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**3-County CoC HMIS Report for Homeless Individuals**  
**January – December 2005**

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Prepared for the

**3-County Continuum of Care  
of Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden Counties**

c/o Peg Keller  
Office of Planning and Development  
Northampton, MA 01060

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## 3-County CoC HMIS Report for Homeless Individuals • January – December 2005

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### Summary

**Thirty housing and shelter programs representing 15 agencies participated in 3-County CoC's 2005 HMIS project.** High participation allowed us not only to unduplicate HMIS records but also to characterize our guests and examine service use patterns across the region for the first time.

**This report focuses on the 1,359 unaccompanied adults who received housing and shelter services within the 3-County CoC during 2005.** Almost 25% of these individuals had more than one stay during the year, and many of these individuals stayed at multiple sites across the 3-County CoC.

Unaccompanied adults were a diverse group with regards to age, gender, and race/ ethnicity. The prototypical guest was a white male in his mid-forties who suffered from a medical or mental health problem. In addition:

- Almost 30% of guests were women when data from the United Veteran's of America (UVA) is excluded
- People of color were disproportionately impacted by homelessness, comprising 25% of all guests
- Almost 10% of guests were young adults
- Almost half of all guests were veterans due to the presence of the UVA

**Collecting information about where guests were staying prior to entering shelter revealed that more than 50% of guests were previously involved in public crisis service systems.** Approximately 32% of guests were discharged into homelessness from these systems. It's likely that many of these individuals could be classified as chronically or episodically homeless (as defined by HUD), but HMIS universal data elements don't collect this information outright.

**In addition, collecting information about last permanent address demonstrated that 62% of guests came from communities within the 3-County CoC.** Another 18% of guests came from Springfield, which comprises its own CoC although it is part of the Pioneer Valley's corridor of homelessness.

**The average length of stay per visit for all sites was 40 days while the average cumulative length of stay per individual was 54 days.** More than half of all guests, however, stayed less than 20 days at one or more 3-County CoC locations.

**Every 3-County CoC site had a noticeable proportion of guests who stayed at other 3-County CoC sites during the year,** ranging from just under 10% of guests at a specialized transitional housing program to almost 70% of guests at a closed-referral SAMHSA-funded emergency shelter. On average, 38% of guests at one site also spent time during the year at another site. This is an underestimate since many 3-County CoC guests probably spent time at emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in Springfield and yet this data was not available for inclusion in HMIS data analysis.

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<b>Reporting Year:</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Participating agencies:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Number of records:</b>	<b>2,241</b>
<b>Bed coverage rate:</b>	<b>80.5%</b>

### Overview

Thirty different shelter and housing programs, operated by fifteen agencies, submitted 2005 HMIS data to the 3-County Continuum of Care. Included in this effort were individual and family emergency shelters, individual and family transitional housing settings, and individual and family substance abuse programs, along with one homeless youth program and one homeless prevention program.

One thousand nine hundred and twenty-five records (1,925) were submitted for individuals staying in emergency shelter or transitional housing. Three hundred and twenty-five records (325) were submitted for families staying in family shelters and domestic violence shelters.

Participation by setting is summarized in Table 1. A complete list of participating agencies is available through Peg Keller, Office of Planning and Development, Northampton City Hall, Northampton MA.

**Table 1. 3-County CoC 2005 HMIS Project: Participating Agencies by Setting and Type**

	Individuals		Families		Total	
	Sites	Agencies	Sites	Agencies	Sites	Agencies
<b>Emergency Shelters</b>	6	3	7	6	13	8
<b># DV Shelters</b>	0	0	3	3	(3)	(3)
<b>Transitional Housing</b>	15	9	2	2	17	11
<b># SA Programs</b>	4	2	1	1	(5)	(1)
				<b>Total</b>	<b>30 sites</b>	<b>15 agencies</b>

**This report focuses on individuals who received services within the 3-County CoC in 2005.** We collected HUD-required Universal Data Elements for more than 80% of individuals, surpassing HUD's benchmark of 75% and allowing for a thorough descriptive analysis. A similar analysis for families has not yet been completed.

