

Guide for Using Equip: An HMIS Youth Homelessness Data Tool

Equip leverages Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data to produce daily counts of youth experiencing homelessness as well as prevalence and incidence rates. Continuum of Care (CoCs) can use Equip to make data-driven decisions and effectively advocate for resources.

Introduction

Credible data on the number of youth who experience homelessness and the characteristics of those youth are critical to Continuum of Care (CoC) and their efforts to prevent and end homelessness among youth. CoCs need these data to make informed decisions about the number of shelter beds or housing units they need for youth, to advocate effectively for adequate resources to address the needs of youth experiencing homelessness, and to measure trends in youth homelessness over time.

All CoCs maintain a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that complies with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [data collection, management, and reporting standards](#). The HMIS is used to collect client-level data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families experiencing, or at risk for experiencing, homelessness and the characteristics of the recipients. These data are central to the annual performance report that CoC program funded recipients are required to submit to HUD.

To help CoCs optimize their use of HMIS data, we developed Equip. Equip uses HMIS data to produce daily counts of youth experiencing homelessness in a CoC and aggregates those counts to generate the prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness.

This guide describes what Equip does and how it can be used.

Key Definitions

Unaccompanied youth	Youth between 12 and 24 years old in a household with no member older than age 24. ^a
Daily counts	Total number of youth who were homeless on a given day.
Prevalence	Percentage of all youth in a CoC who experience homelessness during a defined period.
Incidence	Percentage of all youth in a CoC who experience a new episode of homelessness during a defined period
Episode	Continuous period of homelessness.
Project	Specific program or service within a Continuum of Care in which youth can enroll.
Project type	Category based on the type of shelter, housing, or services provided. Examples include emergency shelter, safe haven, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and street outreach.

^aSee <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HUDs-Homeless-Definition-as-it-Relates-to-Children-and-Youth.pdf>

How Equip Works

Equip uses HMIS data to identify unaccompanied youth. Per HUD's definition, youth enrolled in a housing or service project are considered unaccompanied if they are between 12 and 24 years old and no member of their household is older than 24. Equip determines whether youth are accompanied or unaccompanied for each project enrollment. A youth may be accompanied during one project enrollment and unaccompanied during another.

Next, Equip uses five different methods (see Table 1) to determine whether a youth is homeless on a given day and assigns the youth a homelessness status based on that determination. Then, using each of the five methods, Equip counts the total number of youth who were homeless on that day. Equip does this for each day in the period covered by the HMIS data and graphs the results. CoCs can use the graphs to identify trends in the number of youth being served over time, as well as short-term spikes or dips. The graphs can also help CoCs visualize what happens when housing and service projects are introduced to or removed from the CoC.

Finally, Equip uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate the prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness. The ACS 5-year estimates provide the denominator for the estimate, which is the total number of youth in the relevant population.

Table 1. Methods for Determining Homelessness Status

Method	Definition
Housing project enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Equip counts a youth enrolled in an emergency shelter, safe haven, or transitional housing project as homeless.Equip counts a youth as homeless every day the youth is enrolled in a rapid re-housing or permanent supportive housing project prior to the move-in date.
Contact with a homeless services project	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Equip counts a youth as homeless on each date they have contact with a supportive-services-only project (such as coordinated entry, street outreach, services only) if they entered their current living situation due to homelessness.Equip counts a youth as homeless for the first 14 days following a contact date unless other data indicate that the youth is housed.^a
Self-reported homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Equip uses HMIS data element 3.917 which captures the self-reported actual or approximate date on which a youth's current episode of homelessness began.
Exit to a homeless situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Equip counts youth who exit to a "homeless situation" as homeless for the next 14 days unless other data indicate that the youth became housed.^b
Definitional homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Per HUD guidance, youth are counted as homeless for any duration of 6 or fewer days between documented days of homelessness even if a youth was documented as permanently housed during that period.^c

