

Rebuilding Lives Updated Strategy Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio

Systems Data Match – HMIS & Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services

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Prepared for:

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Introduction

What follows are results from a data match between two systems: the Columbus area shelter system and the state-administered public welfare system. The former uses data collected on persons and families staying in shelters or placed in permanent supportive housing through the Rebuilding Lives (RL-PSH) initiative, and uses records collected by a homeless management information system (HMIS) coordinated by the Community Shelter Board (CSB) in Columbus, Ohio. The latter uses records from the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS), the local public welfare agency that administers a variety of public benefits.

The object of this data match is to see the proportions of individuals and families who were receiving JFS-administered benefits at the point where they entered shelters or RL-PSH, or, alternately, who acquired these benefits while they were in shelter or RL-PSH.

This study focused on four types of benefits administered by JFS. They were:

- Medicaid: federal and state-funded health insurance for single adults and families who qualify based on state-determined eligibility guidelines;
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF): cash assistance to families with children who qualify under state-determined eligibility guidelines. Data is also provided on the number of sheltered families who were ineligible for TANF benefits due to their having exceeded the time limits during which a family may receive this benefit. TANF receipt is not reported for single individuals, either in shelter or in permanent supportive housing, as the rates among this group (due to their not being with families) can be considered negligible;
- Food Stamps: assistance with purchasing food as funded by the US Department of Agriculture to income-eligible single adults and families;
- General Assistance: limited cash assistance provided to single adults, most often who have disabilities but are not receiving other benefits or income. GA rates are not reported for families.
- Disability Assistance: Medicaid for the disabled.

In addition to these assistance categories, two additional categories are also included. The first is an assessment of the proportions of individuals and families receiving disability benefits, based on eligibility to one or more JFS-administered programs. These benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), are most often administered by agencies other than JFS. The second is JFS-administered child care

subsidies, the rates of which were assessed only for families (as single adults are presumed not to have children with them).

This data match, a possible prototype for subsequent data matches between these two systems, assesses the extent to which they serve the same individuals and families and the need for further study and interventions targeting persons who use services through both systems.

Key Findings

Single Adults in the Shelter System

Table 1 – Match results: Single adults admitted to Columbus shelters for the first time in 2004 – 2005 who received benefits administered by the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS)

Single Adults first entering shelters in 2004-05 (N=6,031)	Medicaid	Food Stamps
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits at Shelter Entry	9.6%	22.0%
JFS Benefits Initiated During Shelter Tenancy	1.2%	13.2%
	General Assistance	Disability Assistance
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits at Shelter Entry	2.1%	10.4%
JFS Benefits Initiated During Shelter Tenancy	0.8%	1.2%

Table 1 presents the proportions of single adults first entering the shelter system in 2004 and 2005 who received four types of benefits. For all four, the rates of receipt are relatively low. Specifically:

- for Medicaid, only 10.8% of the total (9.6% on Medicaid at shelter entry and 1.2% initiating Medicaid while in shelter) received Medicaid at some point during their shelter stay.
- Virtually everyone staying in shelters should be eligible for food stamps, just over one-third of the persons in the study (22.0% receiving food stamps at shelter entry and 13.2% initiating receipt of food stamps while in shelter) were identified as receiving food stamps at some point during their shelter stay.
- The rate of persons receiving disability benefits was found to be 11.6% of the total. By means of comparison, this is roughly equal to those identified as receiving Medicaid coverage (10.8% total). Receipt of disability benefits is the primary means by which single adults in shelters would qualify for Medicaid. In another comparison, in the HMIS data set 14% and 24% of males and females, respectively, using single adult shelters reported receipt of benefits upon exiting shelter. While “benefits” in the HMIS data include more than disability benefits, this

suggests that this data match underreports the proportion of persons receiving disability benefits.

- Small numbers of single adults (2.9% of total) are identified as receiving General Assistance (GA) benefits.

