Discussion Paper

Homelessness Performance Reporting Standardization Possibilities

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Introduction

The PROS Board is now in its second year of developing measurement and reporting standards around homelessness for the San Diego region. Last year the PROS Board was successful in drafting four rules: Mi-501 Data Sharing, Mi-502 Data Quality Assurance, Mi-503 HMIS Case Note Documentation, and Ma-504 Long-term Outcome Reporting. Now in 2023, the PROS Board is aiming to create 3-6 more rules in homelessness services. This discussion paper is a continuation of last year's discussion paper. The questions below are the areas, divided into micro and macro topics, where the working groups believed regional standardization could be achieved relatively quickly and with meaningful impact to improve the provision of services to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Prioritized Discussion Questions

This discussion section is designed to surface issues for further discussion and potential development of regionally accepted standards.

First, the staff of the PROS Board has organized discussion questions into two main sections, one looking at the interactions between a homelessness services recipient and providers and the second looking at the interactions of the provider in the macro-sense with the regional/ systems of care. Within the first section, the discussion questions are organized by the general lifecycle of the service recipient from presentation to screening, intake, consent, assessment, service plan development, and service delivery/ referrals and finally to interruptions of services or completion of services and discharge/ onward referral. At the macro-level of the provider, the discussion questions are organized around initial presentation/ referral/ intake, measurements of the services as a whole, discharge/ referrals, and longitudinal reporting/ tracking.

Second, each question – in the form of "[w]hat are the benefits to outcomes for homeless service recipients and the operational costs to the service provider with a verifiable commitment to…" – is intended to provoke conversation around the value of a potential regionally accepted standard for that issue. The discussion of the question in and of itself, while it may imply the potential of a regionally accepted standard, does not mean the PROS Board will ultimately issue a standard there. Please note that the staff of the PROS Board, leveraging prior experience and knowledge in the provision of social services, attempted to elucidate potential benefits and costs to answer the question and also offers other questions to consider so that we share a sense of the benefits and costs of a potential standard before the region commits to designing/ making a standard.

Third and finally, the staff of the PROS Board acknowledge there already exist certain reporting standards or methods that may go beyond the region (e.g., federally mandated requirements, state-level, county-level contractual obligations). The discussion questions are also designed so that the development of regionally accepted standards takes the best of these "extra-regional" requirements and acknowledges the troubles or difficulties they may engender. Ultimately, the development of regionally accepted rules may deviate from these extra-regional requirements, and if that occurs, it is also the hope of the staff of the PROS Board that the parent organization of the San Diego Taxpayers Educational Foundation – the San Diego County Taxpayers Association – would consider advocating for extra-regional changes to reduce the burdens on regional service providers.

Questions at the "Micro"-level of Service Provision and Processes: Interactions between providers and recipients

Measurements of Housing Problem-Solving

<u>What are benefits to outcomes for service recipients and the operational costs to the service provider with a verifiable commitment to tracking the use of housing problem-solving strategies?</u>

Throughout discussions, working group members have argued that diversion can be a mechanism to reduce the burden on service providers as it reduces the inflow of clients into the homeless management system and therefore reduces downstream work providers have to undertake. However, based on the HUD definition of diversion, diversion occurs exclusively before someone has spent a night in a place not suitable for human habitation, meaning they are not eligible to be entered into HMIS. For this reason, diversion attempts are not tracked in HMIS, nor are their outcomes. Therefore creating a standard for diversion would be very difficult.

"Housing problem solving" is a broad term used to describe efforts to help clients resolve their homelessness outside of established programs. Housing problem-solving could include family reunification efforts or transportation funding. It is typically targeted toward people who are newly homeless. The working group recognized that this is an area where increased transparency could be impactful in ending people's homelessness, especially for those who are experiencing homelessness for the first time.

It is regionally accepted that housing problem-solving is a more effective strategy for newly homeless clients than for clients experiencing chronic homelessness. As a result, newly homeless services are limited because the majority of funding goes towards chronically homeless services. This leaves a potential gap in services for newly homeless clients. While a high amount of newly homeless individuals are able to self-resolve, some still require services. It is important that the region is able to create transparency to understand what services a newly homeless individual who does not self-resolve needs. Transparency in the region will also ensure that people that are newly homeless do not become chronically homeless because they do not have adequate services to assist them. Which will reduce the overall burden on the system.