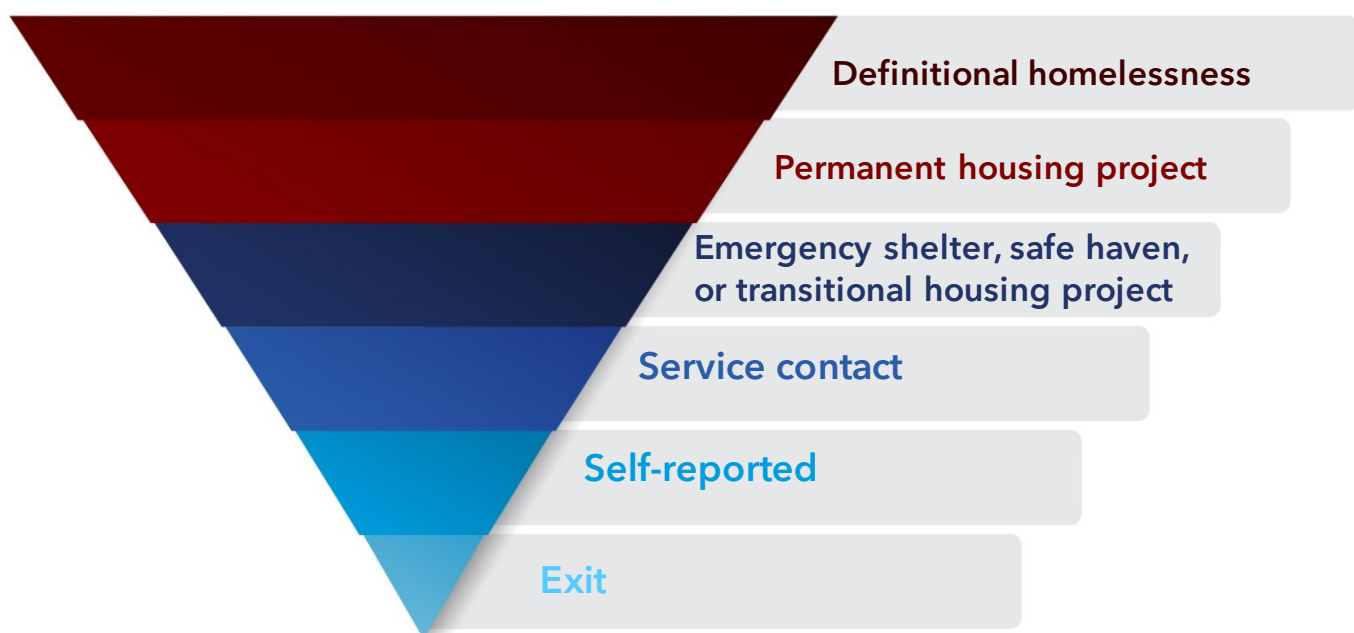
^a This allows for continuity between contacts without counting youth who have not had contact with a project as homeless for an extended period.

^b Homeless situation includes a place not meant for habitation (such as a vehicle, an abandoned building, bus/train/subway station/airport or anywhere outside), a shelter, a hotel or motel paid for with an emergency shelter voucher, or a safe haven.

^c This method of defining homelessness is documented in HUD's [Client Level System Use and Length of Time Homeless Report](#).

Whether a youth is counted as homeless on a single day depends on the method used. Hence, some methods take precedence over others for determining whether a youth is homeless. Figure 1 illustrates this hierarchy. Definitional homelessness takes precedence over every other method because it only counts a youth as homeless between documented days of homelessness. HMIS data documenting that a youth is in a permanent housing project takes precedence over HMIS data documenting that a youth is in an emergency shelter or transitional housing project, while HMIS data documenting that a youth is in an emergency shelter or transitional housing project takes precedence over data documenting service contact (such as street outreach). This reflects the relative accuracy of HMIS data for different project types. HMIS project data take precedence over self-report data, which can be unreliable. However, self-report data take precedence over exit data because no one observes what happens to a youth after their exit date.