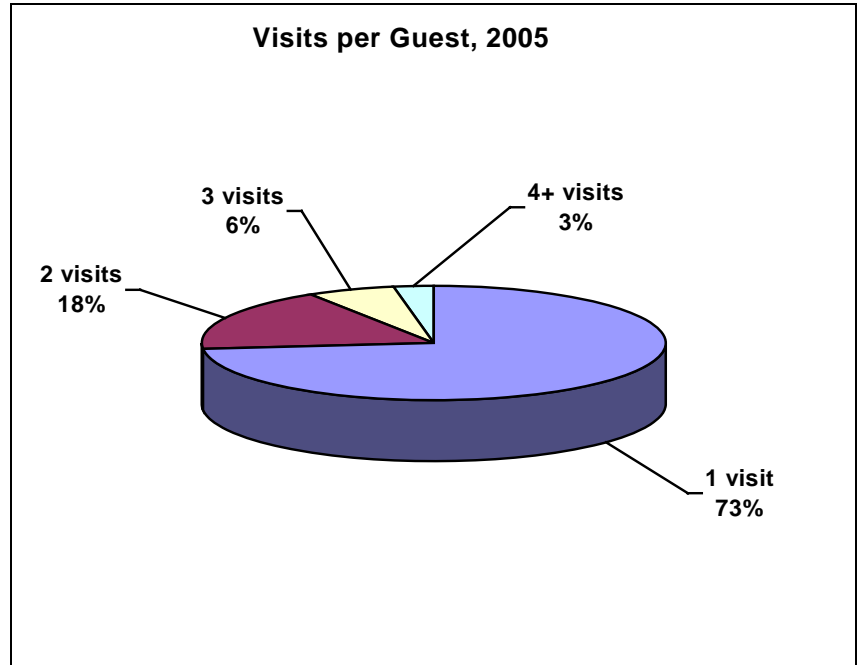
**How many individuals were homeless in the 3-County CoC during 2005?**

One thousand three hundred and fifty-nine individuals (1,359) were provided with emergency shelter or transitional housing within the 3-County CoC during 2005.

The majority of guests had a single visit at one location. About 25% of guests had 2, 3, or 4+ visits at one or more locations, up to a maximum of 13 visits.

**Table 2. Visits Per Guest, 2005**

Number of Visits	Number of Guests	Proportion of Guests
1 visit	995	73.2%
2 visits	242	17.8%
3 visits	82	6.0%
4 + visits	40	2.9%



Individuals who had multiple visits were similar to individuals who had a single visit with regards to gender, age, race/ ethnicity and veteran status. And yet a few important differences between multiple-visit guests and single-visit guests were apparent:

- Multiple-visit guests were more likely to have medical or mental health problems (p=.02)
- Multiple-visit guests were more likely to be doubled up with family or friends prior to entering shelter (32% vs. 20%)
- Multiple-visit guests stayed fewer days per visit (71 days vs. 79.5 days)

More information about length of stay (LOS), and differences in LOS between particular groups of guests, is provided on page 6.

## Characteristics of 3-County CoC guests

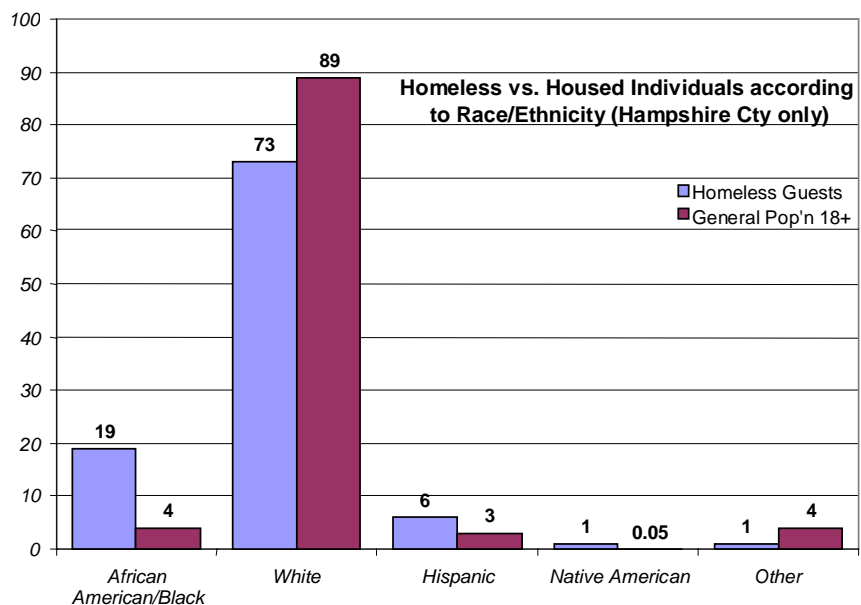
**General characteristics.** Overall, individuals who were provided with shelter or housing during 2005 represented a diverse group who were living in a variety of situations prior to seeking shelter. Almost 20% of all guests were women and 9.2% were young adults. Persons of color, veterans, and people with disabilities were disproportionately represented among CoC guests (Table 3).

