Chronic Homelessness & the Homeless History Tracking Form

Prepared by Institute for Community Alliances
Revised January 2020

Table of Contents

If you wish to access a particular section directly from the table of contents you can do so by holding down the Ctrl key and clicking on the heading of the section you wish to review.

Purpose of Guide

The purpose of this guide is to equip Wisconsin HMIS Users to accurately and consistently document clients' length of time homeless using the Homeless History Tracking Form (HHTF) and the Chronic Homeless Determination Information (3.917) fields in HMIS.[1]

This process is in compliance with the HMIS Data Standards Manual (April 2018) and the Milwaukee CoC Coordinated Entry Manual (March 2018), and draws heavily from the documentation guidelines articulated in the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH): Defining "Chronically Homeless" Final Rule (December 2015), which is outlined below.

Chronic Homelessness: Definition & Calculation

The primary purpose for documenting length of time homeless is to establish eligibility for community resources available only to those whose experience meets HUD's definition of Chronically Homeless.

HUD Definition of Chronic Homelessness

HUD has established that a client is **Chronically Homeless** if they meet the following criteria:

1. Have a disability,
2. Are currently living in a place not meant for human habitation, safe haven, or emergency shelter, AND
3. **Whose documented homeless history meets one of two thresholds**:
    a. 12+ months of continual residence in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, emergency shelter, or a combination of these; **OR**
    b. 4 or more separate episodes of living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, emergency shelter, or a combination of these in the past 3 years, with the total number of months homeless totaling 12+ months**.**

Forms of Homeless Documentation

Although HMIS data entry only requires client self-report, eligibility for programs with chronic homelessness as a criterion depends on the available back-up documentation to verify client self-report.

Acceptable forms of documentation include...

- ❖ **HMIS** Emergency Shelter & Safe Haven enrollments and Street Outreach contact records;
- ❖ **Third-party letters** that bear witness to a client being in a "place not meant for habitation" or an Emergency Shelter/Safe Haven that does not participate in the local CoC's HMIS.
- ❖ **Self-certification letters** that validate a limited period of client self-report.[2]

[1] This guide refers to the Excel version of the HHTF, which replaces the previous Microsoft Word version.
[2] Limit one Self-Certification per client, up to three months in a single episode; may require explanation of attempts to secure other documentation.

Length of Time Homeless Calculations

There are specific rules that govern the calculation of a client's history of homelessness. Staff should still be familiar with these core principles when completing the HHTF:

1. **Any single day of documented contact between a client and service provider** where the client was living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or emergency shelter is countable as covering the entire month in which that day falls.

   The ONLY exception occurs when there is documented proof of a break in homelessness. In that case, staff must count the actual days in that month that were spent living in a place not meant for human habitation. When entering data in Service Point, counted days should be rounded up or down to the nearest month.

2. **Breaks in homelessness** are defined as any 7-night period when a client was **NOT** living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or emergency shelter. There are **additional rules** governing the determination of breaks:
   - If a client becomes homeless after a period of stay at an **institutional setting** such as a hospital, psychiatric facility, detox center, or correctional facility AND
     - They stayed there fewer than 90 days, AND
     - Were living in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or emergency shelter prior to their entry into the institution setting, THEN…

