

Standards for the collection of data on housing insecurity and homelessness

Reference guide

Note: This document aligns with Utah Code 26B-7-114, Office of Health Equity duties.

This document serves as a reference guide for the standards for the collection of data on housing insecurity and homelessness. Additional information on the collection of data on housing insecurity and homelessness is outlined in the [Utah DHHS Guidelines for the collection of data on housing insecurity and homelessness](#).

Homelessness definition

The most widely used and accepted definition of homelessness in the U.S. is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency that works to support housing needs, reduce homelessness, and enforce fair housing laws.

The DHHS homelessness definition, shown in Figure 1, is adapted from the HUD definition (which is used by the Utah Office of Homeless Services).¹ The DHHS definition clarifies language, removes situations where a family or an individual is at risk of homelessness but not actually experiencing homelessness, and removes the 90 days or less time limit of those exiting an institution into homelessness.

Figure 1: DHHS definition of homeless

Homeless:

An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

1. Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation (examples include a car or other private vehicle; park, on the street or other outdoor place; abandoned building; bus or train station; airport; or camping ground); **or**
2. Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter or drop-in center designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, and local government programs); **or**
3. Is exiting an institution* and will lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (examples include correctional facilities/programs, healthcare facilities, mental/behavioral health facilities, substance use disorder treatment facilities, foster care).

*The DHHS homelessness definition does not place a restriction on the amount of time that an individual or family resided in an institution prior to exiting to be considered homeless, as long as the situation that follows will lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. To achieve a definition of homelessness more comparable to HUD, and to the Utah Office of Homeless Services, DHHS restricts the definition describing individuals or family exiting an institution to those who resided in the institution for 90 days or less AND resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.



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Housing insecurity definition

While HUD does not provide an official definition for housing insecurity, it does define “at risk” of homelessness. In addition, the HUD Office of Policy Development and Research conducted extensive analysis to recommend a multidimensional concept of housing insecurity. In this context, housing insecurity is defined as a significant lapse of one or more of three core elements of secure housing: affordability, stable occupancy, and safety and decency (or adequacy).

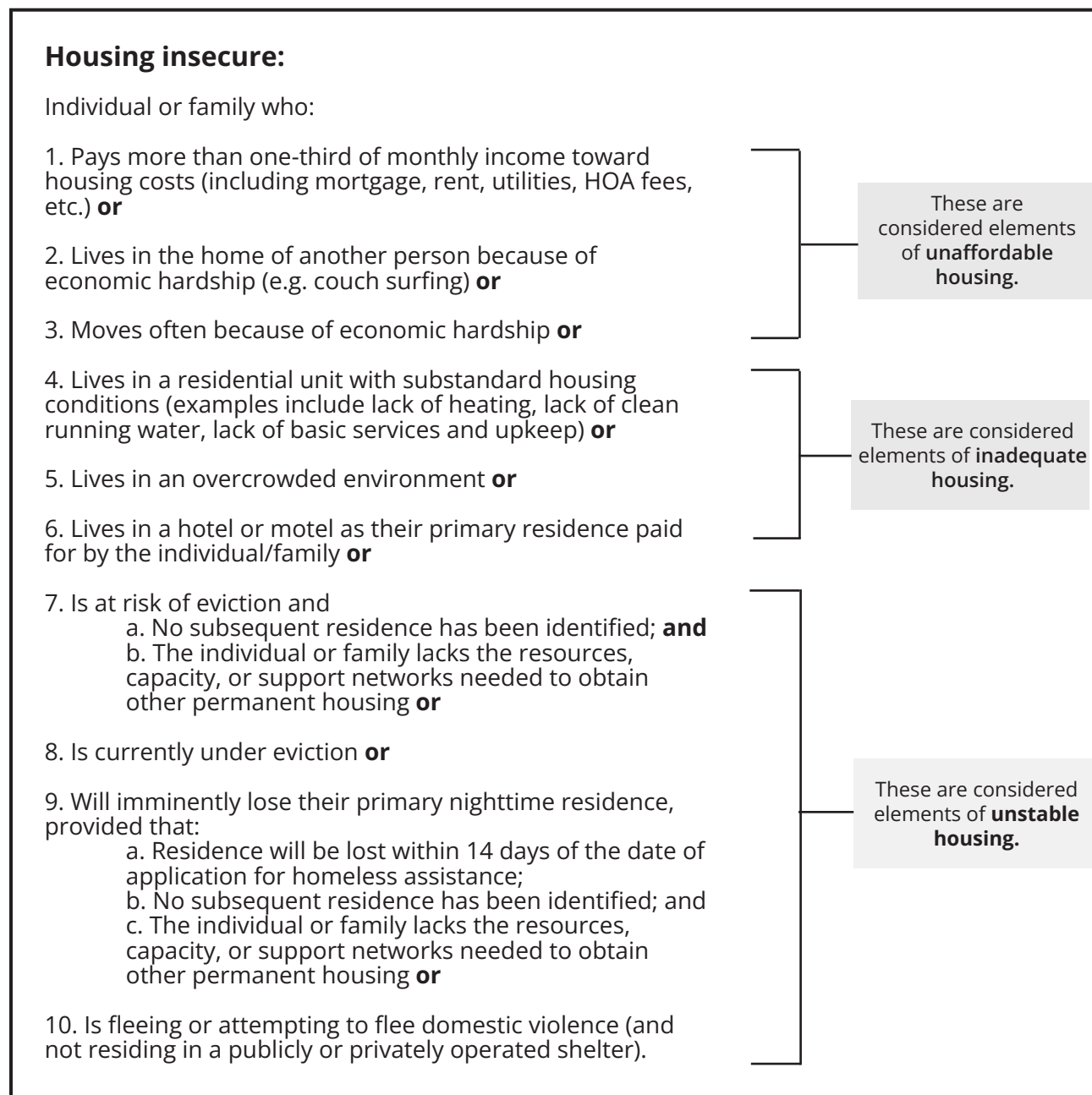
Affordability implies that the costs of a residential unit are manageable, without causing worry about ability to pay and without compromising spending on other basic essentials for health and well-being.

