



Policy Analysis Center

A partnership between The Horizon Foundation & the Association of Community Services

**Howard County: Households at Risk of Homelessness
Indicators Report**

2011

Prepared for the Policy Analysis Center by
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The Policy Analysis Center was established in 2007 and became operational in June 2008 as a result of a joint partnership between the Association of Community Services (ACS) of Howard County and the Horizon Foundation. This Unique collaboration was designed to provide the community with a new capability to provide useful information to community based organizations in the areas of health and human services. Its overarching goal is to improve the community's ability to conduct analysis that addresses the needs of health and human service organizations throughout the County.

The Policy Analysis Center is guided by a Steering Committee co-chaired by Rich Krieg, President of the Horizon Foundation and Anne Towne, Executive Director of the Association of Community Services. Current Members include Jim Truby, Shirley Collier, Roy Appletree, Jackie Eng, and Glenn Schneider.

About This Report: For more than ten years, advocates and human service providers have worked together to address the issues of homelessness in Howard County. This report was compiled at the same time the Plan to End Homelessness was being completed. This research supports the Plan and elaborates on issues related to attempting to find those who might be at risk of becoming homeless. The Center's report on Self-Sufficiency Indicators (http://www.policyanalysiscenter.org/self_sufficiency_indicators) also informs the discussion. Of particular interest is identifying ways in which advocates and providers can help prevent homelessness and developing tools that will help in the process. A quick summary of the Plan follows.

HOWARD COUNTY PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

- The Plan is based on the vision that no one should experience homelessness – no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.
- Completed in November 2010, it was adopted by the Howard County Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency (BPSS) on December 2, 2010 and has been referred for consideration to the County Executive and County Council.
- Coordinated by community advocate Joe Willmott within the BPSS's Committee to End Homelessness, the Plan was developed over two years with the input of over 50 people.
- The Plan is based on the principles espoused by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.
- The Plan is based on the premise that homelessness is not inevitable. This has been proved in other communities.
- The Plan recommends two principal methods of ending homelessness:
 - Prevention – provide stabilization services to people that might otherwise become homeless;

- Housing First – move homeless persons as rapidly as possible to permanent housing.
- The Plan is organized around two goals:
 - Ending Family Homelessness (usually families whose housing is lost during crisis)
 - Ending Chronic Homeless (usually single adults with disabilities who lack housing)

The Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency also convened an educational forum on October 28, 2010. The proceedings from this forum also help inform the discussion of advancing the work on ending homelessness.

Both the Plan to End Homelessness and the Proceedings from “How Communities Prevent Homelessness: Lessons for Howard County” October 28, 2010 Forum can be found on the Policy Analysis Center’s website that contains this study:

http://policyanalysiscenter.org/at_risk_of_homelessness

Many thanks to the Study Advisory Team: Jim MacGill, Jane O’Leary, Joe Willmott, and Bill Salganik for providing guidance and probing questions as the research evolved.

About the Author: Alex Wertheim, MSW, has extensive experience in homelessness prevention and homeless programs at the Montgomery County, MD Department of Health and Human Services as a case manager, supervisor, and administrator. During the past five years, Alex was a key player in developing and implementing Montgomery County’s Housing First program in partnership with the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless. As the Continuum of Care (CoC) lead, he conducted the community process that resulted in the submission of the annual HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistant Program Grant. As part of the CoC grant award process that is ongoing throughout the year, Alex conducted the annual homelessness enumeration, analyzed data and reported the data to the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG). Alex also has experience monitoring and administering contracts in homeless services to shelters, day programs, emergency assistance providers, state Emergency Transitional Housing Services (ETHS) and homelessness Prevention Program (HPP).

Howard County: Households at Risk of Homelessness Indicators Report

Executive Summary

The purpose of the study is to propose a definition of “at-risk for homelessness” for households residing in Howard County, Maryland, propose indicators from existing data sources to estimate the number households that are at-risk for homelessness in Howard County, and make recommendations for future data collection and indicators.

Proposed definition of at-risk of homelessness:

A household consisting of one or more adults, or a family with minor children that is experiencing any of the following:

1. Unable to meet basic housing expenses such as rent, mortgage, or utilities that may result in loss of permanent housing;
2. Residing in a motel/hotel due to loss of permanent housing and lacks the resources to remain;
3. Has lost permanent housing and is living temporarily with a friend or family member and cannot be placed on the lease;
4. Victim of domestic violence;
5. Is facing discharge from a public institution (e.g. incarceration, hospital, etc.) without a housing discharge plan.