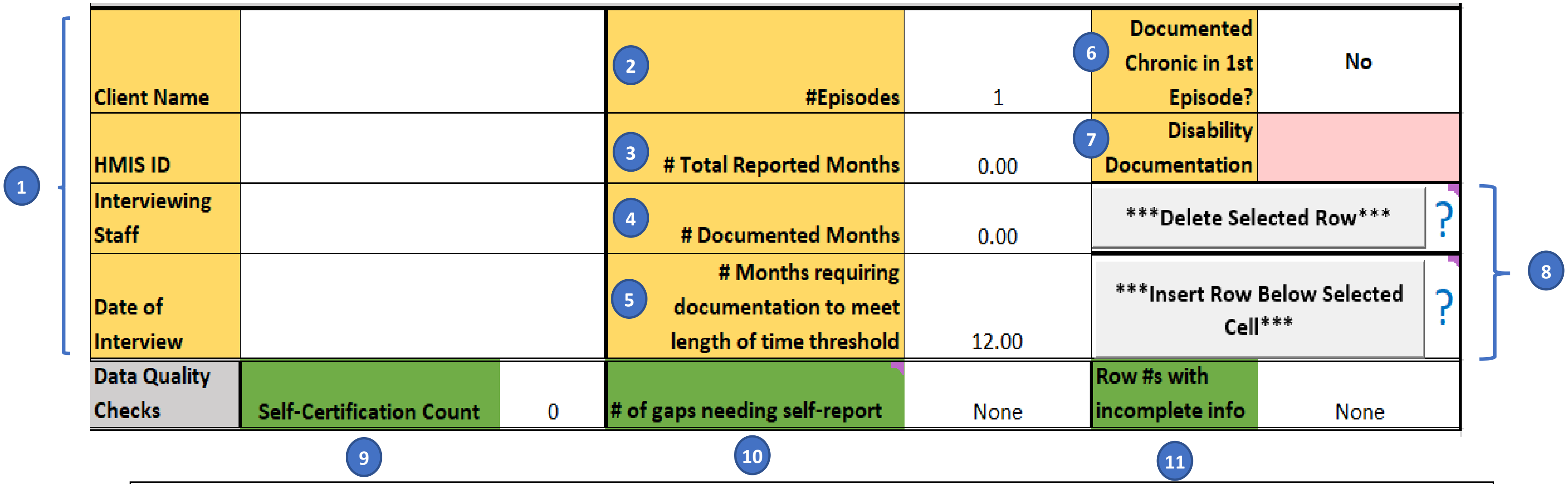
     The time spent in that setting does not count as a break in homelessness and can instead be added to the total documented number of months a client has been homeless.

   - Following a client's initial experience of homelessness, successive **episodes of homelessness** must be preceded by a break in homelessness. **If there are no breaks** in a client's history of homelessness, all months are considered part of the same continuous episode.

The Layout of the Homeless History Tracking Form

The Header Table

Most of the Header Table is *non-editable*. It is meant to provide basic information on the client and summarize the information captured in the Timeline Table. It also contains tools for adding/removing rows to the Timeline Table and a few Data Quality checks that can alert the user of any issues with the Timeline Table data.



Client Name		#Episodes	1	Documented Chronic in 1st Episode?	No
HMIS ID		# Total Reported Months	0.00	Disability Documentation	
Interviewing Staff		# Documented Months	0.00	***Delete Selected Row*** ?	
Date of Interview		# Months requiring documentation to meet length of time threshold	12.00	***Insert Row Below Selected Cell*** ?	
Data Quality Checks	Self-Certification Count 0	# of gaps needing self-report	None	Row #s with incomplete info	None

Header Table Legend:	
1	These **editable** fields are used to input basic information about the Client, Interviewer, and Date of Interview.[3]
2	Calculates the number of episodes of homelessness based on homeless situations that are preceded by non-homeless situations in the Timeline Table.
3	Calculates the total number of months homeless reported in the Timeline table, regardless of the answers to the *Documentation Obtained?* Field.
4	Calculates the total number of months homeless for which the answer to the *Documentation Obtained?* field is either “Yes” or “N/A.”
5	This field subtracts the # Documented Months from 12. “None, client is verified” displays when 12+ months are documented.
6	Checks whether the client reached the documentation threshold when looking only at their first episode, which can be important In cases where the client has 2 or 3 episodes of homelessness.
7	This **editable** field is informational, allowing the interviewing staff to note the current status of disability documentation. Select the appropriate option using the drop-down list: “Verified Yes,” “Self-report Yes; Verification Pending,” and “No Disability.”
8	Clicking these buttons will either delete the row of the selected cell or add a row below the selected cell of the Timeline Table.
9	Will display red, indicating error, when there >1 row of the Timeline Table with “Self-Certification” listed for *Documentation Source*.
10	Will display red and a count of rows that have “Gap (need self-report)” listed for *Housing Situation.* This should be “None” after interview.
11	Will display red and indicate the row number for rows that are missing any values in the Timeline Table (excludes *Documentation Notes)*.

[3] Date of Interview is also the effective date for the information contained within the HHTF.

