CLARITY
HUMAN SERVICES

Effective By-Name Lists
How to Verify Veteran and Chronic Homelessness

White Paper

Bitfocus

CLARITY
HUMAN SERVICES

T   702.614-6690 x211
F   702.666.9102
TF   888.866.1533
E   support@clarityhs.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities nationwide are working tirelessly to end homelessness. Recently, these efforts have been concentrated on ending homelessness for two subpopulations – veterans, and the chronically homeless. To do so, many communities are recognizing the need to develop, maintain, and use a by-name list (BNL), a continually updated snapshot of all individuals experiencing homelessness within that subpopulation in that area.

In order to be an effective tool, a by-name list must be as refined and accurate as possible. However, problems are arising with the validity of by-name lists – communities are ending up with BNLs that are cluttered and inaccurate due to the fact that it is difficult to determine and document eligibility for both homeless veterans and the chronically homeless. This can defeat the purpose of a by-name list.

There is a solution: collaboration and customization.

When a community increases collaboration between service providers through Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) customization, they are able to verify the right information as quickly as possible – ensuring that their by-name lists consist of only eligible persons for each subpopulation. The result is an optimized BNL ready to be efficiently addressed by communities in order to end homelessness among each of these subpopulations.

Purpose

*The purpose of this white paper is to present **1)** an overview of a by-name list (what it is, why use it, and community examples), and **2)** specific problems and solutions to verifying by-name lists for veteran and chronic homelessness. By the end of this white paper, you will have two ways to refine your by-name list so that you can better address veteran and chronic homelessness in your community.*

Table of Contents

CLARITY
HUMAN SERVICES

T   702.614-6690 x211
F   702.666.9102
TF   888.866.1533
E   support@clarityhs.com

OVERVIEW OF A BY-NAME LIST

What Is a By-Name List?

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a by-name list (also called a 'master list' or 'active list') is a real-time, up-to-date list of all people experiencing homelessness which can be filtered by categories, and shared across agencies. This includes individuals who are unsheltered as well as sheltered (i.e. transitional housing, emergency shelter, and safe haven). This list is generated with data from outreach, HMIS, federal partners, and any other community shelters and providers working with the specific homeless subpopulation.[1]

> **Definition**
>
> A **by-name list** (also known as a 'master list' or 'active list') is a real-time, up-to-date list that identifies all individuals for a particular homeless subpopulation within a community, sheltered and unsheltered.

While most commonly used for homeless veterans, some communities (such as Salt Lake County, whose chronically homeless by-name list has been described as "podium-worthy"[2]) have started applying the strategy of by-name lists to chronic homelessness as well.

What Is the Purpose of a By-Name List?

Referring to veteran homelessness (but also applicable to chronic homelessness), the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) lists the following purposes and benefits of a master list:

- Ensure all individuals experiencing homelessness within a community are identified and their housing needs are known;
- Track the status and progress toward permanent housing of each of these individuals;
- Coordinate housing and services for each individual household between all community providers;
- Measure progress toward goals and how close a community is to reaching an end to homelessness among the subpopulation;
- Identify key barriers to goal attainment and opportunities to resolve them.

It is also important to note that a master list is a critical element for communities pursuing the Federal Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness.[3]

How Have Communities Used By-Name Lists?

By-name lists have been described as a "game changer" in a community's effort to end homelessness, and rightly so.[4] Of the 25 cities involved in the key federal strategy 25 Cities Effort, 20 have developed a by-name list that identifies all homeless veterans in their cities.[5]

For communities such as New Orleans, Southern Nevada, and Virginia, by-name lists are cited to have played a huge role in their achievement of ending veteran homelessness.