Who was our prototypical guest? A male in his mid-forties, with one or more medical/ mental health problems, who was almost as likely to be a veteran as he was to be a civilian.

**Table 3.**  
Guest Characteristics (n=1359)

Characteristics	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Women	19.7
Men	80.3
<i>Age group</i>	
Young adults < 25	9.2
Older adults 55+	16.0
Average age (years)	42.9
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>	
Hispanic	10.9
Asian	<1.0
American Indian	<1.0
African American	17.3
White	74.4
Multiracial	1.0
Other	6.0
<i>Veteran</i>	44.0
<i>Disabling Condition</i>	72.0

**Homeless vs. Housed Individuals According to Race/ Ethnicity in Hampshire County**



**Subpopulations.** There were more similarities than differences between subgroups of guests. For example, women were just as likely as men to have medical or mental health problems and they were just as likely to be living outdoors prior to entering shelter. Young adults were just as likely to have a medical or mental health problem as other guests, though they were slightly more likely to be female when compared to other guests.

Examining differences between groups can be useful when targeting services. In the future, collecting and analyzing program-level data (rather than universal data elements only) might yield better and more actionable information.

**Where did people come from?** HMIS data provides information about where people most recently lived, and what type of setting they lived in, prior to seeking shelter.

*Prior living situation.* The most common prior living situation among 3-County CoC guests consisted of being doubled up with family or friends (Table 4a).

About one third of guests were discharged directly into homelessness by behavioral health settings and jails/ Houses of Correction (Table 4b). And more than half of all guests were already involved in public crisis service systems prior to entering shelter.

In general, our HMIS data support findings that public institutions and agencies contribute to homelessness by creating a direct pathway through discharges to homelessness (Burt 2006).

**Table 4a. Prior Living Situation**

Type of Setting	%
Outdoors/ streets	10.6
Emergency shelter	12.3
Transitional housing	10.1
Discharge to homelessness	32.1
Doubled up	20.0
Hotel/ motel	1.4
House/ apartment	9.4
Unknown/ Other	4.1

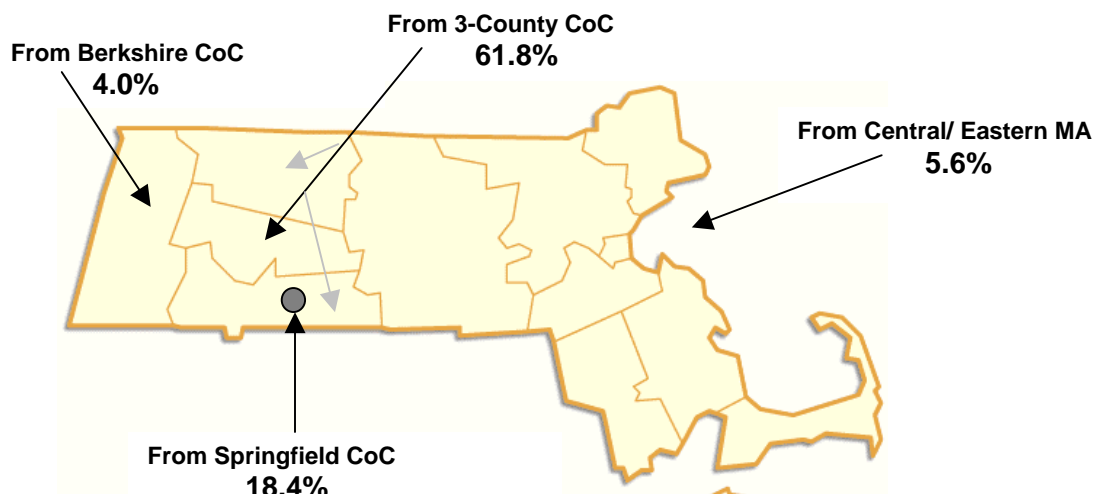
**Table 4b. Discharge to Homelessness**

Type of Setting	%
Detox, SA program	17.1
Respite, psychiatric dc	10.9
Jail, House of Correction	4.1
Transitional housing	10.1

Young adults were more likely than other guests to be doubled up prior to entering a CoC location (34% vs. 22%). Young adults also were more likely than other guests to have been living outside immediately before entering shelter (18% vs. 10%).