The Timeline Table

The timeline table starts at the current date and allows a history to be built working backwards up to 3 years from the interview date. All fields except *Documentation Notes* require a response for a row to be complete.

Housing Situation	Start Date	End Date	Months Homeless	Whereabouts (description)	Documentation Source (obtained or anticipated)	Documentation Obtained?	Documentation Notes
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Timeline Table Legend:	
1	Select the housing situation for the period described. Only *one* housing situation may be selected.[4]
2	The Start Date must be manually entered for each row.
3	The End Date auto-populates based on the above row's Start Date.
4	This field auto-calculates based on the housing situation, start and end dates, and surrounding rows.
5	Allows you to describe the specific situation of the client during this period (e.g. "Rescue Mission Safe Harbor").
6	For homeless situations, select the form of documentation obtained or anticipated; will auto-populate "N/A" for non-homeless situations.
7	For homeless situations, select whether documentation is obtained or is pending; will auto-populate "N/A" for non-homeless situations.
8	Clicking these buttons will either delete the row of the selected cell or add a row below the selected cell of the Timeline Table.

[4] See *Frequently Asked Questions* for guidance on how to handle situations where a client is transient.

STEPS FOR COMPLETING THE HOMELESS HISTORY TRACKING FORM

Transcription of the HMIS record

Before interviewing the client, staff should consult a client's HMIS record to create the "first draft" of the HHTF.

This serves multiple purposes:

- ❖ Having this information already in the HHTF will provide touchstones for the client interview and lessen the burden on the client during the interview to recall their experience.
- ❖ HMIS shelter/safe haven enrollment and street outreach contact records automatically count toward homelessness documentation requirements and provide a clearer sense of the documentation that may be needed going into the client interview.
- ❖ If a client's HMIS record is comprehensive enough, the client interview may not even be necessary.

Reviewing the HMIS Record

Generally, the **Summary tab** of the client's HMIS record provides the most comprehensive view of a client's contact with CoC providers:

The ***Shelter Stays*** table should display all emergency shelter enrollments:

Shelter Stays

	Start Date	End Date	Provider
	10/30/2017	11/12/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor
	10/12/2017	10/13/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor
	09/07/2017	09/10/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor
	09/03/2017	09/06/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor
	08/15/2017	08/20/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor
	08/09/2017	08/14/2017	Milwaukee Rescue Mission Safe Harbor

Showing 1-6 of 18 First

The ***Entry/Exits*** table displays all CoC project enrollments, including those for permanent housing, transitional housing, and participating institutional care providers. All enrollments that speak to a client's housing situation should be documented in the Timeline Table.

Entry/Exits

Program	Type	Project Start Date	Exit Date
Guest House of Milwaukee HomeLinc III PSH	HUD	02/07/2019	
IMPACT - SAMHSA Clinical SSO	Basic	01/18/2019	
Community Advocates Autumn West Safe Haven	HUD	11/16/2017	02/07/2019
Milwaukee CoC Project Homeless Connect	Basic	10/19/2017	10/20/2017
Milwaukee County Outreach Services PATH Program Street Outreach	PATH	08/09/2017	11/16/2017
Guest House of Milwaukee GATES Emergency Shelter	Basic	08/07/2017	08/08/2017

Add Entry / Exit   **Showing 1-6 of 13**   First   Previous   Next   Last

Street Outreach Entry/Exits may cover a broader timeframe than the actual months a client was seen by an outreach worker. For this reason, staff must verify that every distinct month covered by a Street Outreach Entry/Exit is verified either by an ***Current Living Situation sub-assessment record*** (found at the bottom of the Summary page) or a third-party verification letter. In some cases, street outreach contacts will be logged without a corresponding Entry/Exit, and these may also be logged in the HHTF.