New Orleans

Ended veteran homelessness on January 7, 2015. New Orleans used a master list to track when each individual was found by the outreach team, when the VA confirmed the person's Veteran status, whether the Veteran was eligible for VA assistance, whether the Veteran had been formally assessed, if the Veteran had been offered housing, and if the Veteran had moved into a unit (and if so, the type of housing).[6]

Southern Nevada

Ended veteran homelessness on November 6, 2015. Of the key strategies used, utilization of a by-name list was critical. Southern Nevada's multi-agency coordinated outreach team reviews and updates the list weekly, cross-referencing it against the state's HMIS and the VA CRRC database. [7]

Virginia

Ended veteran homelessness on November 11, 2015. Virginia states by-name lists are one way they have improved their overall community response system to veteran homelessnes. The community collaborated with AmeriCorps NCCC members to create a by-name list for veterans, in addition to completing vulnerability assessments for each individual on the list. [8]

A by-name list is the best way to prove a community has reached functional zero. A year later after its achievement, New Orleans is still maintaining this active list, constantly aware of any fluctuations in their population numbers.

If you are new to by-name lists, see the following online resources:
- National Alliance to End Homelessness' FAQ
- HUD's sample master list
- VA's overview document on how to get started with by-name lists

T   702.614-6690 x211
F   702.666.9102
TF   888.866.1533
E   support@clarityhs.com

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS TO VERIFYING BY-NAME LISTS

The purpose of a by-name list is to provide a clear understanding of each identified homeless person and their specific needs, facilitating the efficient coordination of housing and services.

As a master list, a by-name list by its very nature must be as refined and accurate as possible in order to be effectively used.

However, it can be difficult to verify and document eligibility for both homeless veterans and the chronically homeless. This leads to invalid and therefore ineffective by-name lists.

To address this problem, CoCs must make collaboration through HMIS customization a priority, streamlining the verification process and ensuring their BNLs are as effective as possible. Below are some of the specific problems and their corresponding solutions for each of these subpopulations.

Veteran Homelessness

Problems

Regarding this subpopulation, there are challenges in verifying Veteran status and eligibility of a homeless individual.

According to a 2016 research brief from VA, when a non-VA shelter and other social service providers conduct intake, there are various reasons a homeless individual may falsely self-report or not self-report Veteran status. These reasons are listed in the table below.

Reasons one may falsely self-report 'yes' to Veteran status	Reasons one may falsely self-report 'no' Veteran status
• Social desirability bias – the desire to answer a question in a way that might be viewed as favorable by others • Knowledge of and desire for the services available exclusively to veterans	• Those without combat experience or those who left the military with an other than "Honorable" discharge might not view themselves as veterans, therefore reporting their status inaccurately. • Not eligible for VA health or housing services • Demographic groups less prevalent among homeless veterans (primarily women and those under the age of 50) might not be asked their military history [9]

Research shows that these situations lead to significant discordance in data. For example, among shelter users in New York City and Columbus, OH, 36 percent of veterans identified through VA records were not positively indicated as veterans in their corresponding shelter databases.[10]