Stable occupancy implies that an individual or household is not forced to relocate.

Safety and decency implies that a residential unit meets basic standards of safety, habitability, and comfort.²

The DHHS housing insecurity definition, shown in Figure 2, is a 10-element definition based on the HUD definition of “at risk” of homelessness, the working definition of housing insecurity adopted by the HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, and other published federal and academic research.^{3, 4, 5}

Figure 2: DHHS definition of housing insecure



Housing insecurity and homelessness data collection standard[†]

The Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) standard for data collection on housing insecurity and homelessness is a choice between three versions of the same measure: a condensed version (Figure 3), a version with examples (Figure 4), and a detailed version (Figure 5).

It may be appropriate to use the condensed version (Figure 3) when a space-saving format on a survey is necessary.

Figure 3: DHHS housing insecurity and homelessness data collection standard, condensed version

In the past six months, which of the following have you experienced or are you currently experiencing? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ **Unaffordable housing** (costly housing, sharing housing, frequent moving)
- ☐ **Inadequate housing** (poor housing conditions, overcrowding)
- ☐ **Unstable housing** (eviction, fleeing domestic violence)
- ☐ **Homelessness** (unsheltered or sheltered)
- ☐ **None of the above**

***If you or someone you know needs help with domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or the Utah LINKLine at 1-800-897-LINK (5465).**

The version with examples (Figure 4) provides more clear guidance through the examples and is intended to capture housing insecurity and homelessness experiences while recognizing the sensitive nature of disclosing such information. This version may be appropriate when there is adequate space or time on a survey to provide the respondent with examples.

[†]Note that these data standards have not yet been tested or validated. Updates will be made as needed once testing and validation are completed.

Figure 4: DHHS housing insecurity and homelessness data collection standard, with examples

In the past six months, which of the following have you experienced or are currently experiencing? (Select all that apply.)

