Data Evaluation Committee

5/25/2022

Present: Cynthia DiGeronimo, Owen Wallace, Michele LaFleur, Laura Hudson, Shaundell Diaz

**Data request from City of Northampton**- a Northampton High School student is interning with the city of Northampton to create a data dashboard around homelessness and housing insecurity in Northampton. They haven’t been able to gather data from any other partners so are relying solely on HMIS at this point in time. The student’s internship ends in early June so I’m trying to get data to them by the end of the day tomorrow and so far have sent along, for each month since January until May, a report listing the total number of new permanent housing enrollments in Hampshire County broken down by prior living situation, the total number of new exits from Northampton individual shelters and Hampshire County housing programs broken down by exit destinations, the number and type of services provided during the month and how many clients received those services. They are also asking for a report of client demographics with unique identifiers so they can de-duplicate across months. This is the piece I’m unsure if we can provide- it would be a list of unique IDs like ‘A54FN98XC’ with each individual's race, ethnicity, gender, and age range, no client PII and no enrollment information. I had initially sent them two reports, one for totals of clients in individual shelters for each month by race and ethnicity and the other for gender and age, but with this structure they couldn’t de-duplicate. Are there thoughts on how to proceed? We should consider an official policy for data requests moving forward.

Laura- Unique IDs, often somewhere in the identifiers is their DoB and part of their Social, like DPH used to use. Curious about what he is trying to do, even just with demographic data they might be able to figure out who some people are.

Michele- I don’t think Clarity’s unique IDs includes any pieces of personal information but will double check this. This is the explanation he sent of his project- “I’m a 12th grader at Northampton High School and a current intern for the City of Northampton. I’ve been tasked with the development of a database and dashboard for analyzing homeless populations & trends within Northampton under the “State of Homelessness” project. I have been given your contact info by Alan Wolf as I was made aware you may have data regarding homeless populations. The goal for this project is to make a public dashboard that allows the general population & the city to be better aware of current homelessness, visualize trends, and see the utilization of community programs.”

Owen- does this dashboard already exist in a more general sense? My initial thought is a really good project like that it’s trying to bring attention to an important issue might spark more interest and resources. Apprehensive about giving data to someone who isn’t a provider, all of the people who make up that data, whatever agreements they signed, doubt it encapsulates that we might give some data to an intern working for the city. Doesn’t really feel like appropriate use of everyone’s data without knowing details of all the releases signed, feeling it’s an extenuating circumstance.

Laura- hear you Owen, when hearing his letter, I hope their intention is as positive as Owen just stated, to increase awareness, etc., feel more like it sounded like offender database, like people think it’s a horrible issue, fear it would be used negatively and not positively. A question to Alan about what’s their intention with this database?

Owen- definitely needs to be framed in a way that gets in front of that potential narrative. Some people view those experiencing homelessness differently than we do. The narrative needs to be set that this is a problem and how can we help, not this is a problem that annoys me, etc. In order to do the data analysis you need to do deduplication but how much of that information is going to make it to the dashboard. Could see people viewing the demographics through a lens that isn’t great, see potential of this to do the opposite of what they’re trying to do.

Laura- been on the Next Step Collaborative for a long time, don’t think the panhandling study actually helped those in town but was done for benefit of businesses.

Cynthia- probably related to the Resiliency Hub but also have reservations/concerns, there hasn’t been a lot of public talk about the hub

Laura- Steph at Cathedral of the Knight might be a good person to ask about sharing some of the data before deciding to move forward. Could shoot her an email and consider what she would think about that. Somebody who is a very good advocate of the homeless community and privacy thereof

Cynthia- what about the tool they’re using? They’re asking for raw anonymous data, if they’re using tableau public the underlying data might be made public, additional concern on top of sharing with the city. It’s a great idea to get the data but concerned about what people will do with it when they see it. Concerned about what he’ll use and what will be accessible to the public.

One step would be to have them tell us what they’re using to look at data and confirm that raw data won’t be accessible. Can’t take their word for it

Owen- no way of knowing if they’ll share it with another colleague or accidentally shares it on a google drive. There’s some degree of privacy at stake and no way of knowing if the intern is doing it on a work computer or personal laptop, so many variables that are unlikely individually but as a whole the risk profile is too large. Just giving aggregate numbers is probably okay but not as useful for them. Aggregate numbers won’t give the same room to build the report.

Michele- Consensus seems to be sharing aggregates only

Owen- assume the intern has good intentions but don’t feel great about allowing anyone receiving services to be ‘data guineapigs’ for someone learning. Better to be safe with their information than not.

Cynthia- there isn’t a policy yet so it would be sort of premature to go through with this.