The lack of cohesive communication between the VA and non-VA service providers creates a difficult verification process for this self-reported data. Additionally, the VA usually has limited access to a community's HMIS in order to determine eligibility. As a result, when this self-reported data is collected in a CoC's HMIS, it is often left unverified and therefore produces an inaccurate by-name list with individuals who 1) are not in fact veterans, or 2) are veterans but are ineligible for VA assistance and should instead be placed on the community waitlist.
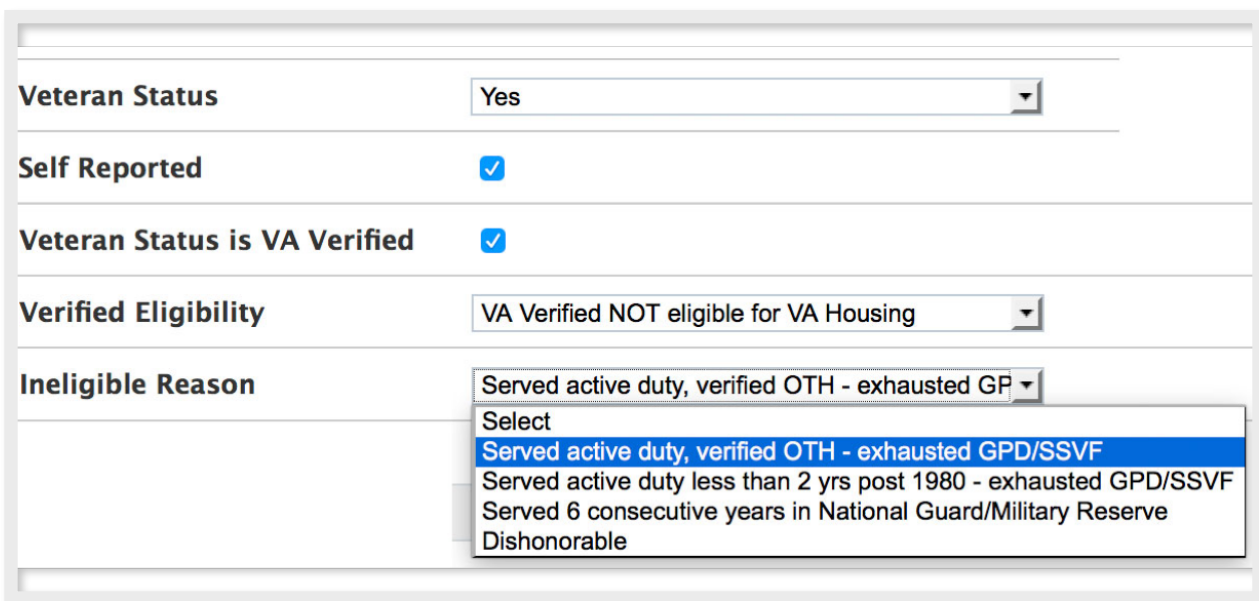
Solutions

Collaboration, as well as HMIS customization, is key to verifying Veteran status as quickly as possible.

In 2015, the VA released a guidance on HMIS "Read-Only" and "Direct-Entry" access, supporting HMIS access requests initiated by local VA leadership and encouraging VA collaboration with HMIS. The VA released a follow-up guidance in 2016, providing VA staff with the legal authority to share information necessary to coordinate referrals and services with community partners. This is a significant step for better collaboration between the VA and communities, especially as it concerns by-name lists.

CLARITY
HUMAN SERVICES

T   702.614-6690 x211
F   702.666.9102
TF   888.866.1533
E   support@clarityhs.com

It is important for CoCs to capitalize on this new guidance, and HMIS customization is one way to do so.

For example, if you have a customizable HMIS, you could take the following actions:

- ✓ Create custom fields (e.g. 'Veteran Status is VA Verified' or 'Verified Eligibility') on intake forms corresponding to Veteran status and eligibility. An example is seen in the screenshot below.
- ✓ Customize an access role specific to VA staff.
- ✓ VA staff are then able to go into the HMIS and cross-reference HMIS client Veteran status and eligibility against the VA database, completing the corresponding Veteran custom fields.

Once status and eligibility are verified, you can pull the HMIS data into your by-name list, confident that every individual on your BNL is verified, eligible, and ready to be addressed. This is how Southern Nevada has approached the verification of their by-name lists, contributing to their achievement of ending veteran homelessness.

Chronic Homelessness

Problems

For this subpopulation, there are challenges in determining whether an individual meets the definition for chronically homeless.

In 2015, HUD established a new definition for "chronically homeless," clearly describing the specifications for this subpopulation so that they can be prioritized correctly. With this new criteria in place, it has been crucial that CoCs adapt their systems accordingly in order to accurately verify the chronically homeless status of an individual.

Image credit: Cecilio Ricardo, Jr Photo Credit : Cecilio Ricardo, Jr

However, because an HMIS is only able to collect data for one particular CoC, problems arise when a person's history of homelessness has occurred across different communities and/or states. For example, an individual can claim a certain length of time they have been homeless – but if any part of that time was in another state or community, HMIS data will not account for the episodes of homelessness that occurred outside that CoC.

This makes the verification process difficult as a CoC cannot independently verify the chronic status for these individuals. Instead, verification is required on the side of the out-of-state providers. As a result, communities have by-name lists with individuals who are not fully verified to be chronically homeless, invalidating the list.

