Monitoring Inflow and Outflow

Having a By-Name List is great, but if you're not going to use it for anything, then it's a waste of effort. You're adding new clients to your list, keeping the list up-to-date, and tracking move-ins. But for what?

In order to understand the performance of your homeless-serving system, it is important to understand how many people are entering homelessness and how many people are exiting homelessness. Most communities with quality BNLs export and review monthly data to monitor progress and trends, and at a minimum, most communities are required to report on these trends annually.

You can actually review most status changes on an individual basis in the client vitals history. Open any client file in HIFIS and on the Vitals tab click on the "Display Vitals History" button at the bottom. This displays a list of all the date-stamped status changes, both activity and housing.

To measure and study system-level inflow and outflow, you need a report that shows the clients from your **Level 2: By-Name List** who had housing transitions over a period of time. Since you want to see overall trends, you don't need a huge amount of data about every client. But since this looking at data over time (e.g., a month or a year), you need to pull information about more clients than just those who are currently on your By-Name List. Which report depends on what exactly you want to look at.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness recommends you review your inflows and outflows monthly. For communities that are part of the Built for Zero (BFZ) Canada movement, they ask that you submit your data monthly. For a monthly report, or to satisfy BFZ reporting requirements, use the CAEH Monthly Inflow/Outflow Report: https://www.acreconsulting.ca/caeh

Reaching Home requires communities to complete the Community Homelessness Report annually, which is found in the HIFIS Report Manager. Documentation is available here: https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/community-homelessness-report-hifis-report/

Ontario requires communities to report on inflow and outflow as part of their HPP program. To satisfy these requirements by pulling data out of HIFIS, visit https://www.acreconsulting.ca/hpp-ontario

- ☐ **Obtain at least one inflow/outflow report so you can monitor your system trends**

Using the Coordinated Access List

The other thing you'll do with your By-Name List is use it to identify who is on your **Level 3: Coordinated Access List** or your **Level 4: Priority List**. From these more focused lists, you can determine who is the best match for an available housing resource. But the first step you'll need is the ability to access and manipulate a list of your highest priority clients.

Accessing your Coordinated Access List

You have a few options to access your Coordinated Access List. Unfortunately, HIFIS does not have excellent options to provide an interactive Coordinated Access List that you can use to sort/filter data as well as in Excel, so what most communities do is they take their HIFIS data and export it to Excel, and manipulate it there (i.e. sort, filter).

> It is important to note that these generated Excel files are essentially single use. You would NOT make updates to the Excel document and maintain it separately from HIFIS. Instead, if you notice there is an error on the exported data and you want to address it, update the client file in HIFIS and then generate a new export.

⭐**The least amount of work for you** is through the Coordinated Access module, which is likely your first stop. In the Coordinated Access module, you can click on the "Export to Excel" button. This generates an Excel document which you can then manipulate to your heart's content.

However, more advanced communities may feel that the columns available in the Coordinated Access module export are lacking some community priorities. It is very common for communities, as they become more experienced with their lists, to come up with a customized version of this export which may add a few columns or exclude some others, or change how ones are calculated. Typically, this is a custom Crystal Report, which is run in HIFIS via the Report Manager, and then exported to Excel. However, communities could generate this Coordinated Access or Priority List in another reporting system like Microsoft Power BI or Tableau.

Additionally, you could borrow a customized prioritization list from another community; there may be another community out there who is generating a list that would be similar to yours. For some of these reports, which are available for you to download for free, visit https://www.acreconsulting.ca/prioritization-list.

> For additional prioritization lists, or to purchase your own, visit https://www.acreconsulting.ca/prioritization-list

- ☐ **Identify the method you will use to export your prioritization list to Excel**
- ☐ **Ensure that the right people have the ability to export the BNL and access the resulting document**

Prioritizing Clients and Assigning Housing Resources

Communities are required to match people to the most right level of support and assign a higher priority to clients that have higher needs than clients with lower needs, much like triaging at an emergency department. Data that is used to prioritize clients typically comes from a Common Assessment Tool and Common Questions & Information that are in HIFIS, along with a history of the services the client has received, and this information is consolidated into the Excel spreadsheet mentioned above.