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Different Methods for Assigning Homelessness Status



Equip Instructions

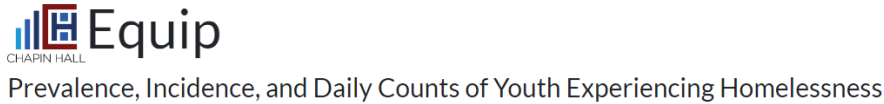
Export data from HMIS

HMIS data can be exported using the HMIS CSV Export function. The HMIS CSV is a standardized report available in all HMIS software and is exported as a zipped folder. Access to the HMIS CSV report is limited to system administrators in most systems. Non-administrators should contact their system administrator about accessing the report. In some HMIS applications, the HMIS CSV report is located in the “Admin” settings rather than the Reports section. Contact your HMIS vendor for help locating the report.

Upload an HMIS CSV Data Set

To upload data into Equip, open the tool, click "Browse," and select the zipped HMIS CSV file (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Importing the HMIS CSV File into Equip

This screenshot shows the "Import HMIS CSV" interface. At the top right of the panel is a link that says "Hide Upload Panel". Below the title is the heading "Step 1. Import File" and the instruction "Select a zipped HMIS CSV file". There is a file selection area with a "Browse..." button on the left and a text box on the right that says "No file selected".

Once the file is uploaded, confirm the report start date, report end date, CoC, and HMIS version, and click "Go" (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Confirming the Report's Start and End Dates

This screenshot shows the "Step 2. Confirm Report Start and End Dates" interface. At the top, a dark blue bar contains the text "Upload complete". Below this is the heading "Step 2. Confirm Report Start and End Dates". There are four input fields: "Report Start Date:" with the value "2016-01-01", "Report End Date:" with the value "2020-12-31", "CoC:" with a dropdown menu showing "SC-501", and "HMIS CSV Version:" with a dropdown menu showing "FY2022". At the bottom left is a "Go!" button.

Set Analysis Parameters

Filters can be applied to all Equip outputs (See Figure 4). Outputs can be filtered based on method (discussed below), client type (youth or all), age group (all youth, youth ages 12 to 17, or youth ages 18 to 24) and accompanied status (accompanied or unaccompanied). Outputs are broken down by other demographic characteristics including gender, race, and ethnicity.

Figure 4. Settings for Filtering Outputs in Equip

Results

Client Type, Age Group, and Accompanied Status selections affect all charts and tables below

Select Client Type: Youth | Select Age Group: 18-24 | Select Accompanied Status: Unaccompanied

Incidence and Prevalence

Start and End dates for incidence and prevalence data can be customized below. Statistics are from US Census ACS data

Inc/Prev Start: 2020-01-01 | Inc/Prev End: 2020-12-31 | Use Statistics From: 2022

