



National Veterans Technical Assistance Center

Coordinated Assessment: Improving Access to Services for Veterans

What is Coordinated Assessment?

People who are experiencing homelessness typically need a variety of services to help them exit homelessness. For example, they may have health problems, including behavioral health issues, and legal issues. They also need assistance finding suitable housing and employment. When each of these services does its own intake assessment, the process may be exhausting and

With coordinated assessment, systems use:

- Client-centric decision making
- Standard forms and assessment processes
- Community agreement on where to refer
- Coordinated referrals throughout the CoC

frustrating for the individual, who not only has to travel to each individual provider but also may find, once the intake is complete, that he or she is not eligible. In addition, providers do not know what other services the individual is receiving, which

makes it impossible to provide effective care. In particular, there has often been a disconnect on the local level between mainstream (HUD) services and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs, which caused unnecessary duplication of services for some Veterans and left other Veterans without any services at all. Coordinated Assessment is required under the HEARTH amendments and is intended to address these problems. Its chief aim is to provide a cohesive system that gives Veterans who are homeless access to greater selections of services with less service fragmentation, greater ease of access and in general, less hassle. In 2007 there were 471 continuums of care across the United States. Because of changing regulations, funding constraints and other issues, there are now 402 continuums and over 8,000 grants to communities across the country . According to HUD, a CoC is “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness¹

¹ For more information about CoCs see <https://www.onecpd.info/coc> and for information about connecting HVRPs and CoCs see <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/HVRPCoCNVTACpaper.pdf>

A Coordinated Assessment (Also called Coordinated Entry or Coordinated Intake) System is a point of entry to receive homeless assistance services in HUD funded continuums of care. It is a process by which homeless and at-risk individuals (including Veterans) are evaluated for service needs at any entry-point into the system with a universal assessment tool. This eliminates the need for duplicative assessments by participating providers and facilitates referral to services for which the individual is qualified. While there is no standard tool, the [VI-SPDAT](#) is a new and widely used assessment tool. Community-level organizers and local CoC boards usually determine which tool will be used. Whichever organization first conducts an intake assessment for a Veteran will do a comprehensive review of the Veteran's needs, goals, and program eligibility. The agency will match these to program requirements, availability, and location – elements shared in a Coordinated Assessment System. In short, homeless and employment programs coordinate on assessment and referrals to make entry into the system of care seamless for the client. No matter where Veterans present themselves, they will get the services that they are eligible for and appropriate for their goals.

How CoCs are Already Using Coordinated Assessment

The Continuum of Care (CoC) is the local body that oversees implementation of homeless programs within a given geographic area. Initially formed under The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the CoC now incorporates other entities such as community leaders, Veteran Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs), faith-based organizations, and local business leaders in the homeless system planning process. CoCs are expected to engage and develop partnerships with any entity in their area who serves homeless individuals, including youth, families and single adults. HUD has mandated that all CoCs use the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect data and implement a coordinated assessment process. CoC use HMIS to track data and select an assessment tool, like the VI-SPDAT, to provide clients with targeted services. In some communities, the CoC adopted a closed HMIS system while others elected to operate an open system in which under strict guidelines, providers share client level information.

Shared Data: An Essential Element of Coordinated Assessment

In order to meet and project service needs, CoCs need data on services provided, demographics, unmet needs and other program and client data. HUD and VA are now attempting to share data through the HMIS and other systems, which would enhance coordination. This partnership allows VA programs and HUD programs to communicate at the client level, while allowing planners at the community level to forecast service needs for the greater system. By integrating data to avoid duplication of service, identify unmet needs, and provide data for system level planning; sharing client level information is a vital part of

Coordinated Assessment. A Coordinated Assessment system, using shared data, will reduce wait times for housing, provide better linkages between providers and other entities, and provides a greater understanding of available services to providers and clients. Programs not actively participating in a local HMIS may find service operations difficult.

The 25 Cities Project: An Opportunity to Refine Coordinated Assessment for Veterans

The VA recently launched the [25 Cities](#) Initiative in communities where there are larger numbers of homeless Veterans. The goal is to coordinate VA efforts with local CoC to end and prevent Veteran homelessness. Under this initiative, VA is working to share client and program data with the CoC on the local level and better serve veterans by using shared data and resources to point veterans to needed services. The disconnect that occurs between VA and mainstream programs is now being addressed through this initiative and will be replicated beyond these initial locations.

What Can CoCs and Recipients do to Maintain and Increase Progress on Ending Homelessness?

Ann Olivia, Director of HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, says "Implement coordinated assessment to connect individuals and families with the right level of housing and services to meet their needs. A first-come, first-served approach to serving people should be replaced with a strategy that covers the CoCs entire geographic area where projects use a standardized assessment to prioritize people for assistance, with the goal of helping people, especially those with the greatest needs, move into housing as quickly as possible.

Participating in Coordinated Assessment

Veteran employment and homeless programs are encouraged to participate in local initiatives to implement and maintain a Coordinated Assessment system. The first step to participate in this process is to get to know the CoC leads in your [area](#). Reach out to the local Homeless Veteran Program Coordinators that operate at VAMCS. By communicating and participation in community and CoC meetings, your program will be part of the greater CoC and integrated into the Coordinated Assessment system. Programs will be able to share client-level data, program availability and requirements, demographics, and other data elements captured in HMIS with each other and the greater CoC.

Sources and Additional Reading

Atlas Research (2014). *25 cities*. Retrieved June 16, 2014, from <http://www.25cities.com/>

National Alliance to End Homelessness (2013). *National Alliance to End Homelessness: Coordinated Assessment Toolkit: Planning*. Retrieved June 16, 2014, from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/coordinated-assessment-toolkit-planning-and-assessment>

Building Changes (2014). *Coordinated Entry Toolkit - Building Changes*. Retrieved June 23, 2014, from <http://www.buildingchanges.org/coordinated-entry-toolkit>