

# HIFIS *Initiative*

## Fact Sheet

### QUESTIONS

- **What is the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System?**
- **Who is responsible for implementing HIFIS?**
- **What data are entered in HIFIS and how are they protected?**
- **What are the requirements for homeless shelters and service providers to submit data exports to HIFIS Community Coordinators?**
- **What questions can HIFIS help to answer about homelessness at the local and national levels?**
- **Why is HIFIS a good alternative to other software for gathering community-based information on homelessness?**
- **Where can I find additional information on HIFIS?**

### ANSWERS

#### **What is the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System?**

Built on a partnership model between the Government of Canada and communities, the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) Initiative is a component of the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Launched in 2001, the HIFIS Initiative aims to prevent and reduce homelessness by increasing knowledge and understanding of homelessness issues, in part through the implementation of information technologies (IT) in shelters and service providers across Canada.

An important component of the HIFIS Initiative is the HIFIS software, a user-friendly data management software built for, and in consultation with, community stakeholders. Free of charge, it improves shelters' and service providers' operational capacity and serves as a means to collect information about the people using shelters while maintaining client anonymity. HIFIS software also assists in their daily operations and reporting on shelter use, allowing communities to collect and analyze data on homelessness and shelter use that is of vital local and national significance.

#### **Who is responsible for implementing HIFIS?**

Federal, regional and local representatives work in partnership to ensure the success of HIFIS. At the federal level, the National HIFIS Initiative Team of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) is responsible for:

- Developing data management tools such as the HIFIS software and data quality tools.
- Providing Toll Free Help Desk Support.



- Training designated trainers.
- Facilitating ongoing forums to share information on best practices.
- Establishing private and public sector partnerships to contribute to the effectiveness of shelters and service providers.
- Providing financial support for activities related to the HIFIS Community Coordinator.
- Analyzing demographic information on the homeless population and patterns of shelter use.
- Developing reports and research studies that will inform stakeholder communities and all levels of government about homelessness in Canada.

The HIFIS Regional Team of HRSDC assists with:

- Identifying potential HIFIS Community Coordinators.
- Training on the HIFIS software.
- Implementing HIFIS Data Sharing Protocol (DSP) with shelters and service providers.
- Responding to the technological needs of communities.

HIFIS Community Coordinators, who have the responsibility of forming partnerships with municipalities, community associations and organizations, are responsible for the implementation of HIFIS at the local level, including planning, training and data management.

Experience has shown that the active participation of HIFIS Community Coordinators within the HIFIS process, including procedures and protocols for privacy, data sharing, data analysis, reporting and data validity, is essential to the success of the HIFIS Initiative.

## **How are HIFIS data protected?**

In 2001, the DSP was published for the implementation of the HIFIS software. The DSP details the requirements for data collection, participation, privacy and security for all shelters and service providers entering data into, or having access, to the HIFIS software. It also outlines the Government of Canada's responsibilities and obligation to protect data. All HIFIS users must adhere to the privacy protections and security protocols in the DSP. A copy of the DSP can be found at [http://www.hifis.ca/resources/hifis/HIFISDSP\\_E.pdf](http://www.hifis.ca/resources/hifis/HIFISDSP_E.pdf)

## **What are the requirements for homeless shelters and service providers to submit data exports to HIFIS Community Coordinators?**

HIFIS shelter or service providers are encouraged to sign a DSP and submit data to HIFIS Community Coordinators on a regular basis. In turn, HIFIS Community Coordinators submit non-identifying collected aggregate data to the National HIFIS Team. HIFIS Community Coordinators submit the following data elements: shelter name and ID code; number of registered and overflow beds; shelter type (as identified by shelters); and the person's unique ID, date of birth, gender, and registration book-in and book-out date. Identifying personal data are not pertinent to the HIFIS Initiative. All the data are collected and stripped of any identifying information.

## **What questions can HIFIS help to answer about homelessness at the local and national levels?**

Data maintained at the local level can help communities understand the contributing factors to homelessness, the characteristics and service needs of those served, and collect statistics on the living arrangements of those being discharged. HIFIS can help the government understand who is homeless, where people use shelter and services, and evaluate the nation's capacity to house homeless people.

## Why is HIFIS a good alternative to other software for gathering community-based information on homelessness?

HIFIS software:

- Is designed, in consultation with community stakeholders, to assist shelters with their operations.
- Is free, including regular upgrades based on community feedback.
- Has a toll-free Support Desk.
- Offers free on-site technical support where HIFIS Community Coordinators/TelecomPioneers are available (TelecomPioneers are skilled volunteers who can provide shelters with a variety of services, ranging from technical support to computer skills training).
- Features free computers and operating software through our partners in the Digital Inclusion Partnership for Homelessness, a partnership which aims to meet the software and hardware needs of shelters and service providers.
- Offers community training on HIFIS software and Data Analysis.
- Has DSPs ensuring the proper protection and management of sensitive data.
- Features *Data Dictionary*: a resource that has been produced to help communities develop a common understanding of terms used in the software.
- Offers access to data at the local and national levels to assist in making policy decisions, designing programs and conducting research.
- Contains comprehensive data on homelessness over time (i.e., to identify patterns of homelessness), which contribute to the development of an accurate picture of the scope and nature of homelessness in Canada.
- Includes online resources available through the HIFIS Initiative Web site: [www.hifis.ca](http://www.hifis.ca).

By joining the HIFIS Initiative, which already has over 400 registrants, shelters and service providers join a growing network of HIFIS users who can provide invaluable resources such as best practices in shelter/service provision management, as well as present an opportunity to share Reporting Templates between communities.

## Where can I find additional information on HIFIS?

For additional information and resources relating to HIFIS, please visit [www.hifis.ca](http://www.hifis.ca) or call the HIFIS Support Desk at 1-866-324-2375.

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