

Western MA Network Youth Count Survey Notes

I. Suggested content improvements to help Western MA CoCs more accurately interpret their survey data -->

1. Include one or more screening questions to determine homeless/housing status, since it was sometimes difficult to ascertain current and/or past status. For example:

How would you describe your housing situation?

- a. Stably housed: I have housing and I'm not worried about losing it
- b. Precariously housed: I have housing but I **am** worried about losing it
- c. Temporarily housed: I am doubled up or couch surfing
- d. Homeless: I am staying at a shelter or in a hotel/motel room
- e. Unsheltered: I am mostly living outdoors/in a car, tent, or abandoned building

And/or...

Where did you sleep last night?

- a. In a car, tent, abandoned building or somewhere outside
- b. In an emergency shelter
- c. In transitional housing or a residential program
- d. In temporary housing - I'm couch surfing or doubled up
- e. In stable housing

Or...

Would you consider yourself homeless?

- > **Yes** (go to x.y)
- > **Not sure** (go to x.y)
- > **No** (skip to z)

x.y) Where did you stay last night?

- a. In a car, tent, abandoned building or somewhere outside
- b. In an emergency shelter or hotel/motel room
- c. In transitional housing or a residential program
- d. In temporary housing - I'm couch surfing or doubled up

2. Revisit the multiple response questions since they sometimes produced ambiguous or otherwise confusing results.

- It's possible that we would be able to better interpret our data if there were fewer multiple response questions and/or fewer response options for the multiple response questions.

For example, shorten the response options for questions like #10, "What are the reasons you are not living with a parent/guardian/foster parent?" and #27: "Have you tried to get help from any of the following services/programs" based on data collected from the

previous 2 surveys - i.e., drop response options that received few affirmative responses in favor of "Other."

One of our providers commented upon the ambiguity present in some of the questions by mentioning: "Question 11 seems a little tricky. What if some left home at 15, came back at 16 and left again at 17? The answer selections would not be clear to me in that type of scenario, so clarification of the wording could be useful. Question 34 is also somewhat ambiguous. The first and last (how many) letters of your first and last name? or should it be the first and last "letter" of first name and last name?"

- Include cascading response options or text boxes within the multiple response questions for a better understanding of what is being reported. For example, Q27-Q29, the "services sought/services received/barriers" questions, could be organized using conditional logic::

Did you seek help related to...

Counseling or other mental health care?

>Yes

(If yes) Did you receive the help you needed?

>No

(If no) What prevented you from getting the help you needed?

>close-ended list or text box for comments

3. Add one or more questions related to the adequacy or insufficiency of shelter/housing resources. For example...

Have you ever needed emergency housing or shelter?

>Yes

(if yes) Were you able to find a place to stay?

>Yes

(if yes) What type of emergency housing or shelter did you stay in?

a. A friend/relative's house

b. An emergency shelter

c. An overnight warming place

d. Somewhere else: _____

4. Add an item regarding permission to follow up with the person. For example:

There may be resources that could help you. Could we talk to you further about your (experience) (current situation)?

>Yes

(if yes) Contact info: name and phone or email

5. Use formatting and layout techniques to facilitate clear responses, such as shading, arrows to indicate skip patterns, etc.

II. Suggested data collection/data entry improvements to help Western MA CoCs work with their data more efficiently -->

Implementing a protocol to detect ineligible and/or invalid survey responses would reduce data entry burden and permit our CoCs to analyze their data more efficiently, since they would not need to spend as much time cleaning up the data.

For example, a section of the survey marked "For office use only" could include checkboxes for 'under 25' and 'valid submission'. The survey administrator or the person entering the data could quickly review each survey and check the applicable boxes. Surveys without both boxes checked could be retained but would not be entered into the online survey tool and/or the database. Then the CoCs would not need to perform a time-consuming data clean-up.

For Office Use Only

- Under 25
 - Valid submission
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III. Suggested data analysis & reporting strategies to help Western MA CoCs learn as much as possible through the surveys and put their learning into action -->

The Western MA Network and its CoCs is eager to translate survey data into meaningful information, so as to transform information into action! This includes...

- 1) Learning more about unaccompanied youth under 18 years old who are homeless or doubled up, as compared to other age groups and those with differing housing status; and
- 2) Learning more about what might distinguish young people who are homeless from those who are not, since this might point toward opportunities for targeted interventions.

These groups become too small to analyze and/or compare to one another at our regional and CoC level. The group of young people who are under 18 and homeless is too small to make comparisons, and possibly too small to make generalizations that could be inform practice. The group of folks who are "never" homeless - when looking at homeless status as "current", "ever", or "never" - is likewise too small to compare to the "current" or "ever" groups.

Yet these groups might become large enough to compare and generalize about at the state level. Thus the Network and Western MA CoCs would gain actionable insights if DHCD could offer statewide survey results pertaining to:

- 1) Youth who are under 18, between 18 and 21, and between 22 and 24 - by refining Q4 re: age group.
- 2) Youth who are currently homeless compared to "ever" homeless and "never" homeless.