The following indicators of the number of households at-risk of homelessness are proposed to be reported on an annual basis:

1. Number of evictions performed by the Sheriff’s Department;
2. Number of landlord-tenant filings in the District Court;
3. Number of individuals and families seeking shelter;
4. Number of households seeking eviction prevention assistance;
5. Number of households seeking home energy assistance;
6. Number of homeless families with school age children temporarily living with another household after losing permanent housing (doubled up).

Recommendation

Explore the feasibility for all agencies serving the at-risk and homeless population use the existing Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) software ServicePoint to record all cases of household applications for assistance. This will better track numbers of at-risk households, record service needs, gather unduplicated information about households, and make service histories available to helping agencies. This may better target resources to households most at-risk and improve coordination among helping agencies.

INTRODUCTION

This study will: 1) Propose a definition of at-risk of homelessness in Howard County with the rationale supporting the definition; 2) Propose indicators to estimate the numbers of at-risk households annually with the rationale supporting the proposed indicators. A description of the key agencies serving the homeless and the at-risk for homelessness population, the services provided and how data is currently maintained and reported will be provided. Finally, recommendations regarding a data system shared across all agencies serving the homeless and at-risk of homelessness population will be discussed with the goals of providing improved estimates of the size of the at-risk population and improved service coordination.

Brief overview of the homeless “continuum of care” (CoC) in Howard County

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal department charged with alleviating homelessness, uses a “continuum of care” model¹ to describe homeless systems. A Continuum of Care is “a collaborative funding and planning approach that helps communities plan for and provide, as necessary, a full range of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing and other service resources to address the various needs of homeless persons. HUD also refers to the group of community stakeholders involved in the decision making processes as the Continuum of Care.” The basic elements of CoC are: Outreach and engagement; prevention of homelessness; emergency shelter; transitional housing; and permanent supportive housing. Within Howard County, CoC elements are addressed as follows:

Outreach and Engagement

Howard County has largely volunteer operated day program located on Route 1 in Savage that provides meals, referrals, medical care, mail, and other important services to mostly unsheltered homeless individuals. Grassroots, Inc. operates the center.

Prevention of homelessness

This is the focus of this study. Services are delivered to at risk of homelessness households via private non-profit agencies that are contracted to provide eviction prevention, home energy assistance, and other services to Howard County residents experiencing a housing crisis. These agencies receive funding from Howard County Government, pass through state and federal funds, and significant private financial and in-kind support. This will be described in more detail.

Emergency Shelter

Howard County provides 24 year round shelter beds for individual men and women and 35 beds for families with children.

¹<http://www.hudhre.info/documents/FY2010CoCNOFA.pdf>. From the HUD 2010 Continuum of Care Notice of Funding Availability.

During the winter season, there are 35 additional shelter beds with the majority designated for individuals.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing provides non-congregant rent subsidized living in the community with time limits usually between 18 – 24 months. Howard County has 15 units for families with children and all families receive case management with the goal of locating permanent housing by program exit. This program is primarily federally funded.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing provides permanent housing subsidies to formerly homeless families and individuals who have documented disabilities. Case management and other services are provided to the individuals or disabled head of household.

Howard County has 14 units of permanent supportive housing for families with children and 33 beds for individuals. This program is primarily federally funded.

AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS DEFINITIONS

The Federal Government through the Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 provides the following definition of at-risk of homelessness²:

(1) AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS: The term “at risk of homelessness” means, with respect to an individual or family, that the individual or family—

1. has income below 30 percent of median income for the geographic area;
2. has insufficient resources immediately available to attain housing stability; and
3. has moved frequently because of economic reasons;
 - a. is living in the home of another because of economic hardship;
 - b. has been notified that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated;
 - c. lives in a hotel or motel;
 - d. lives in severely overcrowded housing;
 - e. is exiting an institution; or
 - f. otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability.

(2) HOMELESSNESS DEFINITIONS:

The Federal Government has multiple definitions of homelessness originating from the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Education (DOE). The latter two definitions are more expansive than the HUD definition. The current HUD definition of homelessness³:

² <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HomelessAssistanceActAmendedbyHEARTH.pdf>. Page 3.

³ <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/FY2010CoCNOFA.pdf>

As defined by the McKinney Act (42 U.S.C 11302), a homeless person is a person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency shelter; and a person in transitional housing for homeless persons who originally came from the street or an emergency shelter.