Communities typically discuss and agree on a set of local priorities, such as assigning the highest priority to clients who have been homeless the longest, or to those who have the most complex needs. Once this set of priorities has been agreed upon, it becomes a policy that exists outside of HIFIS. Aside from collecting the relevant information and ensuring it is part of the data export, HIFIS does not require configuration to indicate what your community's priorities are.

After the prioritization criteria are developed, they are implemented on a regular basis by comparing an available housing resource (i.e. housing unit, rent supplement, case manager) to the list of clients in need. Typically, these prioritization decisions are made outside of HIFIS.

In one common scenario, prioritization decisions are made by a case conferencing team. Some team member would generate the Coordinated Access List using HIFIS data and bring it to a case conferencing meeting, and the team would discuss which client would be the highest priority and the best match. This decision would be made offline, but the resulting decision would be logged in HIFIS. Perhaps the decision is made to match the client to an available caseworker; the caseworker would create a Housing Placement record to indicate that the match has been made and they are now working together.

A second, less-common scenario involves simply providing a list of the top 5 highest priority eligible clients for a given housing resource and allowing the provider to select one. In this case, the provider may simply generate a filtered version of the Coordinated Access List (i.e. only showing the top 5 highest priority single veterans, for example), contact the client directly, and invite them to move in. The provider would then simply record that they're now serving the client, for example by updating their Housing History to indicate that they're now in one of the provider's units.

Conclusion

If your community is using HIFIS already or looking to use HIFIS, it is very little work to maintain your BNL in HIFIS. It's simply a matter of ensuring that everyone is working in the same cluster, collecting the right information, using HIFIS regularly, and having a method to export your BNL data. If you're already using HIFIS, you could have a quality BNL that's not a separate document within a short amount of time - the main concern would be ensuring that there is sufficient data in HIFIS about your highest priority clients.

If you aren't yet using HIFIS or you're not sure if it is right for your community, there are more steps that would go into launching HIFIS and using it for your BNL. It's not quite as simple as using an Excel spreadsheet for your BNL, but there are other advantages to using HIFIS aside from storing your BNL.

> Are you looking for assistance getting HIFIS or your BNL set up? If so, contact ACRE Consulting today! Visit https://www.acreconsulting.ca/ or email ali@acreconsulting.ca

Appendix: Checklist

Want a summary of all of the checkboxes we had in this guide? Here they are, all in one convenient place.

- ☐ Create equivalent service providers in HIFIS for all participating providers
- ☐ Add these service providers to the Integrated cluster in HIFIS
- ☐ Develop and implement data sharing agreements
- ☐ Develop and implement common consent forms
- ☐ Turn on the Enforce Consent setting for the Integrated cluster
- ☐ Add consent records in HIFIS for all clients
- ☐ Define your filters/criteria that determine which of your HIFIS clients you want to include for your various lists
- ☐ Ensure that everyone who should be adding to the list has a user account for HIFIS
- ☐ Ensure that these staff have the ability to add new clients
- ☐ Provide these staff training on how to add clients to HIFIS
- ☐ Define your common data points
- ☐ Map these data points to fields/modules in HIFIS
- ☐ Design user rights templates that make use of these fields/modules
- ☐ Ensure that staff are trained on how to collect and enter this information as expected
- ☐ Select a common assessment tool
- ☐ Decide how it will be added to HIFIS - either using the default tools or being added as a custom form
- ☐ Ensure that staff who are expected to conduct the common assessment have rights to be able to do so in HIFIS
- ☐ Ensure that staff who are expected to enter it into HIFIS have training on how to do so properly
- ☐ Ensure that all staff have the ability to add and update clients' Housing History
- ☐ Train staff on adding Housing History records
- ☐ Add questions about where the client has been staying recently to common questions and intake forms
- ☐ Ensure that protocols solidify the practice of asking clients for information about their housing history
- ☐ Train staff to understand the value of the Housing History
- ☐ Modify the Inactivity Threshold for your Integrated cluster to be 90 days or less
- ☐ Equip intensive housing-based case managers with rights to access the Housing Placements module in HIFIS
- ☐ Provide training to these staff about the Housing Placement module
- ☐ Obtain at least one inflow/outflow report so you can monitor your system trends
- ☐ Identify the method you will use to export your prioritization list to Excel
- ☐ Ensure that the right people have the ability to export the BNL and access the resulting document