**Geographical analysis based on last known address.** Approximately 62% of guests were from the 3-County CoC area according to their last mailing address or last permanent address.

**The Geographical Distribution of 3-County CoC Guests According to Last Address (2005)**



Almost half of all guests whose last known address was within the 3-County CoC area lived in Hampshire County (48%), with one quarter of these guests having most recently lived in Northampton. The most commonly reported last permanent address among all guests was Springfield, MA (Table 5a, Table 5b).

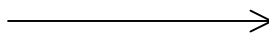
**Table 5a. Geographic Analysis: All Regions**

Last Address*	%
<b>CoC Communities ~ 62%</b>	
Greenfield	7.7
Turner's Falls	5.0
Other Franklin County	2.3
Amherst	3.0
Easthampton	5.7
Northampton	16.0
Other Hampshire County	5.4
Chicopee	3.2
Holyoke	3.8
Westfield	3.0
Other Hampden County	6.7
<b>Non-CoC Communities ~ 38%</b>	
Berkshire CoC	4.0
Springfield CoC	18.4
Central or Eastern MA	5.6
Other New England	4.7
Other	5.4

\*Reported for 68% of guests

**Table 5b. 3-County CoC Region**

CoC Communities (100%)	%
Greenfield	12.4
Turner's Falls	8.0
Other Franklin County	3.7
<b>Franklin Total</b>	<b>24.1</b>
Amherst	4.8
Easthampton	9.2
Northampton	25.8
Other Hampshire County	8.7
<b>Hampshire Total</b>	<b>48.5</b>
Chicopee	5.2
Holyoke	6.6
Westfield	4.8
Other Hampden County	10.8
<b>Hampden Total</b>	<b>27.4</b>



### How long did people stay?

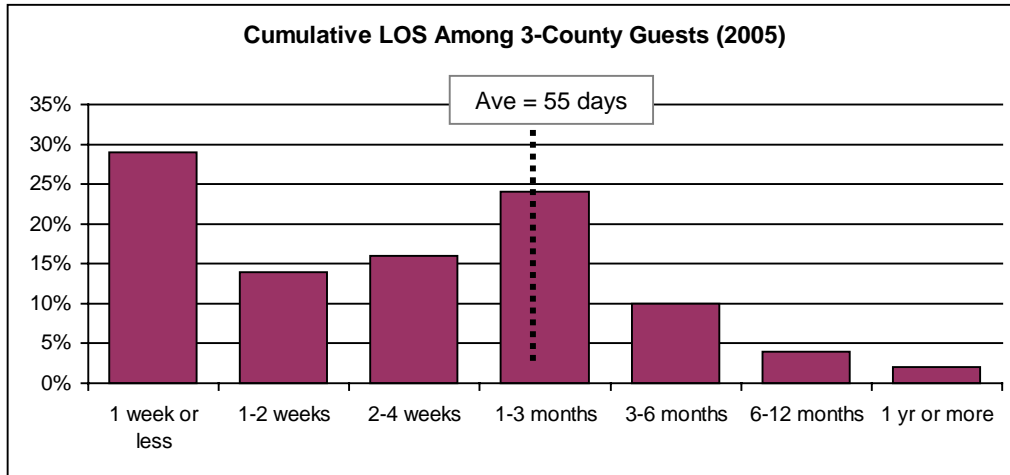
Guests at the UVA had an average length of stay (LOS) of 168 days, more than three times greater than guests at other locations. When excluding UVA guests, the average LOS per visit was 39.5 days while the average LOS per person ~ i.e., cumulative LOS ~ was 54.8 days (Table 6).

**Table 6. Length of Stay Among 3-County CoC Guests, 2005**

Proportion of Guests	Including UVA guests Stayed Less Than...	Excluding UVA guests Stayed Less Than...
50%	35 days	19 days
60%	53 days	31 days
70%	82 days	46 days
80%	133 days	70 days
90%	269 days	147 days
100%	1252 days	1036 days
Average Length of Stay	54.8 days	94.8 days
Median Length of Stay*	36 days	19 days

\*Median LOS indicates the typical LOS among all guests

Half of all guests stayed less than 3 weeks in shelter. Almost 60% stayed less than 1 month in shelter.