> What services fall under the umbrella of housing problem-solving? Does a complete list or definition exist?
> When are these services conducted and are there times when these services are not utilized?
> For how long are housing problem-solving strategies expected to keep clients in housing? Are these strategies supposed to lead to temporary or permanent solutions?
> How do you know when housing problem-solving efforts have had the desired outcome?
> Do both private and public providers utilize these services?
> What data points are collected when utilizing these strategies?

What standards could be developed to create better transparency for these services?

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
- By tracking and analyzing housing problem-solving efforts, organizations can identify areas for improvement and make necessary changes to their programs to better serve their communities. - By improving housing problem-solving through measurements and reporting, organizations can help reduce the number of individuals who experience homelessness. - Effective housing problem-solving methods are identified in the community. - Ease communication between providers and funders about housing problem-solving work - If clients' homelessness is resolved earlier in their journey through the homeless services system, resources will be freed up to focus on people experiencing chronic homelessness - Identifying upstream failures. - Creation of a central repository so that other organizations can see what effective housing problem-solving strategies exist.	- Collecting and reporting data on housing problem-solving efforts can be time-consuming and expensive. - Implementing new processes for measuring and reporting on housing problem-solving efforts may require significant time, effort, and resources. - Organizations may need to provide training and education for staff members on new processes and data analysis techniques to effectively measure and report on housing problem-solving efforts.

Measurements of Post-Service Stability

<u>What are benefits to outcomes for service recipients and the operational costs to the service provider with a verifiable commitment to tracking a clients' risk of falling back into homelessness after receiving housing?</u>

During our working group discussion and from the information that we have seen in HMIS, there do not appear to be any metrics recorded on former clients that have exited the system to housing. This is primarily due to the limited funding providers receive to provide services to housed former clients. While this makes sense, the number of individuals who fall back into homelessness is far too high for nothing to be done. PROS Board standard PROS-HOUD-Ma-504 discusses housing stability at a macro level, but further measurement and reporting on a micro level could result in real-time client risk awareness. Having data points while someone is housed could allow providers to predict whether someone is going to fall into homelessness in real-time, thus giving them an opportunity to deploy preventative measures.

Another possible benefit of tracking a clients' risk of falling back into homelessness, is that a case manager can understand how self-sufficient a client is before they exit the system. If metrics are tracked, then providers can develop a generalized strategy to maintain former clients' housing stability so that they have a lower chance of falling into homelessness again. Simply providing housing for someone does not necessarily permanently end their homelessness if they are not set up to be self-sustaining. The transition from the street into housing and having to pay bills can be overwhelming. Informing a client about supportive services that exist once they exit the system could be enough to help the client become self-sufficient and be able to prevent themself from falling into homelessness again. Furthermore, observing where individuals struggle when they are housed can give providers a better understanding of how to improve programs that lead up to someone being housed.

What makes a client self-sufficient?

How does a provider know if a client is stable enough to be self-sufficient?

What can a provider do to help the client become more self-sufficient post-exit?

Does a provider know if a client is utilizing the appropriate resources to maintain self-sufficiency?

Should programs report on attempts to connect clients with resources intended to help clients retain housing?

What does it mean to be housing stable?

What are some metrics that can be tracked to know if someone is housing stable?

Could income stability be a good supporting metric for this?

Are there metrics on what leads to reentry? Is there any data gathered on quality-of-life improvements?

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
- By tracking metrics, service providers can determine the effectiveness of their programs and services in ending homelessness and maintaining housing stability. - Having data on client self-sufficiency and quality of life of individuals can inform decision-making on program and service design, resource allocation, and policy development. - Tracking metrics can allow service providers to identify potential issues early on and take preventive measures to avoid re-entry into homelessness. - Tracking metrics can increase accountability and transparency in the delivery of services, allowing for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of program outcomes. - By understanding the factors that contribute to post-service stability and housing stability, service providers can optimize resource utilization and better target support to those in need. - Having data on the outcomes of programs and services can support the development of evidence-based practices, leading to more effective and efficient solutions to homelessness.	- Collecting and analyzing data on these metrics can be time-consuming and may require additional staff and resources. - Staff members may need to receive additional training and education to effectively collect and analyze the data. - Services providers would need to expand their services so that they can continue to work with individuals that are housed. - Additional metrics would need to be tracked and would also require data quality assurance.