Solutions

As with veteran homelessness, collaboration and HMIS customization are crucial to the accurate determination of a person's chronic status.

With a robust, customizable HMIS referral system, you can collaborate with out-of-state providers to gather the required verification documents for an individual, and then upload the documentation directly into your HMIS. This allows for a more accurate, streamlined by-name list and coordinated entry process with the additional advantage of preparing your records in the event of an audit.

For example, you could do the following within your HMIS:

- ✓ Set up your programs to require specific documentation for eligibility, directly related to verifying chronic status.
- ✓ Upload all documentation that has been accumulated to verify the chronic status of a client (e.g. disability documents, or historical homeless documentation). An example of these uploaded client files is seen in the screenshot above.

Once the client is shown to be "document ready" (i.e. all necessary documents to determine eligibility have been uploaded to the client record within the HMIS), you can pull the HMIS data into your by-name list, confident that every individual on your BNL is verified as chronically homeless, and is therefore ready to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Referencing by-name lists, the Community Solutions blog says it well:

> "[Communities] are embracing the sector's iterative evolution toward better data and showing for the first time what it looks like to end homelessness rigorously and verifiably. Progress on that front is rooted in the constant improvement of systems and practices … This progress, driven by learning and improvement, will help push us forward in our efforts to end veteran and chronic homelessness … "[11]

By-name lists have revolutionized the way we target and measure veteran and chronic homelessness. When communities steward their BNLs well by verifying the appropriate information through collaboration and HMIS customization, they ensure these lists are as refined and accurate as possible. And in doing so, a by-name list truly becomes a master list – an effective tool for communities to end homelessness among these subpopulations.

REFERENCES

[1] United States of America, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2015, September). *Identifying and Engaging Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*. Retrieved May 6, 2016, from https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Vets-at-Home-Identifying-and-Engaging-Veterans-Toolkit.pdf

[2] Cortez, M. (2016, April 23). Triage group knows Utah's chronically homeless by name, individual needs. Retrieved May 6, 2016, from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865652822/Triage-group-knows-Utahs-chronically-homeless-by-name-individual-needs.html?pg=all

[3] United States of America, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Support Services for Veteran F. (2016, March). *Overview: The Master List*. Retrieved May 6, 2016, from http://thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=py5i5dN95YM=&tabid=166

[4] What Will It Take to End Homelessness in My Community? Ask Your By-Name List. (n.d.). Retrieved May 6, 2016, from https://www.cmtysolutions.org/blog/what-will-it-take-end-homelessness-my-community-ask-your-name-list

[5] Summary of 25 Cities Effort. (n.d.). Retrieved May 6, 2016, from http://www.25cities.com/

[6] United States of America, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2015, December). *Ending Veteran Homelessness in New Orleans*. Retrieved May 6, 2016, from https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Ending-Veteran-Homelessness-in-New-Orleans.pdf

[7] Bond, A. (2016, January 6). How Southern Nevada Achieved an End to Veteran Homelessness. Retrieved May 6, 2016, from https://www.usich.gov/news/how-southern-nevada-achieved-an-end-to-veteran-homelessness

[8] Frequently Asked Questions: Veteran's Day Ending Veteran Homelessness Announcement [PDF]. (2015, November 11). Virginia Department of Veterans Services.

[9] Treglia, D. (2016, March 8). *Identifying and Serving Veterans Accessing Community-based Homeless Services: A Study of Three U.S. Cities* (United States of America, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans). Retrieved May 6, 2016, from http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Treglia_brief.pdf

[10] Treglia, D. (2016, March 8). *Identifying and Serving Veterans Accessing Community-based Homeless Services: A Study of Three U.S. Cities* (United States of America, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans). Retrieved May 6, 2016, from http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Treglia_brief.pdf

[11] What Will It Take to End Homelessness in My Community? Ask Your By-Name List. (n.d.). Retrieved May 6, 2016, from https://www.cmtysolutions.org/blog/what-will-it-take-end-homelessness-my-community-ask-your-name-list