A note regarding LOS data: LOS data should be examined according to setting, i.e., within ES only and within TH only. We are limited in our capacity to do this due to the existence of “mixed bed” settings in our CoC. Some settings include ES beds and TH beds in the same location, and our data collection strategies did not account for this. It is likely that LOS in ES settings is less than 19 days (excluding UVA guest stays).

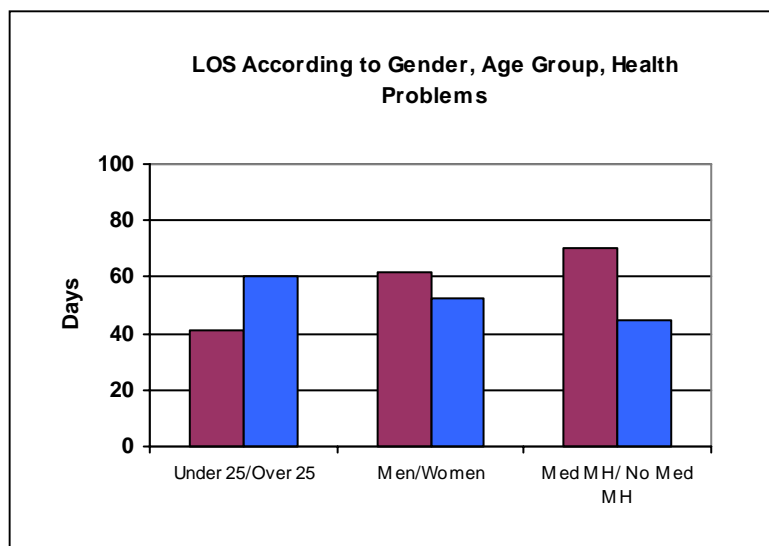
**Is length of stay related to gender, age, race, or health?** Cumulative LOS didn't vary according to race, ethnicity or veteran status. Cumulative LOS varied between men and women and according to young adult status but these differences were not statistically significant.

The only factor related to cumulative LOS was medical/ mental health status: Persons with at least one disabling medical or mental health problem had longer lengths of stay than those without medical or mental health problems (p=.02).

**Table 7. LOS by Subgroup**

Subgroup	Average Length of Stay	
	Within Group	All other guests
Youth	41 days	60 days
Women	62 days	54 days
Illness/ disability	72* days	45 days

\* Statistically significant difference (p=.02)



## Patterns of shelter and housing use

**Multiple-visit, multiple-site guests.** Nearly 25% of guests stayed multiple times at multiple 3-County CoC locations. It's likely that these guests fall into 'episodic' and 'chronic' homeless categories. Determining who is episodically or chronically homeless is complicated by a few factors:

- **Shelter use information is probably incomplete** — Frequent shelter users in our region probably use Springfield-based shelters during the year, but we don't have access to this information.
- **The extent of homelessness is not known** – The Universal Data Elements of HMIS do not include data fields related to the extent of homelessness, such as length of continuous homelessness or number of homeless episodes. This information can be determined by an HMIS when there is at least 3 years of HMIS data.
- **The definition of an 'episode' of homelessness has not been determined** – CoCs are responsible for determining what defines an 'episode' of homelessness. A common method used when defining homeless episodes includes measuring time spent out of shelter. For example, an individual's first entry into shelter is considered the first episode; a second entry is considered part of the first episode if the individual *has not been* out of the shelter system for 30 days or more but represents a second episode if the individual *has been* out of the shelter system for 30 days or more.

The impact of multiple-visit guests is illustrated in the figure below, which shows the proportion of guests at any one location who stayed at any other 3-County location during the year. For example, 32% of guests at the Samaritan Inn stayed elsewhere in the CoC during the year, while 70% of guests at the ISTP shelter stayed elsewhere during the year.