The proposed HUD definition of homelessness in the 2009 HEARTH Act⁴ revises this definition to include those who are residing in “doubled-up” living situations, without a lease or ownership interest in housing over 90 days, experiencing 3 or more moves over a 90 day period, experience barriers to employment/employment, and households subject to a court order to vacate and more.

Separately, DOE defines homeless students as:

... children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.⁵

Using the proposed HEARTH definition of at-risk of homelessness and homelessness, the DOE guidelines, and community discussion in Howard County, we can arrive at a definition of at-risk of homelessness that fits Howard County and better lends itself to measurement. The proposed HEARTH definition of at-risk is very broad and encompasses most if not all situations that may result in homelessness, therefore, the more compact local definition is used in place of HEARTH but is mindful that HEARTH is HUD’s blueprint for its strategy for alleviating homelessness and is a major funder of homeless services. Most notably, HEARTH includes the requirement that income must be less than 30% of the area median income. It also excludes (at least directly) victims of domestic violence.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Definition of At-risk of Homelessness:

A household consisting of one or more adults, or a family with minor children that is experiencing any of the following:

1. Unable to meet basic housing expenses such as rent, mortgage, and utilities that may result in loss of permanent housing;
2. Residing in a motel/hotel due to loss of permanent housing and lacks the resources to remain;
3. Has lost permanent housing and is living temporarily with a friend or family member and cannot be placed on the lease;

⁴ <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/ProposedHomelessDefinition.pdf>

⁵ <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>; ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION, Part C — Homeless Education, Section 725: Definitions

4. Victim of domestic violence;
5. Is facing discharge from a public institution (e.g. incarceration, hospital, etc.) without a housing discharge plan.

A household consisting of one or more adults or a family with minor children is considered to be imminently at-risk of homelessness if they meet any of the following criteria:

1. Unable to meet basic housing expenses such as rent, mortgage, and utilities that may result in loss of permanent housing result in loss of permanent housing (HEARTH: has been notified that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated);

This often results in a landlord filing for a Warrant of Restitution in the District Court for non-payment of rent that can result to eviction by the Sheriff if the restitution amount is not paid prior to the eviction. Utility arrearages can lead to utility cutoffs that also jeopardize housing and can make housing uninhabitable. The lack of income to pay rent and/or utilities go together and jeopardize the ability to maintain permanent housing.

The subprime mortgage crisis coupled with the recession has resulted in more homeowners becoming homeless according to the National Coalition for the Homeless from their 2008 survey on foreclosure and homelessness⁶. In addition, renters of foreclosed properties are especially vulnerable to the foreclosure process:

Despite the enactment of the Protecting Tenants at [Foreclosure](#) Act of 2009 ("PTFA"), which provides important federal protections for tenants in foreclosed properties, many renters are still being unfairly evicted after foreclosure according to a report released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition. PTFA, which was suppose to guarantee that renters received at least a 90 day notice before being evicted because of a foreclosure, the report said that many are being evicted without notice and that 40 percent of the families evicted because of foreclosure are renters.⁷

⁶ http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/foreclosure/foreclosure_report.pdf. National Coalition for the Homeless NCH) conducted a national e-mail survey of local and state homeless coalitions in late 2007 and early 2008. The primary question was, "Is your community seeing an increase in homelessness due to the foreclosure crisis?" As a result of the survey with 29 states responding, NCH concludes: "there is a strong link between the foreclosure crisis and increasing homelessness in communities throughout the nation." See also <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/advocacy/ForeclosuretoHomelessness0609.pdf> for an extensive study and policy recommendations jointly issued by several prominent homelessness advocacy and low income housing organizations published in 2009.

⁷ http://www.allmandandlee.com/bankruptcy_blog/foreclosures/foreclosure-crisis-pushes-renters-into-homelessness/ This site summarizes the report authored by the National Low Income Housing Coalition <http://www.nlihc.org/template/page.cfm?id=260>.

2. Residing in a motel/hotel due to loss of permanent housing and lacks the resources to remain (HEARTH: lives in a hotel or motel) ;

Often households, who lose permanent housing, do not have another housing plan and possess some financial resources, will reside in motels until their resources are exhausted. Many homeless individuals will pay for a motel for a short time using benefits or employment income until this resource is exhausted and return to street homelessness. This provides a brief respite from living outdoors.