Current Living Situation

Information Date	Current Living Situation	Start Date *
08/01/2017	Place not meant for habitation (HUD)	08/01/2017
07/19/2017	Place not meant for habitation (HUD)	07/19/2017
03/01/2018	Place not meant for habitation (HUD)	03/01/2018
01/01/2020	Place not meant for habitation (HUD)	01/01/2020

Add   **Showing 1-4 of 4**

Third-party verification letters and self-certification letters can be found in the ***File Attachments*** section at the bottom of the **Client Profile** tab of the client's HMIS record:

File Attachments

Date Added	Name	Description	Type
07/09/2018	R.M. Tracking Form.pdf		pdf
07/09/2018	R.M. Night Prior.pdf		pdf

Add New File Attachment

Entering the HMIS information into the Timeline Table

Each row of the timeline table should be completed from left to right, keeping the following guidance in mind:

- ***Housing Situation*** should be answered based on the project type in which the client was served during the time period.
    - If you are unsure of the proper categorization for any enrollment, reach out to your HMIS System Administrator.
    - If you do not have information for a period, you will enter one of the following:
        - **"Gap (need self-report)"** for when there is a gap that covers at least an entire calendar month.[5]
        - **"Gap (presumed homeless)"** for when there is a gap between sheltered situations within a calendar month without evidence of a break, homelessness can be presumed, subject to the final Coordinated Entry documentation review.[6]

- ***Start Date*** should reflect the first date that the client was in the selected situation. As **End Date** auto-populates, staff will need to choose the appropriate Start Date for each row, depending on the Housing Situation:
    - **"Place not meant for habitation" situations documented in HMIS through outreach contacts, third-party letters, or a self-certification letters** can be used to count for the entire calendar month (or months) in which they occur unless there is evidence of a break or overlap with an Emergency Shelter or Safe Haven enrollment.
    - The specific dates of **Emergency Shelter and Safe Haven enrollments** should be documented as they appear in HMIS except when there are multiple shelter stays separated by <7 days, in which case they may be treated as one continuous enrollment.
    - The specific dates of all **permanent housing, transitional housing, and institutional care projects** should also be documented as they appear in HMIS.
    - **For records where you have entered "Gap (need self-report)" in *Housing Situation***, **STOP** after entering the Start Date and continue to the next row.

- For ***Documentation Source*****,** select **"Month Already Counted"** when there is a gap between sheltered situations within a calendar month without evidence of a break. At this stage, will always be paired with "Gap (presumed homeless)" but may also accompany client self-report.

- At this stage, the answer for **Documentation Obtained?** should always be either "Yes" or "N/A."

---

[5] Selecting "Gap (need self-report)" will turn the field red. This is meant to convey that the row is incomplete and makes it easier to find when conducting the client interview. The "# of gaps needing self-report" data quality field in the Header Table will also tally each row that fits this criterion.
[6] Selecting "Gap (presumed homeless)" will turn the field yellow if the period is >6 days. This is not necessarily an error but does alert a reviewer to determine whether the usage was appropriate.

Once all available documentation has been reviewed and transcribed into the Timeline Table, any missing information should be encoded as a row with "Gap (need self-report)." **If there are no gaps requiring client self-report, the HHTF is finished**—skip to *"The HHTF and HMIS."*

The Client Interview

Documentation of a client's self-report in the Timeline Table follows the same general pattern as transcription from the HMIS record. The following protocols should be observed:

- During the interview, it is the responsibility of the interviewing case manager to guide the client through the self-report process. This may include…
  - Asking follow-up questions to get a better picture of a client's history,
  - Sharing information from the client's documented record of service utilization in Service Point to help jog the client's memory, or
  - In cases of high acuity mental health and AODA barriers to accurate self-report, overriding client's self-report based on professional knowledge of a client's history of homelessness.

- For ***Housing Situation****:*
  - If the client reports a period of mixed housing situations where there was no break, the predominant homeless situation should be used to characterize the period, with a note of explanation if deemed necessary.

  - If the client does not recall their living situation and there is no other documentation for a period of time, staff completing the interview should make a determination on whether it is likely that the client was homeless during a period based on the living situations immediately prior and after the undefined period, documenting either as a break or as "Gap – presumed homeless." If significant to chronic homeless determination, these cases will be decided by the Coordinated Entry reviewer.

- For ***Documentation Source***:
  - Generally, you will be entering the documentation you believe will be required. In most cases, this will be either a third-party verification letter or self-certification letter.
  - If the client reports being in a place not meant for habitation or hotel/motel paid for by a third party **AND** there is already a documented enrollment in the pertinent calendar month, "Month Already Counted" may be used.