Families in the Shelter System

Table 2 – Match results: Families admitted to Columbus shelters for the first time in 2004 – 2005 who received benefits administered by the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS)

Sheltered Families (1,059 families)	Medicaid	TANF	Food Stamps
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits at Shelter Entry	68.7%	21.4%	56.8%
JFS Benefits Initiated While in Shelter	5.4%	4.6%	6.9%
	Disability Assistance	Childcare Assistance	Reached TANF Time Limit
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits At Shelter Entry	5.2%	3.0%	14.3%
JFS Benefits Initiated While in Shelter	0.2%	7.6%	n/a

The results reported here are based on matches for head of household, which will be a proxy for the entire family. Matches for total family members (n=3619) were also reported by JFS for all categories except for those reaching TANF assistance time limit. For the five categories reported, the proportions were virtually identical, whether reported for head of household or family member.

Results include:

- among the families in shelter, almost three-quarters – 68.7% who were covered upon shelter entry and an additional 5.4% who initiated coverage while in shelter – were identified as receiving Medicaid. This relatively high rate of coverage is compared to the fact that virtually all sheltered families should be eligible for Medicaid;
- About one-quarter of sheltered families received TANF at any point during their shelter stay (21.4% receiving TANF at shelter entry and 4.6% initiating receipt of TANF while in shelter);
- About two-thirds of the families received food stamps – 56.8% at shelter entry and another 6.9% at some point during shelter stay. Like with Medicaid, this rate can be compared to the near universal eligibility among sheltered families for this benefit;
- A relatively small proportion of families, 5.4%, were identified as receiving disability assistance;

- Child care assistance benefits were identified as being received by 10.6% of the families;
- Among the families in the match, 14.3% were identified as being ineligible for TANF benefits when they entered the shelter because they had surpassed the length of time during which they are eligible to receive this benefit.

By comparison, 28.5% and 20.6% of sheltered families reported receiving TANF and food stamp benefits, respectively, in the HMIS data. While the TANF rates are approximately equal, the JFS data suggests that the food stamp rates in the HMIS data are under-reported.

The rate of families in shelters who have exceeded their TANF time limits suggests a tangible link between the loss of benefits and homelessness that should be further investigated.

Persons formerly homeless and placed into Rebuilding Lives-sponsored permanent supportive housing (RL-PSH)

Table 3 – Match results: Single adults placed in Rebuilding Lives Permanent Supportive Housing (RL-PSH) in 2004 – 2005 who received benefits administered by the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS)

Single Adults Placed in RL-PSH in 2004-05 (N=546)	Medicaid	Food Stamps
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits at RL-PSH Entry	17.4%	50.5%
JFS Benefits Initiated During RL-PSH Tenancy	5.1%	17.9%
	General Assistance	Disability Assistance
Received Ongoing JFS Benefits at RL-PSH Entry	8.4%	24.7%
JFS Benefits Initiated During RL-PSH Tenancy	2.2%	5.5%

Substantially greater proportions of persons in RL-PSH are identified as receiving JFS benefits as compared to those reported by sheltered households, yet it would appear that the rates of receipt identified here remain low. Specifically:

- Upwards of two-thirds of all RL-PSH placements (68.4%) are identified as receiving food stamps. This is within the range that could be expected of such a low-income population and contrasts with the rates found among single adults in shelters.
- Just over 30% (30.2%) of those placed in RL-PSH receive disability assistance either at placement (24.7%) or during their tenancy (5.5%). Depending upon the rates and natures of the disabilities among the RL-PSH tenants, the rate found here might indicate that a number of tenants were missed in this match or that they may be eligible for benefits that they are not receiving. The disability assistance rates upon

intake are somewhat consistent with the 12% reporting income from benefits at intake in the PSH data from HMIS.