3. Has lost permanent housing and is living temporarily with a friend or family member and cannot be placed on the lease (HEARTH: is living in the home of living in the home of another because of economic hardship):

This is one of the criteria from the DOE that Howard County Public Schools uses to identify homeless students and the DOE definition does not specify a time frame regarding the length of stay with another household. The HEARTH Act has more narrow criteria for homelessness i.e., cannot remain over 14 days in this household, has experienced 3 or more moves within a 90 period, has not had a lease or ownership interest in housing for over 90 days, has barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing such as poor employment history, poor literacy and educational attainment, etc. These criteria are useful to identify those at even greater risk of homelessness and resources could be targeted to these households once identified.

4. Victim of domestic violence (HEARTH: otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability);

Domestic violence programs have as a key component, safe shelter for domestic violence victims since victims often become homeless when fleeing a domestic violence relationship. Often, victims cannot live with family or friends since the perpetrator will often seek out the victim at these locations therefore, safe shelter is necessary to protect the victim. There is ample evidence that women in physically abusive relationships are at great-risk of homelessness.⁸ This criterion is not present in the HEARTH definition of at-risk.

5. Is facing discharge from a public institution (e.g. incarceration, hospital, etc.) without a housing discharge plan (HEARTH: is exiting an institution) .

Individuals facing discharge from hospitals, jails, and other public institutions are at great-risk of homelessness⁹. HUD requires continuums of care to develop protocols with these public institutions to prevent the discharge of persons into

⁸ <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/domestic.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/DischargePlanningBibliography.pdf>

homelessness whenever possible. An informal survey of inmates to be released from the Howard County Detention Center in March 2010 suggests that 40% did not have housing of any kind and would become homeless upon release.

INDICATORS OF AT-RISK AND KEY AGENCIES

The following indicators of the number of households at-risk of homelessness are proposed and to be reported annually:

1. Number of evictions performed by the Sheriff’s Department;
2. Number of landlord-tenant filings in the District Court;
3. Individuals and families seeking shelter in Howard County;
4. Numbers of households seeking eviction prevention assistance;
5. Number of households seeking home energy assistance.
6. Number of homeless families with school age children living with another household (doubled up).

Interpreting the indicators collectively is important. By themselves, the number of evictions and court filings (indicators 1 and 2) may not necessarily relate. Court filings may increase due to economic conditions and provides an overall number of households experiencing housing difficulties at least in the rental market. The number of evictions is a better indicator of prevention effectiveness – this number should decrease as a relative percentage of court filings to indicate an effective homelessness prevention program.

Consequently, the numbers seeking shelter (#3) should also decrease if homelessness prevention is effective. Numbers seeking housing and utility assistance similar to landlord tenant filings are indicators of housing stress and should increase in times of economic downturns and decrease during economic expansion.

Numbers of homeless families with school age children living in doubled up conditions is an indicator of program effectiveness of preventing loss of permanent housing.

To summarize the use of these indicators:

Measures Size of At-risk population	Measures Program Effectiveness
Number of landlord-tenant filings in the District Court. Numbers of households seeking eviction prevention assistance. Number of households seeking home energy assistance.	Number of evictions performed by the Sheriff’s Department. Individuals and families seeking shelter in Howard County. Number of homeless families with school age children living with another household (doubled up).

DISCUSSION OF INDICATORS AND AGENCIES THAT SERVE THE HOMELESS AND AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Indicators of the number of households at-risk of homelessness in Howard County are derived from several agencies described below. Services provided and how data is collected and reported is described for each agency.

Sheriff/District Court

Indicators:

1. Number of evictions performed annually by the Sheriff's Department. There were 342 evictions in calendar 2009.
2. Number of landlord-tenant filings in the District Court. There were 16,858 landlord-tenant filings in calendar 2009.

It is recommended that evictions resulting from foreclosure be tracked for foreclosed homeowners and for tenants residing in foreclosed properties. Statistics are not currently kept for evictions resulting from foreclosure.

The number of evictions performed by the Sheriff's Department is a much smaller subset of the total number of landlord-tenant court filings in the District Court. Many households are able to pay their rent arrears prior to the court date, and the majority of tenants with court judgments pay their judgments prior to an eviction date. Nevertheless, these two indicators track the number of incidents where households both cannot pay their rent on time or not at all and shows an overall level of "housing stress" in the county.

Only the number total number of landlord-tenant filings and the number of evictions performed by the Sheriff are consistently reported and tabulated. Multiple filings per households could lead to duplicated numbers. Also, the reported numbers include both commercial and residential tenants and evictions and are not reported separately by either the District Court or the Sheriff.

The chart below was manually tabulated by District Court staff and provides more detailed information about the course of the landlord-tenant process for the time frame from January 2009 through August 2009.