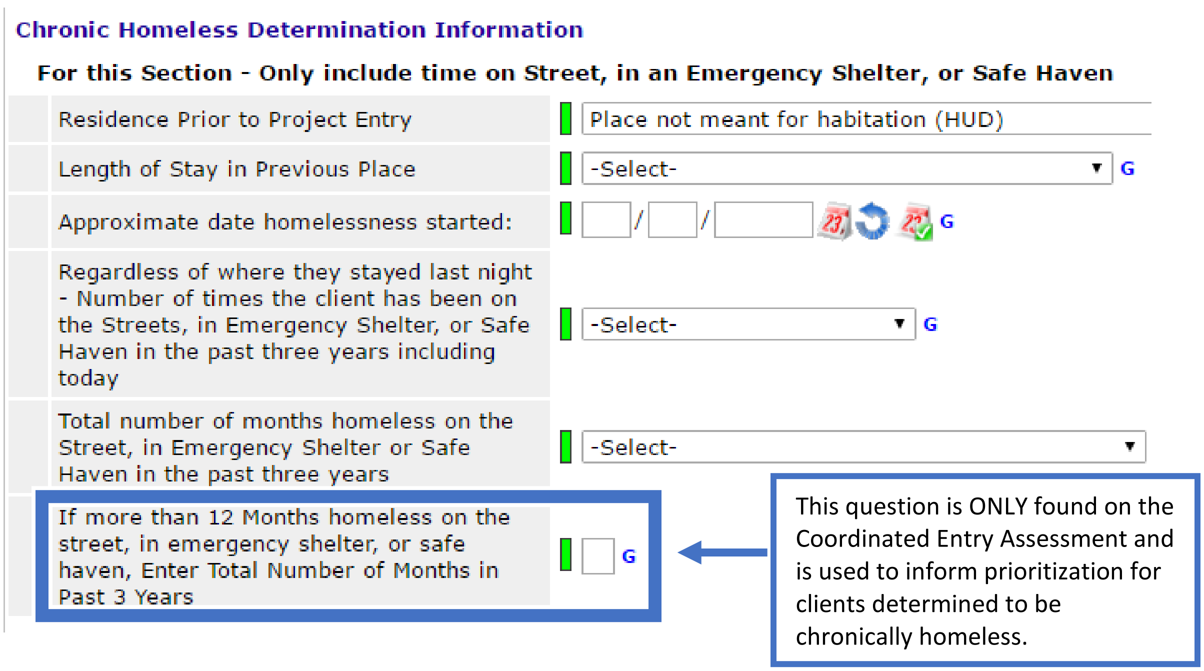
- For ***Documentation Obtained?***, "Pending" will be used in all cases except when "Month Already Counted" is selected for *Documentation Source*. Once the additional documentation has been obtained, the response for the pertinent row can be changed to "Yes."

THE HHTF AND HMIS

The Chronic Homeless Determination Questions

The Chronic Homeless Determination Questions are a set of HUD-specified data fields in HMIS that reflect a client's living situation prior to project entry and, by extension, identify clients that may be experiencing chronic homelessness in our community.

<u>The questions always appear as a set and look like this</u>:



Chronic Homeless Determination Information

For this Section - Only include time on Street, in an Emergency Shelter, or Safe Haven

Residence Prior to Project Entry	Place not meant for habitation (HUD)
Length of Stay in Previous Place	-Select- G
Approximate date homelessness started:	/ / G
Regardless of where they stayed last night - Number of times the client has been on the Streets, in Emergency Shelter, or Safe Haven in the past three years including today	-Select- G
Total number of months homeless on the Street, in Emergency Shelter or Safe Haven in the past three years	-Select-
If more than 12 Months homeless on the street, in emergency shelter, or safe haven, Enter Total Number of Months in Past 3 Years	G

This question is ONLY found on the Coordinated Entry Assessment and is used to inform prioritization for clients determined to be chronically homeless.

There are two versions of the Chronic Homeless Determination Questions, both of which will provide the necessary information for determining a client's current chronic homelessness status in HMIS:

- If your program is an **Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, or Street Outreach** provider, you will automatically see all the above questions regardless of a client's prior living situation because, by virtue of being served by your program, the client is flagged as literally homeless by Service Point.

