FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
FOR
HIFIS RELEASE 4.0.59.1

This FAQ provides practical advice on implementing HIFIS release 4.0.59.1 (release 59.1), on the use of the Coordinated Access module, and how the Unique Identifier List (the List) intersects with other reports and initiatives.

A. Implementing HIFIS release 59.1

1. Why should my community implement release 59.1?

HIFIS plays a central role in improving access to data by allowing communities to document client interactions within a housing and homelessness system and making this information available to local partners based on user rights in that system. Communities using HIFIS also have the ability to track their progress with reaching homelessness reduction targets at the community level. Aggregating the results in this way can help demonstrate and report on the collective efforts of service providers to prevent and reduce homelessness across the community.

Implementing the most recent HIFIS release ensures that your community benefits from the latest functionalities and fixes. All enhancements and fixes from previous releases are included in HIFIS release 59.1. See HIFIS release notes 58.1, 58.2 and 58.3 for additional information.

Release 59.1 includes several functionalities to support the implementation and operation of Coordinated Access and report progress, including:
- ✓ Improvements to strengthen housing history data entry;
- ✓ Automatic calculation of chronic homelessness based on the Reaching Home definition;
- ✓ An integrated Unique Identifier List (or By-Name List), and more.

For questions on release 59.1 or HIFIS in general, the HIFIS Client Support Centre can be reached by email at support@hifis.ca or by phone at 1-866-324-2375.

2. Is it mandatory to implement release 59.1?

Sharing the HIFIS export fields with ESDC **is an obligation** under the Data Provision Agreement (DPA), as ESDC grants the right to use a registered copy of HIFIS in return for the HIFIS export fields (see DPA Annex A: HIFIS export fields). To fulfill this obligation, communities must have implemented release 58.1 or a more recent release of HIFIS.

Release 58.1 and, by extension, release 59.1 contain an updated export function that allows the sharing of non-directly identifiable client and shelter information to ESDC. This information is crucial to the Government of Canada and Reaching Home, as it helps to advance the understanding of homelessness in Canada.

Furthermore, HIFIS 59.1 contains enhancements that will help your community implement and operationalize Coordinated Access and set the foundation to report on its progress.

3. **Given that a mandatory HIFIS PiT Count release is expected in Winter 2021, should I wait before implementing release 59.1?**

Everyone Counts 2020, the third nationally coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) count, is deferred to Spring 2021 due to the risks posed by COVID-19. To obtain a better understanding of the experiences of homelessness during this pandemic, new and modified survey questions will be introduced in a Winter 2021 HIFIS PiT Count release.

The PiT Count release is **only mandatory for communities using their HIFIS installation** to conduct the 2021 PiT Count or enter PiT Count data. However, if your community is not using its HIFIS installation to conduct PiT Count or enter PiT Count data, you do not need to install the Winter 2021 PiT Count release.

It should be noted that while the Winter 2021 release will focus on the PiT Count, every HIFIS release improves functionality and addresses bugs. Please consult any release notes to inform your decision to update.

If your community is using its own HIFIS installation for PiT Count, you can contact the HIFIS Client Support Centre by email at support@hifis.ca or by phone at 1-866-324-2375 to discuss the following options:
1. **Update to release 4.0.59.1 and use HIFIS Lite for PiT Count 2021**: Use HIFIS Lite for PiT Count 2021 and update with release 4.0.59.1 now
2. **Update to release 4.0.59.2**: Wait for the HIFIS PiT Count 2021 release before updating HIFIS (will contain release 4.0.59.1 enhancements)
3. **Update HIFIS twice**: Use the Coordinated Access enhancements now with HIFIS release 4.0.59.1. Update again with the PiT Count release before conducting the PiT Count.

B. Using the List

4. **How can I use the List to generate community-level data if I have multiple HIFIS clusters in my HIFIS database or if HIFIS is not the only Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) in my community?**

The Coordinated Access module generates the List for a single cluster at a time. Specifically, client information is only pulled from the cluster you are logged into (i.e., the cluster where the HIFIS service provider you logged into is from).

The following steps can help create a single List from two or more HIFIS clusters:
1. Export each List into Microsoft Excel using the export function of the Coordinated Access module.
2. Combine the Lists into the Microsoft Excel document.
3. Check for duplicate clients and, if duplicates are found, consolidate each client's data (e.g., merge multiple rows of data into one row in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet).

In a similar fashion, a community with multiple Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) can combine each source by following similar steps – export each dataset into a common format, such as Microsoft Excel, and check for duplicate clients.