**Statewide warehouse data requests**- we need to vote on this today, if at all possible. The state would like an answer by June and Michele will be away the 27th until June. We checked in with Brad Gordon, one of the co-chairs of the board of directors, and he recommended delegating the vote to one of the CoC’s committees. The decision is around data requests from outside researchers, much like the city of Northampton's request. The policy and request form were written by DHCD with input from a representative of each CoC that make up a state data warehouse Committee. Unfortunately, this was establishing and happening during our HMIS migration so we weren’t heavily involved and sometimes didn’t have a representative at those meetings. Our primary contribution to the policy and form was to request that there be a higher number of checks in place for researchers request de-identified data because of the potential nature to identify someone in a small community with limited demographic information. Are we okay with this policy? Do we have any feedback for them? (If they’ll take it)

Owen – seems straightforward enough for what it is

Cynthia- CoCs have the opportunity to say yes or no about sharing and clients can say yes or no about sharing.

Laura- right now, if they asked for data from the CoC, because no one has signed the release, they can’t see anything. Who would ever be requesting this data? Is there a reason for us to go through the process of getting these releases signed? Is there benefit to us doing that process? Is state saying we need to do the process?

Don’t need to, necessarily, but there are some benefits to CoCs. There may be outside researchers who send in requests city of nothampton could request from state warehouse in future with their process in place. Aggregate data can be shared regardless of releases but not de-identified.

Owen- what is the benefit to this? Other than an amorphous esoteric it’ll help because there will be more data to look at? Feels like there’s a lot of trust involved, try to weigh that against every person who makes up that data, how they would feel about potentially a much larger net of people seeing them. Feels beyond the scope of what every person who signed onto services agreed to. See a lot of potential vectors for this information to be shared, even if someone checks all of the boxes. Don’t love giving up this level of control.

Cynthia- all the data has been going into the warehouse?

Michele - Most has been going in from our CoC, most CoC funded programs and some others, all MA CoCs are entering data in the state warehouse. The benefit for CoCs is to be able to do reporting that includes family shelters for CoC reports and can generate homelessness verification documents if the client has signed a release sharing with the CoCs.

Cynthia- the state can see and do their own analysis, so there’s no loss there in terms of documenting the need in the area.

Amanda- spoke with both Christine and Olivia and they were fine to move forward

Laura- Seems to be a fairly protected process, even to get aggregate data would require a lot of people at east looking at the request, you would at least hear about the request and if anything was a a concern would vote no. For anything with PII someone would have to sign a request so we would have to figure out how to identify who had signed that requested and start asking agencies to ask participants to sign the request. So, if research needs to be done there’s a request, if not participating means we might not be in line to get some kind of special funding then it’s not good that we don’t have anyone sign the release. What would not participating do?

Not having anyone ever sign the release means aggregate and de-identified data could be used but no identified data so no sharing of chronicity across the state. Trying to find out if a client is chronic sometimes and clients can’t tell exactly where/when but with data from Springfield might be able to tell.

Owen – so the ROI, which we haven’t seen, sounded like an individual could say ‘yes, I give permission for APP to view my records’

Michele- not limited to specific agencies within a CoC, any provider within that CoC with access could see if a client gave access to their CoC.

Owen- anyone's information in this would be in the statewide release. Hate to add one more piece of paperwork and this is never going to be a priority for many people, we can do our best to ty and encourage. Would assume that more people or not would decline if they knew it doesn’t affect their services and shares their personal info, more thought and protections put into place for this as long as every person working within our CoC is able to opt out of that, don’t see any immediate issues.

Laura- would vote yes for this, initially lets someone potentially get information in the aggregate and deidentified data until we start getting releases signed. Have offered the city of Northampton aggregate data and they’re asking for identified with a number. We could either add to our release or use this release if we had it signed with DHCD to be able to share PII, if someone signed that release, we would use the same list to share identifying information with someone who came to us. Would include only those who are okay with their data to be released to an outside researcher. Would allow you to have a plan, to refer someone to the state process.

Shaundell – I vote yes, understand where Owen and Laura are coming from and that people have the opportunity to opt out

Cynthia- Agreed, the committee gets to review and decide- the idea that small populations present unique challenges is something I hope the committee would attend to.

We agreed to support the statewide warehouse’s external data request plan and Michele notified the state of this decision following the committee meeting.

**Next Meeting** – Wednesday 6/22, 3-4:30pm

New release of information draft- let's look at it and start revising as soon as we can! If you can take a moment to read through the draft and provide feedback prior to our next meeting that would be helpful, the draft is included in the email that went out with these notes. It will be our focus on 6/22.