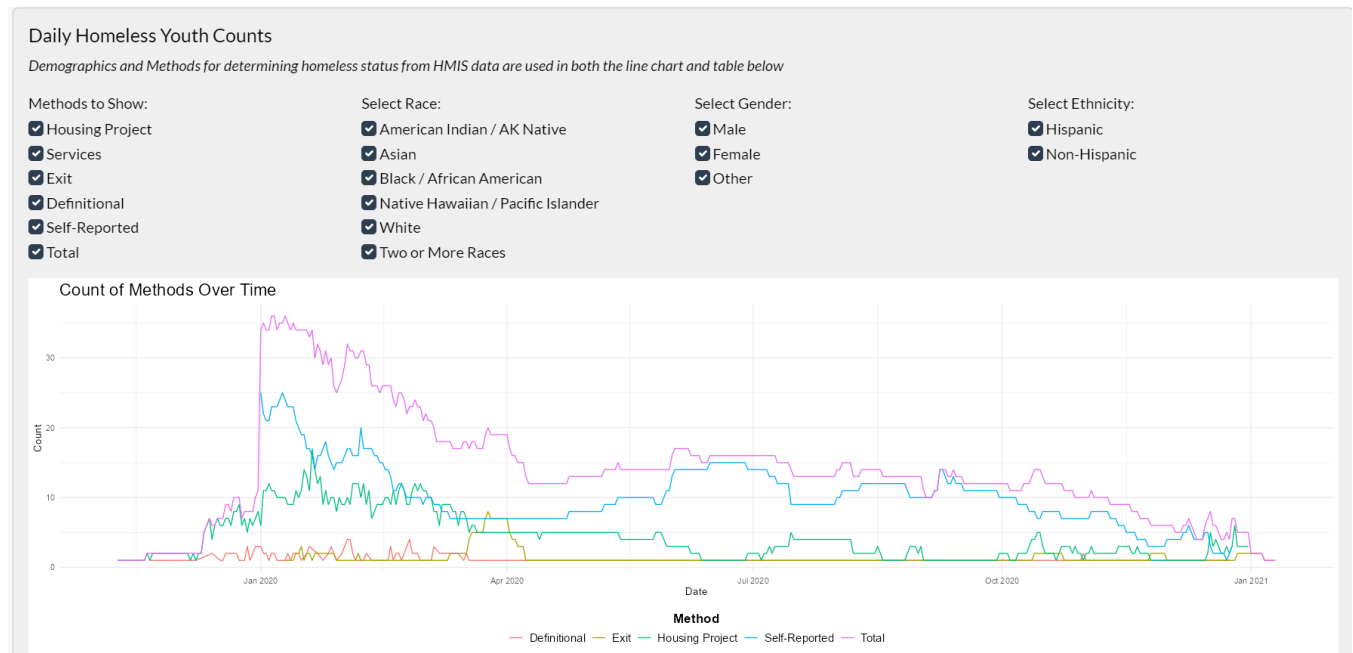
Include Self-Reported Homelessness

Age	Gender	Race	Ethnicity		
Age	Count	Episodes	ACS_Estimate	Prevalence	Incidence
Age 18-19	20	9	23916	0.084%	0.038%
Age 20-24	83	38	54621	0.152%	0.070%
Total	100	47	110301	0.091%	0.043%

Daily Homeless Youth Counts

Figure 5 displays the total count of all youth experiencing homelessness on each day during the reporting period. The count date is plotted on the x-axis and the count of youth is plotted on the y-axis. The checked boxes indicate which groups of youth are represented in the graph. These filters can be applied to both the "Daily Homeless Youth Counts" (Figure 5) and the "Incidence and Prevalence" estimates (Figure 4).

Figure 5. Displaying Homeless Youth Counts



Prevalence and Incidence Panel

Equip requires information about the numerator and denominator to generate prevalence and incidence estimates. The **numerator** is either the number of youth who experienced homelessness within a given period (in the case of prevalence) or the number of youth who experienced a new episode of homelessness within a given period (in the case of incidence). To generate the numerator, set the start date and end date for the relevant period. Then indicate whether self-reported homelessness should be included in the numerator. All other methods of determining homelessness will be used. For both prevalence and incidence, the **denominator** is the number of youth in the CoC's population. To generate the denominator, select the year of ACS data Equip should use (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Setting Parameters for Incidence and Prevalence Estimates

Incidence and Prevalence

Start and End dates for incidence and prevalence data can be customized below. Statistics are from US Census ACS data

Inc/Prev Start: Inc/Prev End: Use Statistics From:

Include Self-Reported Homelessness

The result is a table with five columns (see Figure 7). The prevalence and incidence estimates can be broken down by age, gender, race, or ethnicity.

Figure 7. Incidence and Prevalence Estimates

Age	Gender	Race	Ethnicity		
Age	Count	Episodes	ACS_Estimate	Prevalence	Incidence
Age 18-19	1187	267	47377	2.5%	0.56%
Age 20-24	2799	916	104615	2.7%	0.88%
Total	3671	1183	212359	1.7%	0.56%

The contents of those columns are described in Table 2.