- If your program is **NOT** an Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, or Street Outreach provider, data entered for the client's prior living situation will determine whether further questions will need to be completed through conditional logic. Clients served by non-Shelter/-Safe Haven/-Street Outreach providers are not automatically assumed to be literally homeless, and the use of conditional logic limits the amount of data collection to only that information required to determine chronic homeless status. Additional fields may appear based on responses to each question.

Answering the Chronic Homeless Determination Questions

Although these questions may be answered purely based on self-report in preliminary assessments, they should be revised to match the HHTF once it has been completed.

1. Residence Prior to Project Entry

Record the type of living arrangement of the head of household and each adult household member was residing in **just prior to entry into your project**. The living situations are listed through a drop-down box and have been divided into three different situations**: Literally Homeless; Institutional; and Transitional and Permanent Housing.**

2. Length of Stay in Previous Place

Record the length of time the client was residing in just their previous place of stay.[7]

3. Approximate Date Homelessness Started

Record the Approximate date **the current episode** of homelessness began. This question is NOT asking for the date a client first experienced homelessness UNLESS the client has been continuously staying in an Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, or place not meant for habitation since that time.

4. Regardless of where the client stayed last night enter the number of times the client has been homeless on the streets, in ES, or SH in the past three years including today.

This question captures the number of separate episodes of homelessness a client has experienced, and should be determined through the client interview. If this is the first time the client has been homeless in the past three years then the response is "One Time."

5. Total number of months homeless on the Streets, in ES, or SH in the past three years.

This question captures the total number of months homeless across all episodes in the past 3 years. <u>Available responses</u>:

[7] The response for this field will not necessarily match up with the response to the Approximate Date Homelessness Started question, specifically in cases when a client has moved between multiple living situations that would be categorized as Literally Homeless.

a. *One month - this is the first month* -Meaning in the past three years this is the first month the client has resided on the Streets, ES, or SH.

b. *A selection between 2-12 months* - Count the total number of months the client indicates they have been on the streets, ES, or SH in the past three years. For example, if the client has been on the streets, ES, or SH since January and it is now March, the cumulative total would be 3 months (January = 1, February = 2, and March = 3). If they were also homeless for a month back in October, the cumulative total would then be 4 months.

c. *More than 12 months* – In this case, the staff entering or updating the client's information would also input the actual figure in the text box for question #6.

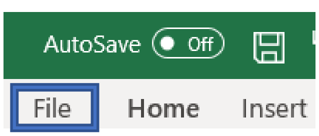
6. *If More than 12 Months Homeless on the Streets, in Emergency Shelter, or Safe Haven, Enter Total Number of Months in Past 3 Years.*

This question is ONLY found on the Coordinated Entry Assessment and is used to inform prioritization for clients determined to be chronically homeless. **Since the question looks back to the last 3 years, the figure entered should not exceed 36 months.**

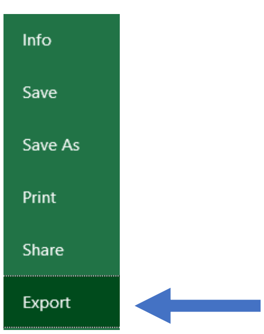
Uploading the HHTF and other documentation into the HMIS record

All supplemental documentation of homelessness—including HHTFs, Third-party verification letters, and Self-certification letters--should be uploaded into HMIS. For the Excel version of the HHTF, follow the steps listed below:

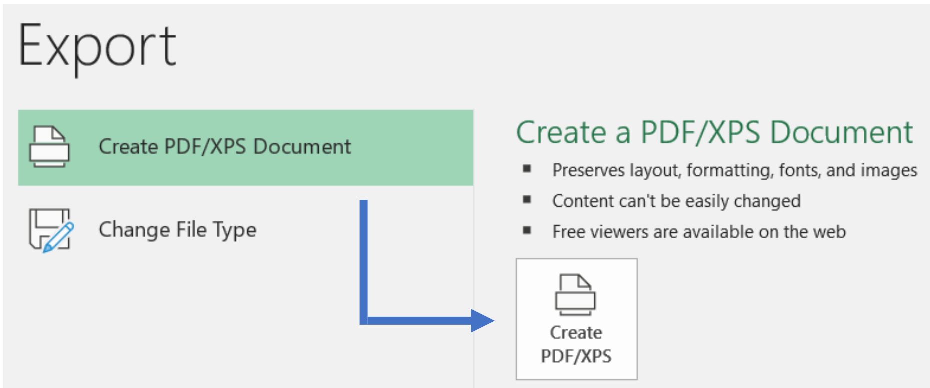
1) While in *Excel*, click "File" at the top-left corner of the window.



2) Looking at the bar that appears on the left, click "Export".



3) Select “Create PDF/XPS Document” and then click “Create PDF/XPS”.

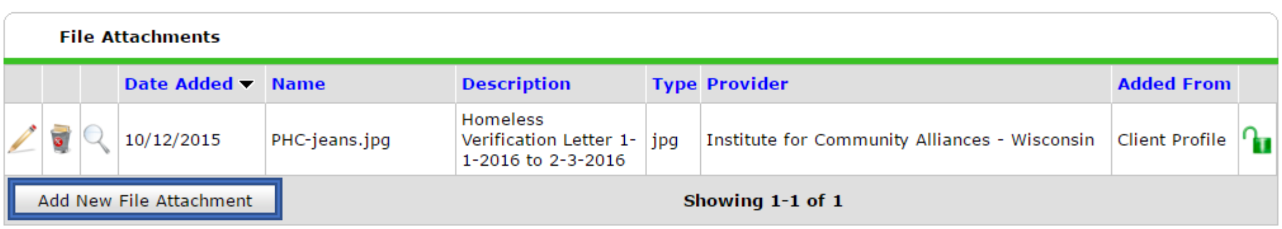


4) In the window that appears, you can edit the file destination and name, Use the naming convention below. Then click “Publish” to save.

[*Client Initials_Document Type_date range reported*]

<u>For example</u>:
ZE_HHTF_3-1-2018 to 6-15-2018

5) To upload the file, log into HMIS & look up your client; then, scroll to the bottom of the ***Client Profile*** tab. Once there, you can click “Add New File Attachment” on the <u>**File Attachments**</u> sub-assessment.



File Attachments

			Date Added	Name	Description	Type	Provider	Added From	
			10/12/2015	PHC-jeans.jpg	Homeless Verification Letter 1-1-2016 to 2-3-2016	jpg	Institute for Community Alliances - Wisconsin	Client Profile	

Add New File Attachment — **Showing 1-1 of 1**

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Q:** What if my client can't remember where they were for a period and we don't have any other documentation?
  - **A:** It depends on the situation—
    - If any part of the period occurs within a month where there is already documented homelessness, the time in that/those months can be marked as "Gap (presumed homeless)."
    - For periods or partial period that occur in months for which there is no documentation of homelessness, the interviewer should consider the impact of the determination on the client's status:
      - If treating as a break causes them to lose their status, it is more important to ask the client whether they think it was more likely they were homeless or housed and to fill out a Self-Certification form if needed.
      - If treating as a break has no effect or aids the client's eligibility for more resources, the interviewer should err more toward recording the period as a break, as no additional documentation is required.

- **Q:** If my client went between a homeless situation and a doubled-up situation but never stayed in the doubled-up situation for more than 7 days, do I need to report each situation on a separate row?
  - **A:** No, the entire period can be reported on a single row. Select the appropriate homeless situation ("Place not meant for habitation" or "ES/SH/Agency-paid hotel") and note the movement between situations in the description.

- **Q:** What do I do when there are overlaps between enrollments in the HMIS record.
  - **A:** Email either the involved agencies to clarify the situation or your HMIS System Administrator, as this is likely a data quality issue.

- **Q:** Does being in an unsafe situation—such as trafficking & interpersonal violence—count toward a client's homeless time under the Category 4 definition?
  - **A:** Category 4 is currently only a criterion for establishing eligibility for programs that require clients to be "homeless." Such situations do not count as "homeless" for the purpose of the chronic homeless definition.