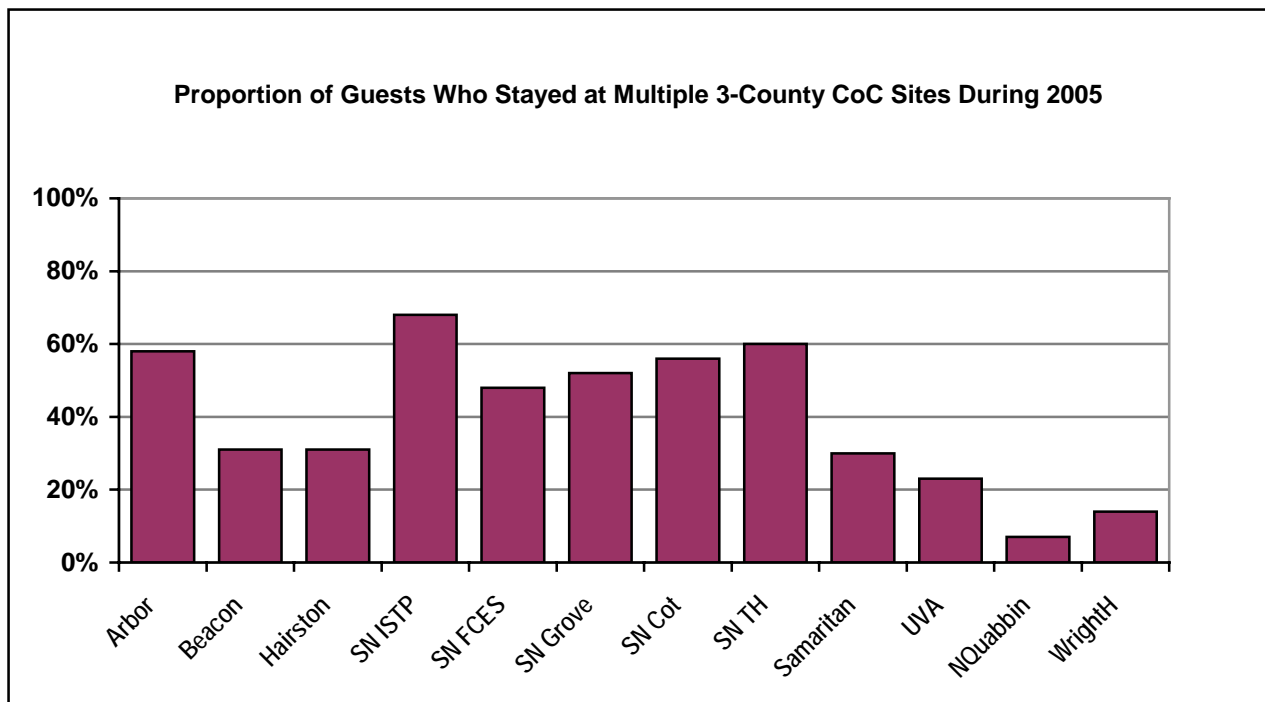


Table 8 and Table 9 include additional information about the number of guests, guest visits, and average LOS at each location in our CoC for which HMIS data was available.

**Table 8. Guest Visits and Proportion of Guests Who Stayed at Multiple 3-County CoC Sites During 2005**

Location	Number of Visits	Number of Persons	Maximum # Visits	Proportion who stayed elsewhere in CoC
Arbor House <sup>1,2</sup>	124	120	2	57.5%
Beacon Men & Women <sup>1,2</sup>	40	39	2	30.8%
Hairston House <sup>1,2,3</sup>	16	16	1	31.2%
ISTP ES (SN)	31	25	4	68.0%
DIAL/ SELF <sup>5</sup>	13	13	1	15.4%
FCES (SN)	196	162	4	48.1%
Grove Street ES (SN)	168	160	2	52.5%
Interfaith Shelter (SN & The Friends) <sup>6</sup>	346	233	11	56.2%
Samaritan Inn ES & TH	330	308	3	30.5%
UVA ES & TH	563	466	3	22.8%
SN Franklin/Hampshire TH	62	55	2	60.0%
No. Quabbin TH	14	14	1	7.1%
Wright House TH <sup>1,4</sup>	35	35	1	14.3%

1=No HUD funds; 2=SA program; 3=Men only; 4=Women only; 5=Youth only; 6=Seasonal ES  
 ES= Emergency Shelter; TH= Transitional Housing; SN= ServiceNet