Reports and metrics on Client Feedback

<u>What are benefits to outcomes for service recipients and the operational costs to the service provider with a verifiable commitment to having reports and metrics on client feedback?</u>

During working group discussions, working group members brought up that the service reports are not always indicative of what is going on behind the scenes. Sometimes the reports can show that the provider is servicing many individuals but client feedback shows otherwise. This means that there is an area for increased effectiveness that is being overlooked.

Additionally, client feedback can provide more information to service providers and funders as to why the same service in different areas might be producing different outcomes. Having client feedback reports would be able to give more meaning and background to the service reports that a provider has to do for a grantor. Service providers may already be receiving feedback but it may not be through an effective channel, therefore making it hard for the service provider to collect good feedback.

Having a regional agreement on client feedback systems can help service providers, who originally would not have had the financial means to record feedback, now be able to push funders to provide the necessary funding to support a feedback system that the region agrees to be effective.

What client feedback is important for an organization to collect?
What do organizations typically do to collect client feedback?
How do organizations act on feedback given by clients? Do organizations report on actions taken based on client feedback?
What metrics, if any, are tracked to see if changes made because of client feedback were impactful?
Do clients know that their feedback has been heard?
Are client feedback systems adequately funded?
What standard could be made to create more transparency around client feedback in the San Diego region?

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
- Client feedback can help organizations identify areas for improvement and take actions to enhance service delivery, resulting in higher quality services. - By acting on client feedback, organizations can address clients' concerns and improve their satisfaction levels, leading to increased client retention and loyalty. - Client feedback can provide valuable insights into how organizations	- Organizations may need to invest in designing and administering surveys to collect client feedback. This can include the costs of survey software, hiring survey administrators, and printing and distributing surveys. - After collecting client feedback, organizations need to analyze the data and prepare reports that summarize their findings. This may require investing in data analysis software, hiring data

- communicate with their clients, enabling them to adjust their communication strategies and improve overall client engagement.
- Organizations that collect and act on client feedback demonstrate their commitment to providing high-quality services and holding themselves accountable to their clients and stakeholders.
- Client feedback can provide organizations with valuable data and insights that inform decision-making on service delivery, resource allocation, and strategic planning.

analysts, and developing report templates.
- Staff members may require training on how to administer surveys, collect feedback, and analyze data. This can include the costs of training materials, staff time, and hiring trainers.
- Organizations may need to invest in maintaining their feedback system, such as upgrading software, troubleshooting technical issues, and monitoring the system's performance.
- Organizations may need to invest in outreach and promotion activities to encourage clients to participate in the feedback system. This can include the costs of advertising, social media campaigns, and developing outreach materials.

Questions at the "Macro"-level of Service Provision and Processes: Interactions between providers and the System of Services

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

What are benefits to outcomes for service recipients and the operational costs to the service provide with a verifiable commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

A recent surge in data availability, research, and general awareness has resulted in widespread interest in understanding disparities between demographic groups with regard to people's movement through the homelessness services system. The County of San Diego, for example, has convened a committee to investigate the experiences of Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness, which has conducted interviews and discussions with Black former and current clients. Working group members familiar with the committee and familiar with other feedback from Black clients noted common problematic trends; however, the solutions to these trends are not clear. In order to build comprehensive, effective solutions, providers need to first understand where disparities exist and what their longer term consequences may be. It is also critical that funders understand where disparities exist so that they can strategically allocate funding toward solutions. Funders, however, can not understand existing disparities unless inequities are measured in a standardized way across all providers. If provider A only looks at racial disparities in program exit types and provider B only looks at racial disparities in long-term housing statuses, then a funder cannot evaluate relative efficacy, and providers are unable to compare amongst themselves and learn from one another. The following discussion questions are intended to draw out such a common form of measurement and reporting:

At which point(s) in clients' journeys through homelessness services are there likely to be the largest disparities among demographic groups?

At which point in a client's journey through homelessness services would disparities among demographic groups be most consequential?