1	11,358 HH	Landlord requested court hearing for failure to pay rent (filings)
2	2,478 HH	HH had the process cancelled for payment of the rent
3	421 HH	Eviction was cancelled due the HH moving on their own
4	8459 HH	Net outstanding judgments
5	3,095 HH	Warrants Issued for Restitution (monies not received and the LL is still pursuing it)
6	247 HH	Evicted

Sheriff's eviction statistics count row 6 but some tenants moved out prior to the eviction (these cases are not captured in row 3). Also, residential and commercial evictions are not separated in these statistics and the numbers in each category are unknown.

An examination of the actual evictions performed by the Howard County Sheriff shows that 2.7% of all court order filings resulted in sheriff evictions in FY 2008 and 2% in FY 2009. The number of sheriff's evictions includes households who abandoned their property prior to the sheriff arrival which implies that these households may have resolved their potential homelessness even if temporarily. The Sheriff's office does not distinguish between households who abandoned housing prior to eviction and those who did not.

The Community Action Council (CAC) has met with the District Court and will request permission to perform eviction outreach. The District Court may or not grant this request since they state they must remain "neutral" and not favor either party.

Grassroots

Indicators

1. Individuals and families seeking shelter in Howard County.
2. Numbers of households seeking eviction prevention assistance from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) program.

In FY 2010, total shelter request incidents were 4135; 2604 were from individuals and 1531 from families with children. With 235 shelter admissions, 3900 turn away incidents were recorded. Multiple shelter requests by individuals or families could result in duplicated numbers; therefore incidents (contacts) are reported.

It is recommended that an annual count of unduplicated shelter requests be reported.

HPRP is the federal economic recovery program designed to assist homeless persons to rapidly exit shelter and to prevent homelessness. Howard County's HPRP plan uses these federal funds primarily for eviction prevention. HPRP households cannot receive other government funds to resolve their eviction but can be served before or after the HPRP assistance in another incident. HPRP households can receive non-government assistance to help resolve their housing crisis and CAC may serve some households concurrently with Grassroots with private non-profit funds. It is therefore likely that some overlap exists between HPRP and CAC serviced households. .

Grassroots has several programs that serve homeless families and individuals and persons seeking financial assistance for eviction prevention. Data is input into two web based data tracking software systems that do not interface.

1. Persons seeking emergency shelter either as walk-ins or calls to the hotline are entered into a required Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration's approved mental health hotline tracking software iCarol. Grassroots tracks monthly and reports annually the total number of walk-in and telephone requests for shelter apart from mental health crisis and is reported as the number of single adult males, single adult females, and families. iCarol is designed to track mental health hotline calls and Grassroots has made modifications to include fields for those seeking shelter. Grassroots does not attempt to unduplicate callers since they have historically reported total numbers of shelter turnaways (i.e. total calls requesting shelter minus number of shelter admissions) as a useful comparison number over periods of time. Information in iCarol may be minimal as callers may not want to provide much information if there is no shelter available. Callers are tracked for Howard County residency.
2. Data for all persons entering homeless shelter programs is input into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) software program, ServicePoint, by Grassroots staff. At present, Grassroots reports that they are entering minimal required data. They report that there is inadequate user support and no reports have been provided to them from the HMIS. The Shelter Director has agency administrator status but has not been trained to run reports or to perform data quality analysis. While data for the shelter programs are entered in HMIS's ServicePoint (family shelter, men's shelter, and motel overflow shelter) persons receiving emergency shelter in the cold weather shelter overflow are not entered into HMIS's ServicePoint unless they are subsequently admitted into the regular site based shelter or motel shelter program. While HUD does not mandate that shelters use the HMIS's ServicePoint, they award points in the Continuum of Care competitive application to jurisdictions that do so. Families entering motel shelter must demonstrate that they have resided in Howard County for the past three months.
3. iCarol has the capability to export to Excel or Access where data can be de-duplicated, however, iCarol records every incidence of a client call by name or phone number; there is no client ID number (key field) to search (although the software vendor can add this key field). If the name is not spelled correctly, a search will not yield the correct client caller. Therefore, obtaining unduplicated data poses some challenges but is achievable. Obtaining useful data from callers is a larger challenge if the caller is not willing to engage the crisis worker if shelter cannot be provided. The software can collect typical demographic data and addresses.
4. Persons receiving HPRP eviction prevention assistance are entered into HMIS's ServicePoint as required by HUD. Currently, the cases are entered by Howard County Government (HCG) Citizen Services (the HMIS Lead Agency) and not by

- Grassroots due to reported problems of the software not being user friendly, lack of user support and training for front line staff, and lack of time to enter data.
5. All clients seeking assistance from Grassroots at the North Laurel Multi-Services Center are entered into HMIS's ServicePoint.
 6. Day Center clients are tracked and unduplicated numbers are reported using Excel. Currently, HMIS's Service Point is not used for Day Center clients most of whom are street homeless or residing in shelters.

