Greater Richmond Continuum of Care: Homeward Community Information System Application Process for New Participating Agencies

Description: The Homeward Community Information System (HCIS) is a HIPAA-compliant online database used to link households experiencing homelessness to resources; to better understand client demographics, service needs, service usage, and trends; and, to facilitate community planning to reduce homelessness.

HCIS is the regional implementation of a federally mandated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS.) HUD and the Virginia Department of Housing Community Development, the largest public funding sources for homeless services, require the use of an HMIS for providers and localities receiving federal and state homeless assistance funds. Agencies and programs primarily serving survivors of sexual and domestic violence are prohibited from using HCIS.

In the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC), there are more than 155 individual HCIS users in approximately 14 partner agencies. The GRCoC's HCIS implementation is also used by other CoCs in the Commonwealth: the Virginia Balance of State (which includes Petersburg), Western Virginia (which includes Harrisonburg and Winchester), and the Fredericksburg region. Homeward is the designated HMIS Lead for the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care.

Purpose of HCIS: The use of HCIS allows homeless service providers to
- Coordinate services for households experiencing homelessness from multiple agencies.
- Focus on equity and target services to the most vulnerable households needing homeless assistance.
- Center client dignity by providing continuity of care between programs and over time while ensuring confidentiality.
- Track program outcomes; identify gaps in needed services; and determine which interventions have the biggest impact on exits to permanent housing.
- Ensure accountability and compliance for public funding.

The use of HCIS enables our community to be eligible for public funding to address homelessness. Appropriate use of HCIS facilitates coordinated service provision and ensures that GRCoC programs are eligible and competitive for ongoing federal and state funding. HCIS data is used to coordinate and maximize referrals for year-round emergency shelters and targeted housing interventions.

Overview of Process:
- Agency meeting with HMIS Lead Staff (contact hcis@homewardva.org.)
- Review HCIS Policies and Procedures (https://www.homewardva.org/hcis)
- For non-funded agencies, submit an application to the HCIS Committee for review and recommendation to the GRCoC Board.
- If approved, review eligibility for a Homeward subsidy or review costs for HCIS participation.
- If approved, plan for training and implementation.

Applying to join HCIS in the Greater Richmond region: Funded Agencies

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Agencies with a notice of award or grant agreement from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the US Department of Veterans Affairs, or other public funding source requiring participation in and reporting from HMIS should reach out to the HMIS Lead staff to discuss HCIS implementation and potential costs including eligibility for a subsidy from Homeward for certain HCIS costs. The process for funded agencies does not require additional approval from the HCIS Committee or GRCoC Board although participating agencies must follow all HCIS policies and procedures including requirements for documentation, training, client confidentiality, and data quality.

Applying to join HCIS in the Greater Richmond region: Non-funded Agencies
Agencies not currently funded by the state (DHCD) or federal government (HUD or other) to provide homeless assistance can apply to join HCIS if they demonstrate a clear and relevant business purpose that includes participation in confidential service coordination for households experiencing or at risk for homelessness in the Greater Richmond region served by the GRCoC.

Interested agencies who have not previously used HCIS as well as agencies whose usage has been terminated or revoked for any reason <u>must</u> meet with the HCIS Lead staff prior to starting the application process. Contact the HMIS Lead staff at hcis@homewardva.org to set up a meeting to discuss the HCIS application process. Interested organizations should also review the HCIS Policies and Procedures for additional information before starting the application process.

After the meeting with the HMIS Lead staff at Homeward, non-funded agencies interested in joining HCIS must meet the following criteria:
   a. Meet technical requirements for using HCIS (detailed in the HCIS policies and procedures found here: https://www.homewardva.org/hcis-training-documents/user-agreements).
   b. Be a participating member of the GRCoC as outlined in the bylaws here: https://www.endhomelessnessrva.org/orientation. New agencies can demonstrate intent to participate in the GRCoC. For more information, please contact info@homewardva.org.
   c. Have a valid business purpose or mission for using HCIS. The HCIS Committee reviews this information in concert with the HMIS Lead staff.
   d. Be a nonprofit or government entity with a mission or program(s) fully or partially dedicated to addressing homelessness in the Greater Richmond region.
   e. Complete an application available at www.homewardva.org/hcis. The application includes the following components:
      i. Technical requirements including hardware and software requirements as well as policy requirements.
      ii. Description of the programs to be included as well as the business purpose and mission of the agency or program.
      iii. Description of organizational policies including client confidentiality and privacy, particularly as they relate to social media.
   f. If approved to join HCIS, comply with training and documentation requirements for HCIS implementation.

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g. If approved to join HCIS, have a signed agency agreement on file with Homeward and complete other required documents to use HCIS: https://www.homewardva.org/hcis-training-documents/user-agreements.

Process: Applications from non-funded agencies will be reviewed by the HCIS Committee as soon as practical or within 30 days and will be recommended for approval/disapproval to the GRCoC Board. If any agency disagrees with the CoC Board's decision, it can appeal in writing to the Board and provide additional information to support its case. If this appeal is unsuccessful, a non-funded agency can re-apply in six months following the same procedures outlined above. Homeward HMIS Lead staff will serve as the liaison between the agency and the HCIS Committee and GRCoC Board.

Homeward requires a probationary period of six months for new participating agencies to ensure that the system is being used as intended and offers frequent check ins and support to ensure client confidentiality and data quality.

Resources:
To learn more about HCIS, please visit https://www.homewardva.org/hcis. For assistance with HCIS, please email hcis@homewardva.org.