On what client demographic characteristics do data exist?

Would it be burdensome to providers to report on all demographic groups for which data exist? Are there certain demographics for which reporting would be more or less useful?

How do disparities present differently along different demographic axes? (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, veteran status etc)

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
● Common understanding of best practices around measuring inequities ● Ability for funders to evaluate equity metrics across providers ● Ability for providers to share processes and techniques toward a common goal	● May require or incentivize additional data collection ● Measurement may capture external factors contributing to inequities (e.g. housing discrimination)

<u>What are benefits to outcomes for service recipients and the operational costs to the service provide with a verifiable commitment to homelessness prevention?</u>

Homelessness prevention includes any case management conducted or services provided to individuals who are housed and at risk of falling into homelessness with the goal of keeping them in housing. This could include rental assistance, assistance with employment, tenant legal advocacy, or provision of healthcare services which permit individuals to fulfill daily responsibilities. Recent research from the county of San Diego found that, for every 10 people housed through homelessness services, 13 fall into homelessness. This statistic lends itself to the policy recommendation that more upstream work is needed in order to prevent people from falling into homelessness. Although this is a regionally-accepted need, there is limited funding available for such efforts, in part because it is challenging to define success in prevention work. This is in part due to a lack of regional consensus around the precise goals of prevention work. Some might argue that prevention efforts are successful when a person remains housed for a year after receiving prevention services. Some might contest that prevention efforts should keep individuals housed for two years or more, while others might argue that the efficacy of prevention efforts needs to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, and that it is useful to have check-ins at multiple points in clients' journeys. This challenge in addition to data limitations result in an inability for funders to understand the results of their financial contributions. Because prevention efforts are not documented in HMIS, service providers have no understanding of whether clients who come to them are experiencing homelessness after receiving prevention services. The following discussion questions are intended to draw out a regionally-accepted measurement for success in prevention work and possible work-arounds for data limitations:

What is a "prevention" program?
What are the goals of prevention efforts?
How do you know when prevention efforts were or were not successful?
How is eligibility for prevention services determined?
What individual attributes might make prevention efforts more or less impactful?
What kind of communication exists between providers and clients about past prevention services? Would more or different communication be impactful?

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
- Shared measurement of efficacy of prevention services - Promotion of best practices around talking to clients about prevention services - More accurate identification of clients eligible for prevention services - More accurate understanding of the success of prevention efforts could	- May require or incentivize additional data collection - Measurement may not be capable of fully capturing the complexities of prevention work

translate to more funding for prevention services.	

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

Service providers in PROS Board working groups have expressed concerns over burnout and high rates of turnover among frontline staff. Not only does this put a strain on management who have to train new cohorts of frontline staff, but it results in less effective service delivery for people experiencing homelessness because employees are generally inexperienced and training may be rushed or limited. Service providers have also expressed interest in seeing more efforts to create diverse workforces, including workforces in which persons with lived experience of homelessness are represented. Working group members expressed a desire to see this diversity at different levels of seniority, as well as an interest in ensuring that promotion practices are similar across demographic groups. A standard in this area could increase transparency around workforce practices, resulting in several important benefits: it could create a set structure in which providers could compare workforce practices and identify best practices, it could allow funders to understand how their funding is being used on personnel, and it could help providers to understand their own workplace practices within an established and clear structure. A standard on workplace practices would likely include reporting on the indicators outlined above. For example, providers might be asked to report on their workplace demographics at different management levels, including race, ethnicity, gender, lived experience of homelessness, and any other relevant factors. Such a standard might also ask providers to report on hiring or promotion across demographic groups.

Potential Benefits to Outcomes	Potential Operational Costs
● Regional acceptance regarding the most important indicators of (in)equity in hiring, recruitment, and retention ● Increased transparency, ability for funders to understand internal processes of the providers they fund ● Providers have a heightened understanding of their own practices around recruitment, hiring, and retention.	● Requires additional data collection ● Might be challenging to accurately capture all workplace demographics (eg. if an organization has a non-diverse workforce, but management changes and focuses on diversity in hiring, that change may not be reflected) ● May be more challenging for organizations with smaller markets and client pools (e.g. religious organizations) to meet the same diversity metrics as other organizations