Grassroots tracks the following for the shelter programs outside of HMIS (which does track all of these data points):

- Reasons for shelter admission (eviction, domestic violence, discharge from institution, others).
- Disposition (exit reason from shelter). This is an outcome measure.
- Demographic information.
- County of residence prior to shelter admission.
- Bed nights provided.
- Length of stay in shelter program.

Community Action Council (CAC)

Indicators

1. Number of households requesting energy assistance. CAC provided assistance to 4,103 households.

In FY 2010 CAC served an unduplicated total of 4,324 households in all programs.

CAC provides the vast majority of eviction prevention, first months' rent, and utility assistance to Howard County residents experiencing a housing related emergency and essentially functions as a central point of intake. CAC funding consists of state and local government funding as well as a variety of congregational, foundation, and other non-profit sources. CAC also shares HCG office space which speaks to the partnership between HCG and the CAC which is tasked with providing emergency housing assistance. The number of assistance requests including the number of approved and denied applications are provided to each grantor. This information is available for all programs. Denied applications represent households at risk of homelessness. Households denied for assistance may have income above the criteria or have rent arrearages too large to resolve.

CAC uses an eligibility model to determine if a household is eligible to receive financial assistance to prevent an eviction or receive first month's rent. CAC compares household

size and income to the set percentage of Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) usually up to 175% of FPL to determine eligibility. The exception is the state funded Emergency Assistance to Families with Children (EAFC) program which compares a household's income and expenses for the past 30 days. CAC is able to package several funding sources if needed to resolve an immediate housing crisis if the recipient is able to demonstrate that the housing can be maintained for a period of time.

The eligibility model provides assistance to those who meet the criteria of need. Reasons for denied applications are varied and includes households who have fallen too far behind in rent and the amount of assistance required to stop an eviction are beyond the scope of CAC, households above the designated FPL, and households who cannot demonstrate a workable plan to remain in their current housing even if the current court eviction judgment is satisfied. Households may be found eligible for housing assistance once per 12 month period. Denied applicants may be referred to Grassroots to call the crisis hotline for shelter but given the lack of shelter beds in Howard County, this is not a realistic option. Currently, CAC does not work with these households who may be at greatest risk for eviction and homelessness since they do not meet the criteria for assistance with a "workable plan." The EAFC is the only exception to the requirement of the household approval being based on the ability to maintain-the regulations state only that the emergency must be resolved.

Energy Assistance

CAC administers federally and state funded Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) and Electrical Universal Service Plan (EUSP) funds, Howard County Government funds, Baltimore Gas & Electric (BGE) funds, and several other smaller funding sources to resolve utility emergencies. The largest numbers are the EUSP (3,669 approved applications) and MEAP (3,769 approved applications). These are strict eligibility programs based on income.

For the State's energy assistance programs, assistance is available once between July 1-June 30. Other energy resources, such as the Fuel Fund or Crisis Intervention Initiative, are available once per 12 month period.

Data

CAC uses several database programs to track services and determine eligibility. All enrolled cases are entered into a software program, PRO developed by a community action agency in southern Maryland. In addition, the state programs EUSP, MEAP, and EAFC have their own required data systems that do not interface with PRO. The HMIS's ServicePoint is used at the North Laurel-Savage Multiservice Center across all providers at the center. CAC staff use the ServicePoint in addition to their required databases.

CAC uses a one page application for assistance for all programs in addition to any forms required by specific programs. The application for assistance collect basic demographic data including family size, age, income and source, monthly rent, address, and other identifiers. Narrative is also entered by caseworkers who provide further information about the household and the outcome of the assistance request. Data from the application is entered in PRO and reporting can show the unduplicated numbers of households served as well as reporting on any of the tabulated data fields. PRO does not export to Excel. Fiscal tracking which is not possible with Pro in its current configuration is reported and tracked separately in Excel spreadsheets.

The HMIS's ServicePoint, is reported to be much slower than PRO. If ServicePoint were to run as fast as Pro, this is seen as a more attractive software for CAC since its reporting and tracking capabilities are superior, however, the slow speed of ServicePoint is seen as a big impediment for CAC which inputted 4324 households receiving 10,882 incidents of services in FY 2010.