See release 59.1 Reference Guide Section *2* – Prioritization for more information on how to export Lists.

IMPORTANT: Communities combining multiple Lists should consider developing written protocols to ensure that the process for merging Lists, which includes addressing potential duplication of clients, is standardized. In addition, communities may wish to create a process of keeping track of how specific client data has been "merged" between datasets, especially if the process will need to be repeated.

5. Should I maintain a history of the Lists that are generated?

Communities are encouraged to maintain historical records of their Lists to monitor trends over time, such as changes to homelessness inflow and outflow dynamics, client demographics or acuity (e.g., the daily number of people experiencing homelessness). This information can then be used to support reporting and decision-making.

To create these historical records, communities need to either save exported Microsoft Excel copies of their Lists to preserve that snapshot in time or create a new Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where some of the data generated from the Lists can be tracked over time.

Lists generated at different points – even on the same day – may generate different results. For example, a List may be generated at 12 pm and then again at 6 pm on the same day. In a community with a local 90-day inactivity policy, if a shelter worker books a homeless client with no HIFIS transactions over the past year into a shelter between 12 pm and 6 pm, this new service transaction would make the client's state change from Inactive to Active. Consequently, the client would be included in the 6pm List, assuming that the Coordinated Access consent is acquired.

Both Lists are accurate for the same day – Lists pulled before the shelter booking transaction would exclude the client, while Lists pulled after this transaction would include the client. See the Reference Guide's Section 1 – Triage and Assessment Table 1 – Service Table, for service making clients to be or remain active.

A HIFIS report is being developed to support communities with their Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report. This HIFIS report, expected to be available in 2021 in HIFIS' Reports Marketplace, will help communities with trend monitoring, among other things.

6. Can I make edits to the List to add filters and sorting?

The List can be filtered directly in the Coordinated Access module by applying one or more filters in four categories: Client Vitals, Age, Experience of Homelessness and Additional Filters. To display filters, click on ▼ Filter Options at the top of the Coordinated Access – Unique Identifier List page.

To display additional data points on the List not shown in the Coordinated Access module or to make further edits, the List can be exported into Microsoft Excel with the export bottom located at the bottom of the Coordinated Access module. Once exported, new data points from a non-HIFIS dataset can also be added. This requires a way to match the non-HIFIS dataset to the right clients using a common unique identifier (e.g., a name, or Client ID). See Reference Guide Section *2 – Prioritization* for more information on how to export and sort Lists.

You can also submit proposed changes to the List as displayed in the Coordinated Access module or as exported into Microsoft Excel to the HIFIS Client Support Centre at support@HIFIS.ca or by phone at 1-866-324-2375.

C. Clients in the Report

7. How can I make clients appear or disappear from the List?

Adding or removing a client from the Coordinated Access module's List can be done by updating the client's HIFIS information related to three areas. The List includes clients who meet each of the following criteria:
1. Have an active Coordinated Access consent (Consent: Coordinated Access).
2. Currently active (Client State: Active) as per the community's configured HIFIS Inactivity Threshold; and
3. Currently homeless (Housing Status: Homeless, Transitional* or Unknown).

   *Clients with a Transitional Housing Status may or may not be included depending on HIFIS configuration. See Reference Guide Section 1 – Triage and Assessment's Administrator – Changing the Provisionally Accommodated Housing Continuum Category from "Homeless" to "Housed".

> **IMPORTANT:** Communities should maintain real-time data in HIFIS to get the most out of the List. If clients are missing from the List, their HIFIS information should be reviewed carefully pertaining to the three criteria described above, to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date. The same process should be conducted for a client that shows up on the List, but should not appear. See the Reference Guide's Best Practices for Data-Driven Communities.

Another option is to add or remove clients to/from the List once it is exported into Microsoft Excel. For example, some communities may want to remove (filter out) clients who have a housing offer. See question 11. How can I identify that clients on the List have a housing offer in progress?

8. How does my community's Coordinated Access inactivity policy impact who is included in the List?

Communities' inactivity policy or protocol have a direct impact on who is included in the List.

Under Coordinated Access, communities must have an inactivity policy that sets the number of days of no contact or service interactions that need to pass before the state of an individual or family is changed from Active to Inactive. HIFIS Administrators can configure this in the HIFIS Inactivity Threshold. See Reference Guide Section 1 – Triage and Assessment's Administrator – Selecting the Inactivity Threshold.

