Data Guidance for Analyzing Racial and Ethnic Inequities in Homelessness Crisis Response Systems

USICH and our federal and national partners recognize the need for communities to address the racial inequities that exist across experiences of homelessness. In order to understand the dynamics underpinning these inequities and develop local solutions, communities must collect and examine both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of this guidance is to provide communities with a framework for gathering and assessing that data.

Quantitative data analysis is most useful for determining "if" and "where" inequities exist within a system. Qualitative analysis, particularly information collected from persons with lived experience, is integral to understanding "why" these inequities exist. Taken together, quantitative and qualitative analysis can enable a continuum of care (CoC) to ensure that the homelessness crisis response system isn't exacerbating existing inequities while also developing solutions to address inequities communitywide.

Quantitative Analysis

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) have both developed tools that assist CoCs in determining "if" and "where" racial inequities exist within their system. These tools examine population data on race and ethnicity and program outcomes data.

HUD Continuum of Care Racial Equity Analysis Tool

Released in January 2019, HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) Racial Equity Analysis Tool assists communities in assessing who is accessing their homelessness services system and the associated outcomes for those individuals and families. This tool assists communities in identifying racial inequities by comparing local point-in-time count data to community data from the American Communities Survey by race and ethnicity.

National Alliance to End Homelessness Racial Equity Network Toolkit

Released in April 2019, NAEH's Racial Equity Network Toolkit assists CoCs in measuring their program and system outcomes to determine if inequities exist by race and ethnicity.

HUD Stella Tool

Stella, a tool within HUD's Homelessness Data Exchange, can be used to analyze a CoC's system performance data by race and ethnicity, to identify any racial disparities that have existed, and to develop models for system changes that may ameliorate racial disparities. Stella consists of 2 components:

- **Stella Performance (Stella P)** analyzes and visually represents Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) data to show how households have moved through the homelessness service system and to highlight disparities. Stella P examines a system's *past* performance, allowing a CoC to understanding where future improvements need to be implemented.

- **Stella Modeling (Stella M),** once launched, will enable CoCs to develop models that assist in understanding how resource allocation decisions impact the capacity of their system. Stella M will enable CoCs to look *forward* at different modeling scenarios of how their system can perform.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Data

GIS data can also be a powerful tool in helping CoCs understand racial inequities in their "inflow" and "outflow." For example, by mapping the last permanent address of persons entering the system and the address of the housing destination when they exit the system, CoCs can develop a visual mapping to see if there are concentrations by race and/or ethnicity in certain geographies of origin and/or destination. For further information on how to use GIS to understand racial disparities in homelessness see "Using GIS Mapping to Help Address Disparities in Homelessness Assistance."

Additional GIS Resources
- Continuum of Care GIS tools
- ESRI, www.esri.com (developers of ArcGIS software)
- GIS Lounge's free resources for learning GIS

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis is integral to addressing racial inequities within homelessness crisis response systems. While quantitative data analysis assists a CoC in determining "if" and "where" racial disparities exist within their system, it's the qualitative data analysis that will help CoCs understand "why" they exist and get at the root causes. In order to accurately assess and effectively eliminate racial inequities, quantitative data analysis must be coupled with qualitative analysis through such avenues as interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

Persons with Lived Experience

The importance of collecting qualitative data from persons with lived experience cannot be overstated. Understanding the experiences of persons of color is vital to discovering many of the root causes of the inequities that may exist within a CoC's homelessness crisis response system. This qualitative data can be gathered by collecting oral histories, administering surveys, and conducting focus groups. The information gathered from these data collection methods can be used to identify overarching themes and patterns related to how a system is causing and/or exacerbating racial disparities. It is also necessary to developing effective solutions.

CoCs can engage persons with lived experience through existing consumer Advisory Boards or by creating an Advisory Board. Additionally, CoCs can invite persons with lived experience to participate in focus groups and/or public forums aimed specifically at understanding their experiences in order to dig into why the disparities exist and to get ideas for system changes that would address them.

CoCs should ensure that persons with lived experience are paid adequately for their time and that their participation is focused on sharing their expertise rather than "telling their story." Information gathering sessions should be structured in such a way that meaningful data is collected that is relevant to informing systems change.

Examples of the types of questions that could be asked include:

- What could have helped prevent you, or other people, from experiencing homelessness?
- If you experienced homelessness as a child, what could have helped prevent that experience for you and your family?
- If you experienced homelessness more than once, what could have helped prevent you from entering homelessness a second time?

- What was most helpful in resolving your homelessness? What do you think has been most helpful for other people?

- What could have helped remove barriers that prevented you from resolving your homelessness?

- How do you feel race and/or ethnicity impacted your or other people experiencing homelessness? What might have helped prevent or reduce those impacts?

- How do you feel race and/or ethnicity impacted your or other people's ability to resolve homelessness? What might have helped prevent or reduce those impacts?

- What recommendations do you have for improving the homelessness crisis response system?

     - What could be improved about coordinated assessment and entry processes?

     - Do you have recommendations for improving: Outreach strategies? Emergency shelter programs? Transitional housing programs? Rapid re-housing programs? Permanent supportive housing programs? Other housing or services programs?

Program Staff

Program staff are a key source of information and data, assisting CoCs in understanding how programs operate and what can be implemented to improve program performance. Collecting qualitative data from program staff via interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys can assist a CoC in further understanding "why" racial inequities exist and "where" in the system the disparities originate. Additionally, program staff can provide invaluable recommendations for system change that can ameliorate any disparities. Program staff can also provide feedback on how a particular component of the homelessness system is performing once a change has been implemented. Qualitative data should be collected from the entire range of staff, from frontline workers (e.g., peer support specialists, intake workers, case managers) to senior administrators.

Examples of the types of questions that could be asked include:

- What are our programs doing well to resolve our clients' homelessness?

- How are our programs posing barriers to resolving our clients' homelessness?

- Are there components of our system (e.g., shelter or transitional housing) where clients aren't moving through in a timely manner? If so, what are the causes of this lack of flow?

- What racial inequities have you observed within program operations and/or outcomes? What do you think are the causes of these inequities? What solutions do you recommend for addressing them?

- What improvements can be made to our programs to improve outcomes for clients?

Conclusion

In order to understand and address racial inequities within homelessness crisis response systems, communities must collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. Integral to the collection of qualitative data is information from persons with lived experience, in order to understand "why" these racial disparities exist. It's not until CoCs understand the "why" that they can then develop effective solutions for addressing racial disparities within their homelessness crisis response systems.