Data Tracking/Reporting

CAC enters all applications into Pro and is able to report the number of unduplicated households receiving all services but cannot differentiate between unduplicated energy or housing applications.

Bridges to Housing Stability (BRIDGES)

Indicators

1. Number of shelter turnaways;
2. Number of households requesting homeless prevention assistance.

Bridges to Housing Stability provides transitional housing to homeless families and operates prevention programs. The prevention programs have two components – providing case management to households receiving HPRP assistance from Grassroots and a pilot program that outreaches to households experiencing housing problems that may lead to homelessness. Several of these households are identified by a low income housing provider, Community Homes, Inc.

As a transitional housing provider, Bridges receives shelter requests from homeless families which are almost all turnaways since the transitional housing program usually operates at 100% capacity.

For the 18 month period from March 2009 through August 2010, 221 calls were received from households seeking shelter and 94 applications were submitted out of the 221 calls. Of these 94 applicants, 16 were accepted into the transitional housing program and 3

households were diverted from shelter. This number seeking shelter probably has a large duplication factor with Grassroots.

Bridges has provided case management to 4 households out of 27 that received HPRP assistance from Grassroots who administers the financial assistance. There is no requirement that households receiving HPRP financial assistance receive case management services thus it is voluntary. HPRP case managers contact all households that receive HPRP financial assistance 3 months later to determine their housing stability and are usually done with a phone call. This follow-up information is reported to HUD via HMIS's ServicePoint.

The pilot program with Community Homes Inc. is an innovative attempt to outreach households who are at-risk of eviction in order to preserve their housing. The at-risk households are identified by the landlord who agrees to work with the case manager from Bridges and the household to arrive at a satisfactory resolution in lieu of landlord-tenant court involvement. Community Homes provides 300 low income rental units. If a tenant loses affordable housing at Community Homes, it is unlikely that comparable housing can subsequently be found in Howard County.

Howard County Public School System (HCPSS)

Indicator:

1. Number of homeless families with school age children living with another household after losing permanent housing (doubled up).

Although this discussion is limited to at-risk of homelessness, HCPSS also encounters families who are unsheltered and should be considered a priority for shelter.

HCPSS encounters homeless and at-risk of homeless students and their families (all school systems use the DOE definition of homeless as was discussed earlier) that is more inclusive by counting families in doubled up living situations) upon student enrollment. If a family cannot obtain a lease or deed and present themselves as homeless, the Pupil Personnel Worker completes a Student In Temporary Housing Form, offers services, provides ongoing case management, and continues to provide support to the student and the family until they are no longer homeless.

Data:

HCPSS has several categories of homelessness that are tracked (per the DOE definition):

1. Shelter (these families are tracked and served by Grassroots).
2. Motel/hotel (some of these families are served by Grassroots – up to five at any given time).
3. Unsheltered (car, park, street, empty building).
4. Living with another person/family due to loss of housing or financial hardship.

HCPSS is uniquely able to capture families with school age children living in doubled up housing situations, living in motels and not served by Grassroots, and who are unsheltered.

Using the DOE definition of homelessness (below) HCPSS identified the following numbers of homeless school age children and families during the 2009-10 school year:

Housing situation at enrollment/beginning school year	Children	families	
Motel/hotel	61	34	
Shelters	63	37	
Living with another household without lease	334	177	
Unsheltered	3	2	
Unknown	1	0	Unaccompanied youth
Totals	462	215	

HCPSS Pupil Personnel “recertifies” the homeless situation of each student annually when the school year begins; therefore, there are “carryover” homeless students each year. The number of newly homeless students in the 2009-10 school year was 320. The number of students deemed to be homeless prior to the 2009-10 school year is below:

This table presents the school year of the onset of homelessness for the 462 homeless students served in the 2009-10 school year.

School year of onset of homelessness	Number of students
Prior to 2005-06	5
2005-06	3
2006-07	10
2007-08	25
2008-09	99
2009-10	320
TOTAL	462

As of this writing, HCPSS has recorded a total of 273 homeless students year-to-date in 2010 compared to 181 for the same period in 2009.

Howard County Department of Citizen Services

This department is responsible for contract administration and grants management that provides federal, state, and county funding to the non-profit agencies that provide services to the at-risk population described above. It is also the Lead Agency for the annual HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Program application that provides funding for permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless families and individuals

and transitional housing for families. This agency also receives and distributes funding from the Federal Emergency Shelter Grant and the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing grant.

