

Subject: Critical Concern: Reconciling CoC Data Metrics with Community Realities

To the System Performance Committee,

I am writing to raise strong concerns about the way we are collecting and using data to inform the narrative about the homelessness response system in Seattle/King County.

I bring to this Board not only my experience as an individual who has been homeless but also my professional history as a provider within our CoC. I know of instances where data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) was utilized to portray my program as more successful than it factually was. This experience continues to resonate with me as a Board member, as I hear countless stories from CoC members and the community we serve that simply do not align with the successful metrics we routinely review.

The data presented at the October CoC Board meeting is, on the surface, exceptional. It suggests that the system is not only working but exceeding required standards. While this positive picture should not be entirely discounted, **how can we honestly reconcile it with known community realities?**

For instance:

- In January 2025, eviction rates in King County were [66% higher than pre-pandemic levels](#).
- Other agencies funding and monitoring Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and other housing providers have previously cited [unacceptable vacancy rates](#) and made changes to ensure units were being utilized.

How can we reconcile the stark reality we know the people we serve are experiencing when our accountability metrics show our programs are **exceeding every expectation?** If the numbers show a highly successful system, why are we continually reading and discussing the need for fundamental system change?

We, especially those with lived or living experience, recognize that there is something desperately missing in the way we consider and evaluate our outcome metrics. We are not alone in this concern. Harvard University recently published a [nationwide report on PSH](#) and found, much like the point I am making here, that elements like the 'utilization rate' do not accurately reflect the **true occupancy and use of the units themselves**.

The Chicago CoC recognized this critical gap and took steps to dive deeper into their metrics. I strongly encourage you to review the recording and materials they provided. That report clearly illustrates that the metrics required for HUD reporting did not paint a complete picture of their homelessness response system.

The report highlights that **HMIS and the current metrics have severe limitations**. The CoC must begin undertaking the task of establishing relationships with other agencies to build a more holistic understanding of how our funds are truly being used.

Recommendations for Action

I propose the following immediate and longer-term steps to address our data limitations:

1. **Cross-County Data Exploration (Longer Term):** Encourage the KCRHA to engage in conversations with neighboring counties to explore sharing limited HMIS information. This would enable us to better understand the long-term results of programs that fund individuals moving outside of expensive King County. This could also expose potential patterns of displacement, which could be further explored through a partnership with the **Puget Sound Regional Council** which already undertakes regional data collection and analysis.
2. **Refine Return to Homelessness Metric (Immediate Term):** The "Return to Homelessness" statistic should be separated into two distinct data points: **returns inside of King County** and **all returns to homelessness**. This distinction will help identify actionable patterns for CoC members to address.
3. **National Advocacy for Displacement Analysis (Longer Term):** KCRHA, at the direction of the CoC Board, should begin advocating and working with HUD to consider a nationwide "return to homelessness" analysis. This could show how displacement via support funding may have benefited or hindered the national response system as a whole.
4. **Determine Annual Vacancy Rate (Immediate Term):** The CoC should coordinate with local funders to determine the **annual vacancy rate** of CoC-funded housing programs across the entire system. The Harvard report outlines various interventions should the vacancy rate be determined to be a challenge in our community, as it has been in others.

This issue is important and will be essential to the CoC Board's work in 2026 to help take back the public narrative on homelessness. I would be happy to provide additional information, context, or support for any of the items mentioned in this letter.

Thank you,

Dorsol