- Among RL-PSH tenants, 22.5% received Medicaid either upon moving into PSH (17.4%) or while in PSH (5.1%). These rates, while higher than among the sheltered single adults, should be approximately equal to rates of disability assistance but are actually a bit lower. In a manner similar to what was mentioned above in reference to those receiving disability assistance, more RL-PSH tenants could be expected to be eligible for (and therefore receiving) Medicaid benefits. Also noteworthy, the Medicaid rates were very different in 2004 as compared to 2005. In 2004, the rate is slightly lower than the rate of persons receiving disability assistance; in 2005 the rate is much less (see appendix). This may be due either to a data problem or to an actual fluctuation in rates.
- Receipt of general assistance (GA) was found among 10.6% of RL-PSH tenants: 8.4% at housing placement and 2.2% during placement.

Recommendations

These results represent the first-ever systematic examination of JFS benefits received among homeless and formerly homeless populations in Franklin County. As such, the results represent a prototype that provides initial impressions on the degree to which JFS services reach these households (i.e., single adults or families) and serve to raise as many questions as they answer.

Among sheltered single adults, the results show a low rate of accessing benefits. This is not surprising, as benefits such as Medicaid are often more difficult to access by single adults, as compared to families. The transient experience of homeless adults, which creates difficulty in maintaining a regular address, among other difficulties, will also reduce the rates of benefits receipt found here. Nonetheless, a large majority of single adults should be eligible for food stamps, and the low rates of participation for this benefit warrant outreach services to this population. The low rates of General Assistance and for disability benefits also likely indicate an underutilization of these benefits, but given the uncertain levels of disability in this population, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this is the case. Further research is needed into the prevalence of disability among single adults and whether outreach efforts are warranted for these benefits.

Among sheltered families, high rates of receipt for food stamps and Medicaid coverage confirms that many families are indeed availing themselves of these services, which virtually all homeless families should be eligible for. In a manner similar to the sheltered single adults, the transient nature of being homeless will reduce the rates of benefit receipt, and that is likely to explain somewhat why rates are not higher. Such

dynamics are also likely to account for the lower than expected rates of TANF receipt. Here the rates are doubtlessly lower than the families that are eligible for such assistance, and outreach to eligible families stands to be instrumental in generating an income source that may facilitate faster exits from shelter. Outreach efforts to match eligible families with TANF benefits are also likely to increase rates of participation in food stamps and Medicaid.

The other factor that appears to partially explain low TANF rates, and which is one of the key findings, is that 14.3% of the sheltered families were identified as having exceeded their time limits for receiving TANF and were no longer eligible for the benefit. This represents a substantial proportion of the sheltered family population. This finding needs to be better understood, in terms of the specific dynamics that lead these families to become homeless following loss of benefits, and also the rates of homelessness experienced among all families who have lost TANF eligibility due to exceeding time limits for assistance.

The rates of all types of benefit receipt for tenants of RL-PSH appear modest. However, whether or not these benefits are underutilized by these tenants depends largely on the levels and types of disability present among the tenants, which is unclear. A review of these findings by persons with in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of this tenant population is needed to assess the accuracy and unmet need of these findings before further recommendations can be offered.

It cannot be ruled out that problems with the matching procedures resulted in some suppression in the number of matches between HMIS and JFS. While high levels of matches are found among benefits receipt among certain populations, such as Medicaid and food stamps among sheltered families, further inquiries should be made to validate the data match performed here and to otherwise assess the rates of benefits received by sheltered households.

Methodology

A computerized administrative database of client records was provided to JFS to match with their administrative database in accordance with procedures outlined in a data sharing agreement between JFS and CSB and as approved by the institutional review board at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia.

The HMIS database contained all households – families and single adults – whose first homeless shelter stay was either in 2004 or 2005, and all persons placed in permanent supportive housing under the auspices of Rebuilding Lives in 2004 and 2005. The JFS database contained records of persons and families receiving assistance administered by JFS.

HMIS and JFS records were matched based on common social security number. After ascertaining the matches, JFS staff then aggregated the results in a table whose format was provided for them by CSB consultant. Dr. Steve Metraux then reformatted the aggregated tables and, in consultation with JFS staff, produced this report which summarizes the findings. The data were broken down by year – 2004 and 2005. These yearly results are provided in the appendix following this section.