Citizen Services is the HMIS database owner and Lead Agency and is responsible for the deployment and ongoing maintenance of HMIS's ServicePoint for the Howard County CoC. Citizen Services is currently providing additional HMIS user support via two part-time contract staff to assist ServicePoint users to better utilize the system. The contract for the user support staff ends March 31, 2011 and Citizen Services is evaluating further steps to improve user support and to expand the use of HMIS's ServicePoint. The HMIS's ServicePoint software has been in existence for at least five years.

Citizen Services plans to upgrade to the latest and faster version of the HMIS's ServicePoint.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Each agency has its own method of collecting data on persons and households served. This data does not interface with other agencies and unduplicated counts are not possible without a cross county platform such as HMIS's ServicePoint. An "open" HMIS database that is used by the agencies serving the homeless and at-risk population has the following immediate benefits:

1. Able to obtain better and unduplicated data for each household and/or person. This will provide a better picture of the size of the at-risk population and will identify households most at-risk of homelessness through reporting and HMIS record review.
2. Reports outcomes for prevention and shelter programs. The ability to report outcomes measures program and CoC effectiveness. A self sufficiency matrix tool is available for HMIS that measures change in a client's self-sufficiency over multiple points in time enabling a pre and post services comparison. This matrix is based on a best practice developed by an Arizona CoC¹⁰.
3. Records past service transactions and assessments that enable an agency to better understand the applicants housing situation over time. This promotes better coordination of services and uses resources more effectively.
4. Reports can be generated that benefit the Howard County CoC as a whole and for each agency that uses the HMIS.
5. Using an HMIS's ServicePoint as opposed to another platform places Howard County in a better competitive position to leverage future HUD funding. From the 2010 CoC NOFA¹¹:

¹⁰ <http://www.hmis.info/Resources/790/Resource-Emerging-Research-Handout---Self-Sufficiency-Matrix.aspx>.

¹¹ <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/FY2010CoCNOFA.pdf>

The HEARTH Act places an increased emphasis on the use of HMIS. The HEARTH Act requires that all communities have maintain a HMIS databasethat has the capacity of collecting unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing *homelessness and providing information to project sponsors and applicants for needs analyses and funding priorities* (italics added).

From the HEARTH ACT¹²:

(f) PARTICIPATION IN HMIS.—The Secretary shall ensure that recipients of funds (Continuum of Care and Housing Solutions Grants) under this subtitle ensure the consistent participation by emergency shelters *and homelessness prevention* (italics added) and rehousing programs in any applicable community-wide homeless management information system.

There are several challenges to using the HMIS effectively in Howard County:

1. Each agency above already uses its own data system. Grassroots is mandated to use iCarol since a large part of their mission (and funding) is mental health crisis. CAC is invested in PRO but could use HMIS if key problems with ServicePoint are addressed. It should be explored if HCPSS is willing to use the HMIS.
2. Currently, there is a lack of training and user support for the existing HMIS, therefore, shelter providers input minimal required data to meet HUD requirements. No reports are produced by or for the agencies using HMIS so they see little value to using it. As stated above, the Howard County Department of Citizen Services has contracted with two part-time HMIS specialists to provide user training to shelter providers. In order to expand the HMIS to include prevention programs, a full time dedicated user support staff may be needed to train users, customize input and assessment screens, and to write and run reports.
3. Obtaining user agencies agreement to making HMIS an “open” system where clients who have applied or received services through another agency have (some) of this information available to the next agency where they apply for services. In a “closed” system, this information is not available and a new record is created that makes unduplicated reporting more problematic. While it may seem intuitive (at least to this writer) to have an open system, some CoC’s in Maryland do not for their cited reasons of client confidentiality, etc. This can be overcome with participation agreements, notices of privacy protection, client authorization to share information within HMIS provider agencies, etc. in a HIPAA compliant manner.
4. The current HMIS’s, ServicePoint, is reported by all agencies using it to be too slow. ServicePoint is a very robust system with multiple assessment forms that can be customized to the community’s needs. The vendor, Bowman Systems, Inc.

¹²<http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HomelessAssistanceActAmendedbyHEARTH.pdf>, SEC. 416. [42 USC 11375] RESPONSIBILITIES OF RECIPIENTS.

has stated that the next version of ServicePoint is much faster. Citizen Services plans to obtain this upgrade version toward the end of 2010.

An effective HMIS may lead to new and better indicators once good data is reviewed.