**Table 9. Length of Stay Among Guests at 3-County CoC HMIS Sites During 2005**

Location	Number of Visits	Ave. LOS Per Visit (days)	Number of Persons	Ave. Cumulative LOS (days)
Arbor House <sup>1,2</sup>	124	26	120	54
Beacon Men & Women <sup>1,2</sup>	40	129	39	132
Hairston House <sup>1,2,3</sup>	16	99	16	99
DIAL/ SELF <sup>5</sup>	13	192	13	192
ISTP ES (SN)	31	43	25	54
FCES (SN)	196	36	162	69
Grove Street ES (SN)	168	40	160	53
Interfaith Shelter (SN & The Friends) <sup>5</sup>	346	11	233	28
Samaritan Inn ES & TH	330	18	308	24
UVA ES & TH	563	124	466	137
SN Franklin/Hampshire TH	62	277	55	293
No. Quabbin TH	14	135	14	135

1=No HUD funds; 2=SA program; 3=Men only; 4=Women only; 5=Youth only; 6=Seasonal ES  
 ES= Emergency Shelter; TH= Transitional Housing; SN= ServiceNet

The chaos of multiple-visit, multiple-site homelessness is apparent when reviewing actual records, as illustrated in Table 9. The data in Table 9 is taken from our HMIS database and represents the entries and exits of 3 individuals who have been coded as Individual X, Individual M, and Individual E. Note that Springfield-based shelter use is not included in the data since Springfield consists of a separate CoC.

**Table 9. Examples of Multiple-Site Shelter Use Among 3-County CoC Guests During 2005**

Individual	Entry Date	Exit Date	Location	LOS (days)	Episode*
Person X	6//2005	06//2005	Grove Street	4	1
X	10//2005	10//2005	Samaritan Inn	15	2
X	10//2005	10//2005	Arbor House	6	2
X	11//2005	11//2005	Samaritan Inn	14	2
X	11//2005	12//2005	Interfaith Shelter	7	2
			<b>Total</b>	<b>46 days</b>	<b>2 episodes</b>
Person M	07//2005	07//2005	Samaritan Inn	5.00	1
M	09//2005	10//2005	Arbor House	13.00	2
M	10//2005	11//2005	UVA	22.00	2
M	12//2005	12//2005	Interfaith Shelter	4.00	3
			<b>Total</b>	<b>44 days</b>	<b>3 episodes</b>
Person E	03//2005	03//2005	Samaritan Inn	22	1
E	04//2005	04//2005	Interfaith Shelter	22	1
E	04//2005	05//2005	Grove Street	3	1
E	05//2005	05//2005	FCES	19	1
E	11//2005	11//2005	Interfaith Shelter	2	2
E	12//2005	12//2005	Interfaith Shelter	2	2
E	12//2005	01//2006	Interfaith Shelter	18	2
			<b>Total</b>	<b>88 days</b>	<b>2 episodes</b>

*\*For the sake of illustration, an 'episode' begins when the individual enters shelter for the first time or when the individual re-enters shelter after having left for 30 days or more.*

## Recommendations

The 3-County CoC had high levels of HMIS participation in 2005, enabling us to quantify and describe homelessness in our region for the first time.

In the future, the collection of program-level data elements might allow us to better define subgroups of 3-County CoC guests so that we can appropriately plan targeted services and programs. Program-level data also provides the information we need to assess outcomes, such as: How many people in emergency shelter enter into transitional housing? How many people re-enter shelter after being housed? Who is most at risk for cycling in and out of the sheltering system?

Additional HMIS-related resources would be needed to analyze these types of outcomes. In the short-term:

- Collecting data about an individual's extent of homelessness might allow for a better description of long-term homelessness in the region
- Distinguishing between ES and TH beds in mixed bed settings would allow for a better understanding of LOS and its relationship to guest characteristics
- Collaboration with the Springfield CoC would allow for an accurate assessment of service use patterns and trends

Implementing some or most of these recommendations could allow the 3-County CoC to use HMIS as part of an overall strategy to end homelessness in our region.

## Acronyms

HUD: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

CoC: Continuum of Care, a HUD-required geographical arrangement of homeless service providers

HMIS: Homeless Management Information System

ES: Emergency Shelter

TH: Transitional Housing

DV: Domestic Violence

SN: ServiceNet Shelter and Housing

UVA: United Veteran's of America

SA: Substance Abuse

MH: Mental Health

DC: Hospital discharge

LOS: Length of stay

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*Special thanks to intern Sara Miller, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, who helped prepare this report.*

*For more information related to 3-County HMIS data, data collection methods, data analysis, etc., contact Andrea Miller: [amiller@servicenetinc.org](mailto:amiller@servicenetinc.org)*