The List only contains clients that have an Active Client State, meaning clients that have had transactions from the Reference Guide's Table 1 – Service Table within the timeline specified in the HIFIS Inactivity Threshold.

For example, a community has configured its 90-day inactivity policy in HIFIS Inactivity Threshold. HIFIS will **exclude** from the List any clients who **do not** have a transaction from Table 1 – Service Table recorded in HIFIS in the past 90 days, even if they are still homeless.

9. How do I make sure families appear on the List?

To appear on the Report's List, each family member must meet the three criteria. See the question *7. How can I make clients appear or disappear from the List?* Any family member that does not meet these criteria will not appear on the List. Note that family members with an "Inherited" consent do not appear on the List, unless they were also granted Coordinated Access consent.

Family relationships between clients should be entered in HIFIS and kept up-to-date. The Family module keeps track of a client's family members and the role each member has in the family (dependents, family head or partner). When a client is linked to a family, members can be managed as a family unit for certain activities, such as book-ins. For instructions on how to create a family unit, see the HIFIS User Guide, p.22-23.

D. Coordinated Access Process

10. Are clients who do not want housing included on the List?

Clients who do not want housing are not included on the List. To appear on the List, each client must meet three criteria. See the question *7. How can I make clients appear or disappear from the List?*

This includes providing the Coordinated Access consent, which is the consent to receive housing resources from the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory. Common housing resources include housing units, rent subsidies and case managers that help people to stay housed.

11. How can I identify that clients on the List have a housing offer in progress?

The List's "Expected Move In Date" and "Housing Secured Date" data points indicate the date on which a client is expected or will move into a housing unit, respectively. As per their local policies, communities can choose to identify these clients so that they are not invited to consider another offer at the same time.

These two data points become available once the List is exported from the Coordinated Access module into Microsoft Excel. The export buttons are located at the bottom of the Coordinated Access – Unique Identifier List page in the Coordinated Access module.

IMPORTANT: Communities should consider developing written protocols to ensure that the process for identifying clients with a housing offer in progress is standardized.

E. Intersections with Other Reports and Initiatives

12. Why is the number of clients in the List different from our last PiT Count?

The number of clients in the report and the last Point-in-Time (PiT) count is expected to be different, as the List includes people who have had recent interactions with homelessness services, while the PiT Count is a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night, whether or not they have been connected with services.

The List includes information on clients whose information has been entered in HIFIS, i.e., clients who have been in contact with a homeless serving organization. Clients on the List also meet three criteria. See the question *7. How can I make clients appear or disappear from the List?*

On the other hand, the PiT Count measures homelessness in shelters, transitional housing and unsheltered locations. This means that the PiT Count may include individuals and families that are sleeping rough and have not connected with any homeless service organizations. If someone has not had their information entered into HIFIS, they cannot appear on the List as it is generated from data in HIFIS.

Over time, the number of people experiencing homelessness in a community changes, and the information collected in a PiT count might not reflect the situation in real-time. The PiT count offers a one-day snapshot of homelessness in a community that is not updated until the next count, which might be two years later.

13. Can I use the List to report on inflow and outflow?

The List could be used to calculate homelessness inflow and outflow data points, but the results will need to be generated manually by comparing Lists pulled at different points in time (e.g., at the end of each month). See question *5. Should I maintain a history of the Lists that are generated?*

To support communities with their Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report, a HIFIS report is being developed to pull these data points using Housing History and inactivity information. The report is expected to be available in 2021 in HIFIS' Reports Marketplace.

14. Can I use HIFIS to determine chronic homelessness?

HIFIS identifies clients that are chronically homeless based on the federal definition. For more information, see Reference Guide, Section 1 – Triage and Assessment

HIFIS displays this information on the List and in HIFIS under:

1. Client's Summary box and Client – Vitals;
2. Client List (Front Desk – Clients);
3. Coordinated Access Export.

Useful Information

- Consult the Reaching Home website, the Coordinated Access Guide, the HIFIS Toolkit and the Homelessness Learning Hub for more information on Reaching Home and the steps to implement Coordinated Access and HIFIS.

- Visit the HIFIS release notes webpage for information on recent HIFIS enhancements and fixes.

HIFIS Support and Staying Connected

- Contact the HIFIS Client Support Centre by email at support@HIFIS.ca or by phone at 1-866-324-2375 for questions about Version 59 or HIFIS in general. You can also refer to the HIFIS Toolkit.

- To receive the HIFIS Newsletter send a request to sign up by email at info@HIFIS.ca