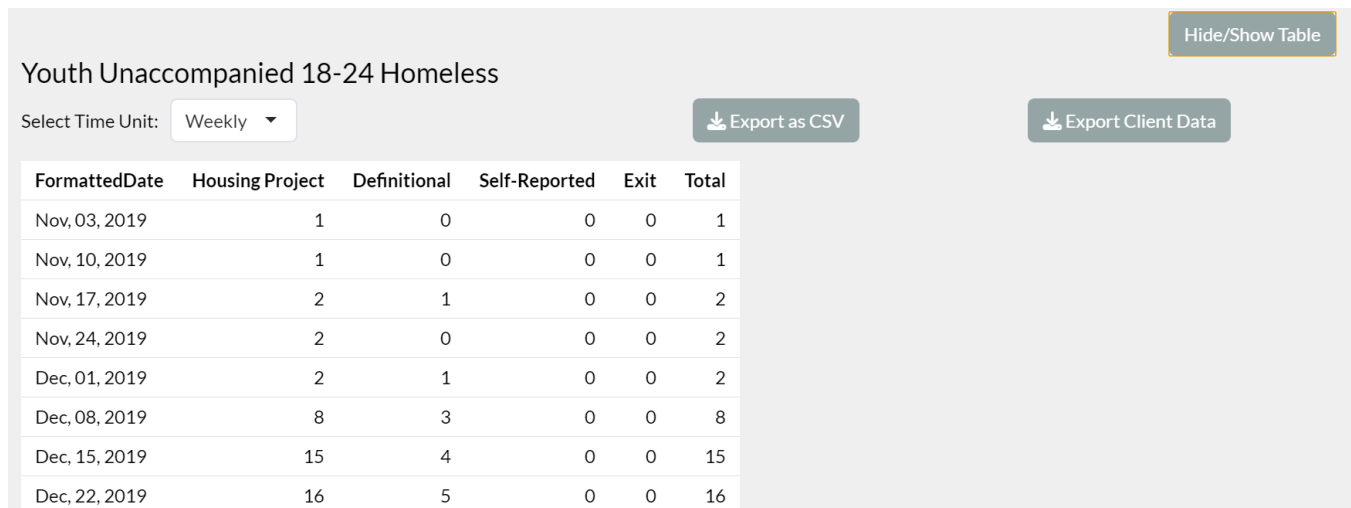
Table 2. Table Elements

Column	Definition
Count	Number of youth who experienced homelessness
Episodes	Number of new episodes of homelessness youth experienced
ACS estimate	Number of youth in the CoC
Prevalence	Count divided by ACS estimate, multiplied by 100, to create a percentage
Incidence	Episodes divided by ACS estimate, multiplied by 100, to create a percentage

Displays and Exports

To display the Daily Homeless Youth Counts in a table, click on the "Hide/Show Table" button in the upper right corner (see Figure 8). Clicking "hide/show table" will display daily homeless youth counts based on each counting method. Also displayed are the total count for all methods combined and the total count for all methods combined except self-reported homelessness. The total counts may be lower than the sum of all method-specific counts because youth counted as homeless by more than one method are included only once in the total. Data can be aggregated by week, month, or year.

Figure 8. Displaying the Youth Count Data in a Table



FormattedDate	Housing Project	Definitional	Self-Reported	Exit	Total
Nov, 03, 2019	1	0	0	0	1
Nov, 10, 2019	1	0	0	0	1
Nov, 17, 2019	2	1	0	0	2
Nov, 24, 2019	2	0	0	0	2
Dec, 01, 2019	2	1	0	0	2
Dec, 08, 2019	8	3	0	0	8
Dec, 15, 2019	15	4	0	0	15
Dec, 22, 2019	16	5	0	0	16

To export the summary table, select "Export as CSV." To export client-level data that show each of the methods by which the client (identified by the Client ID used in your HMIS) has been determined to be homeless, select "Export Client Data." Because this will also export client level data, including client's accompanied status, DOB, age, race, gender, and ethnicity, the file should be saved to a secure location.¹

¹ In this output, "method" refers to the final method used after the hierarchy shown in Figure 1 is applied.

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