

Title: 1.3. Common Assessment Tools

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Date Approved:

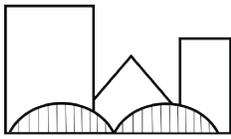
The CoC's CE process for clients who are not fleeing domestic violence provides a standardized assessment process to all CE participants, ensuring uniform decision-making and coordination of care for persons experiencing a housing crisis. The standardized assessment tool used for Coordinated Entry, outlined below, follows the guidelines for establishing a Coordinated Entry System outlined by HUD in Notice CPD-17-11.¹

Who Can Administer Vulnerability Assessments?

Assessors who administer the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) to clients who are not fleeing domestic violence are generally housing provider staff, outreach workers, or those who are key players within the CES. Training on the assessment tool is a 22-minute video, offered by the assessment's creator – OrgCode Consulting, Inc. This training video is incorporated into a three part Coordinated Entry Training series that can be found on the CAFTH website (www.cafth.org). After completing the video training, assessors will take a brief quiz located on the website on the material to ensure they have watched the training in full and are able to comprehend the materials. Anyone can administer the assessments once they are trained on the tool and pass this brief quiz, and all assessors must know how to swiftly pass along the assessment once completed while maintaining confidentiality and data security. Assessors are also trained in how to quickly and safely refer a client fleeing domestic violence who may present at a CE access point.

All staff administering assessments are expected to use culturally and linguistically competent practices. The CoC will incorporate cultural competency and linguistic competency training into the required annual training protocols for participating projects and staff members using standards of practice from models provided by organizations and associations like the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA). Assessments will include questions for all persons that reduce cultural and linguistic barriers to housing and services for special populations, including immigrants, refugees, youth, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ persons.

¹ Department of Housing & Urban Development. (2017). *Notice establishing additional requirements for a CoC centralized or coordinated assessment system*. Notice CPD-17-11.



Who Qualifies for a Vulnerability Assessment?

The Memphis/Shelby County CES has adopted the practice that a person or household must be at minimum literally homeless to receive a vulnerability assessment. The definition of literally homeless is determined by HUD and varies by population. HUD's HEARTH Act Final Rule on Homelessness² defines literal homelessness as:

1. Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided;
2. Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence;
3. Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; and
4. Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

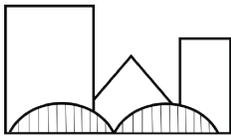
The following population brackets match the following assessment tools:

1. Any individual who is at least 25 years of age and at least literally homeless must be assessed using the VI-SPDAT.
2. Any individual who is between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age and at least literally homeless must be assessed using the Transitional Age Youth (TAY)-VI-SPDAT. Youth are eligible to receive this assessment if they are literally homeless or if they are couchsurfing/staying temporarily with friends or family.
3. Any family, or household with children, who are at least literally homeless, must be assessed using the Families (F)-VI-SPDAT.

Administering an Assessment

When a client is identified as literally homeless, a CE provider, outreach worker, or person trained to administer the VI-SPDAT assessment tool should conduct the assessment with the client to identify potential housing resources they may qualify for.

² Department of Housing & Urban Development. (2011). *Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing: Defining "Homeless"*. Federal Register Vol. 76, No. 233.



All assessments take approximately 10-12 minutes to administer. All assessments include important information about the person/household's history of homelessness, while identifying any barriers to being housed, as well as any variables that might make them more vulnerable. The score on the assessment helps to determine vulnerability level when making prioritized placements and referrals to housing and supportive services. In addition to identifying a person/household's overall needs and preferences, the assessment also offers an immediate evaluation to establish if the client needs access to shelter, outreach, mental health services, or mainstream resources. All assessment tools are electronically available within the HMIS Coordinated Assessment Systems module and on the CAFTH website.

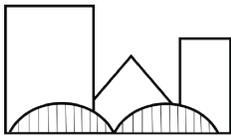
How Long Does an Assessment Remain Valid For?

Per OrgCode's guidance, a VI-SPDAT assessment has no timeframe for expiration. Clients should only receive an additional assessment, even if they are re-entering the CES, if the household has been housed and become homeless again, or has had a major change in their life circumstances. The outreach worker or service provider currently engaging with the client will be responsible for reviewing HMIS for the client's previous VI-SPDAT assessment score and for discussing with the client if they have had any major life changes or were recently housed in a CoC program but have now returned to homelessness. The outreach worker or service provider will also be responsible for discussing the client who they believe needs a new assessment with CE Lead Agency staff and during the next By-Name List meeting. If sufficient information has been gathered showing that the client has had a major life change or has returned to homelessness from housing, the CE Lead Agency will instruct the outreach worker or service provider to complete a new assessment.

Assessments for Domestic Violence Survivors

It is HUD's position that any level of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking is inherently dangerous and life-threatening. Therefore, HUD did not intend the phrase "dangerous or life-threatening" outlined above in the definition of literal homelessness to be interpreted as a level of violence that must occur before an individual or family can qualify as homeless.³ HUD interprets the intent behind section 103(a)(6) of the McKinney Vento Act as including all individual and families fleeing, or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

³ National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2019). *Hearth act 2009 and domestic violence victims and providers*. Retrieved from: https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Library_TH_2018_HEARTH_Act_Regulations.pdf



These domestic violence subpopulations are to be assessed separately from those who are entering CE and are not fleeing domestic violence or assault. Clients within this population are to receive a brief risk assessment to best assess their needs while protecting their privacy.

Privacy and Assessments

An HMIS consent form is attached to each assessment (found in the appendix). The client's consent is required for the release and sharing of information, and for entering the client into the HMIS Coordinated Entry System. If a participant completes the assessment, but does not want their data in HMIS, the CE Lead Agency will need to be given the data by the assessor so that a unique identifier can be used on the By Name List for connection to supportive housing. Domestic violence clients will not have their information entered into HMIS, to protect their safety and abide by Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) regulations.

Client's Right to Decline Answers

CoC Coordinated Entry clients are free to decide what information they provide during the assessment process, to refuse to answer assessment questions, and to refuse housing and service options without retribution or limiting their access to other forms of assistance. Written policies and procedures outlined in Section 1.4.3 specify the conditions for participants to maintain their place in coordinated entry prioritization lists when the participant rejects options.

During the assessment, clients are not required to disclose information, including a specific disability or diagnosis. The disclosure of a specific disability or diagnosis (or the refusal to disclose such) will not impact an individual or household's placement into the Coordinated Entry System, nor will it affect the individual's place on the priority list. Assessment score, length of time homeless, chronic status, and supportive documentation forms will all be used to determine eligibility and referral appropriateness. Information regarding a specific diagnosis or disability may only be obtained for the purposes of determining program eligibility to make appropriate referrals from Coordinated Entry, e.g. accessible units, physical limitations, first floor vs. upper floor vacancies, and congregate vs. scattered-site settings.