☐ **Unaffordable housing**

For example:

- paying more than one-third of your household's monthly income toward housing costs
- sharing housing with others due to economic hardship (doubled-up)
- moving often due to economic hardship (moving more than twice in six months)

☐ **Inadequate housing**

For example:

- living in substandard housing (such as lacking heat, clean running water, or electricity; infestation with pests or mold; leaky roof or ceiling; lacking stove or refrigerator)
- living in overcrowded housing
- living in a hotel or motel as your primary residence, paid for by you or your family

☐ **Unstable housing**

For example:

- eviction (threatened, in progress, or completed)
- fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence (and not living in a shelter)*

☐ **Homelessness**

For example:

- living in a place not meant for humans to live, such as a car, park, abandoned building, sidewalk, bus/train station, or campground
- staying in a publicly or privately operated temporary shelter, such as a drop-in center, congregate or domestic violence shelter, transitional housing, or hotel/motel
- exiting an institution without secure housing to transition into (examples include correctional facilities/programs, healthcare facilities, mental/behavioral health facilities, substance use disorder treatment facilities, foster care)

☐ **None of the above**

***If you or someone you know needs help with domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or the Utah LINKLine at 1-800-897-LINK (5465).**

The detailed version (Figure 5) gives detailed choices to indicate housing insecurity and homelessness experiences, if this level of detail has been identified as necessary. Be careful when you use this version as the response options may put respondents in a position of disclosing sensitive information, such as experiencing domestic violence.

Figure 5: DHHS housing insecurity and homelessness data collection standard, detailed version

In the past six months, which of the following have you experienced or are currently experiencing? (Select all that apply.)

Unaffordable housing

- ☐ Paying more than one-third of your household's monthly income toward housing costs
- ☐ Sharing housing with others due to economic hardship (doubled-up)
- ☐ Moving frequently due to economic hardship (moving more than twice in six months)

Inadequate housing

- ☐ Living in substandard housing (such as lacking heat, clean running water, or electricity; infestation with pests or mold; leaky roof or ceiling; lacking stove or refrigerator)
- ☐ Living in overcrowded housing
- ☐ Living in a hotel or motel as your primary residence, paid for by you or your family

Unstable housing

- ☐ Eviction (threatened, in progress, or completed)
- ☐ Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence (and not living in a shelter)*

Homelessness

- ☐ Living in a place not meant for humans to live, such as a car, park, abandoned building, sidewalk, bus/train station, or campground
- ☐ Staying in a publicly or privately operated temporary shelter, such as a drop-in center, congregate or domestic violence shelter, transitional housing, or hotel/motel
- ☐ Exiting an institution without secure housing to transition into (examples include correctional facilities/programs, healthcare facilities, mental/behavioral health facilities, substance use disorder treatment facilities, foster care)

☐ **None of the above**

***If you or someone you know needs help with domestic violence, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or the Utah LINKLine at 1-800-897-LINK (5465).**

Data collection standards for additional details

Additional questions may be asked for greater detail on housing insecurity and homelessness.

Additional details related to housing insecurity

Figure 6: Worry about housing security

In the past six months, how often have you been worried or stressed about having stable housing?* (This can include housing affordability, adequacy, and stability.)

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

*This question was adapted from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).

Additional details related to homelessness

Figure 7: Current homelessness

Are you currently experiencing homelessness?

- ☐ **Yes**—I am currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness. *(That is, living in a place not meant for humans to live, such as a car, park, abandoned building, sidewalk, bus/train station, or campground)*
- ☐ **Yes**—I am currently experiencing sheltered homelessness. *(That is, staying in a publicly or privately operated temporary shelter, including drop-in center, congregate or domestic violence shelter, transitional housing, or hotel/motel)*
- ☐ **No**—I am not currently experiencing homelessness.

References

1. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.). *Category 1: Literally homeless*. HUD Exchange. Retrieved July 29, 2024, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/category-1/>
2. Watson, N. E., & Carter, G. R. (2020). Toward Implementation of a National Housing Insecurity Research Module. *Cityscape*, 22(1), 227–248. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26915495>
3. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.-a). *At risk of homelessness*. HUD Exchange. Retrieved July 29, 2024, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/at-risk-of-homelessness/>
4. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.-c). *Category 2: Imminent risk of homelessness*. HUD Exchange. Retrieved July 29, 2024, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/category-2/>
5. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.-d). *Category 4: Fleeing/ Attempting to Flee Domestic violence*. HUD Exchange. Retrieved July 29, 2024, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/category-4/>