Data matches of this fashion typically yield conservative assessments of services use across systems due to inconsistencies with either reporting or recording social security numbers across systems. Furthermore, limitations related to the structure of the JFS database could further impair the ability to match across systems, though it is not known if this is a problem in this match. The limitations specific to this data match should be explored in further detail before making firm conclusions based on the results reported here.

Appendix – Data broken down by year: 2004 and 2005

Single Adults in Shelter

2004

Single Adults in Shelter – First Shelter Stay in 2004	Medicaid		Food Stamps	
Total	3307		3307	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	319	9.6%	709	21.4%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	53	1.6%	493	14.9%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	2935	88.8%	2105	63.7%
	General Assistance		Disability Assistance	
Total	3307		3307	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	73	2.2%	336	10.2%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	37	1.1%	55	1.7%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	3197	96.7%	2916	88.2%

2005

Single Adults in Shelter – First Shelter Stay in 2005	Medicaid		Food Stamps	
Total	2724		2724	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	263	9.7%	624	22.9%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	18	0.7%	306	11.2%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	2443	89.7%	1794	65.9%
	General Assistance		Disability Assistance	
Total	2724		2724	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	56	2.1%	294	10.8%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	9	0.3%	19	0.7%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	2659	97.6%	2411	88.5%

Families

2004

Families in Shelter – First Shelter Stay in 2004	Medicaid		Food Stamps	
Total	547		547	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	375	68.6%	327	59.8%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	26	4.8%	34	6.2%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	146	26.7%	186	34.0%
	TANF		Disability Assistance	
Total	547		547	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	120	21.9%	33	6.0%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	23	4.2%	2	0.4%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	404	73.9%	512	93.6%
	Child Care Assistance		Reached TANF Time Limit	
Total	547		547	
At Shelter Entry	19	3.5%	74	13.5%
While in Shelter	43	7.9%	n/a	n/a
Neither at Entry nor While in Shelter	485	88.7%	473	86.5%

2005

Families in Shelter – First Shelter Stay in 2005	Medicaid		Food Stamps	
Total	512		512	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	353	68.9%	275	53.7%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	31	6.1%	39	7.6%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	128	25.0%	198	38.7%
	TANF		Disability Assistance	
Total	512		512	
Received Ongoing Benefit at Shelter Entry	107	20.9%	22	4.3%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in Shelter	26	5.1%	0	0.0%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in Shelter	379	74.0%	490	95.7%
	Child Care Assistance		Reached TANF Time Limit	
Total	512		512	
At Shelter Entry	13	2.5%	77	15.0%
While in Shelter	38	7.4%	n/a	n/a
Neither at Entry nor While in Shelter	461	90.0%	435	85.0%

RL – PSH Single Adults

2004

Single Adults in PSH – Placed in 2004	Medicaid	Food Stamps
Total	328	328
Received Ongoing Benefit at PSH Entry	70 21.3%	166 50.6%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in PSH	23 7.0%	68 20.7%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in PSH	235 71.6%	94 28.7%
	General Assistance	Disability Assistance
Total	328	328
Received Ongoing Benefit at PSH Entry	29 8.8%	76 23.2%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in PSH	11 3.4%	25 7.6%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in PSH	288 87.8%	227 69.2%

2005

Single Adults in PSH – Placed in 2005	Medicaid	Food Stamps
Total	218	218
Received Ongoing Benefit at PSH Entry	25 11.5%	110 50.5%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in PSH	5 2.3%	30 13.8%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in PSH	188 86.2%	78 35.8%
	General Assistance	Disability Assistance
Total	218	218
Received Ongoing Benefit at PSH Entry	17 7.8%	17 7.8%
No Benefit at Entry/Started Receiving Benefit while in PSH	1 0.5%	1 0.5%
No Benefit at Entry/Did Not Receive Benefit while in PSH	200 91.7%	200 91.7%