

# HMIS & VI-SPDAT

*How the Data System Works — A Plain-Language Guide for Norman / Cleveland County*

Behind every successful effort to end homelessness is a data system powerful enough to track every person by name, measure every outcome, and ensure that the most vulnerable are never overlooked. In Cleveland County, that system has two essential components: **HMIS** and the **VI-SPDAT**.

*Together they form the backbone of CoC OK-504 — the infrastructure that turns compassion into coordination and coordination into results.*

## PART ONE: HMIS

### What Is HMIS?

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HMIS stands for Homeless Management Information System. It is the secure, centralized, web-based database mandated by HUD for every Continuum of Care in America. Every provider that receives HUD funding — shelters, transitional housing programs, rapid rehousing providers, supportive services agencies — is required to enter client data into HMIS.

HMIS collects unduplicated, client-level data on individuals and families experiencing homelessness. It tracks who entered the system, what services they received, where they went, and whether they maintained stable housing. It is the foundation of every evidence-based homeless response system in the country.

### A Brief History

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HMIS originated as a grassroots CoC initiative in the mid-1990s. Communities recognized that without shared data, providers were duplicating effort and losing track of the people they were trying to serve. Congress formalized it through the 2001 McKinney-Vento reauthorization. The 2012 CoC Interim Rule made HMIS participation mandatory for all HUD-funded projects. In Oklahoma, the statewide HMIS is administered by the Community Development Support Association (CDSA), serving 25+ provider agencies across multiple CoCs including OK-504 Norman/Cleveland County.

## How HMIS Works in Cleveland County

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When a person experiencing homelessness in Cleveland County first makes contact with a CoC OK-504 provider, their information is entered into HMIS with their consent. Every subsequent service interaction, housing placement, and outcome is tracked from that point forward.

What HMIS Tracks	Why It Matters
Every person by name, DOB, unique client ID	Eliminates duplicate counting — one person = one record across all providers
Shelter entries and exits	Measures length of homelessness and shelter utilization
Services received	Shows what interventions work and where gaps exist
VI-SPDAT vulnerability scores	Prioritizes the most vulnerable for permanent housing first
Housing placements and outcomes	Tracks whether people stay housed — the ultimate success measure
Real-time by-name list	Powers the PIT Count and coordinated entry system year-round

## Why HMIS Data Quality Determines Funding

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HMIS is not just a record-keeping tool — it is a funding mechanism. HUD’s CoC Competition awards up to 40 of 100 points based entirely on System Performance Measures reported through HMIS. Communities that achieve above 95% data quality are positioned for Tier 1 funding.

**Without HMIS, CoC OK-504 forfeits \$1–2 million in annual federal funding and cannot make Functional Zero claims. With strong HMIS data, Cleveland County competes at the national level.**

## Privacy and Data Protection

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HMIS operates under strict HUD privacy and security standards. Client information is never shared publicly. Every participating agency signs a data sharing agreement. Clients provide informed consent before their information is entered and have the right to review their own records at any

time. Public-facing HMIS data is always fully anonymized and aggregated — no names, no identifying information, ever.

## PART TWO: THE VI-SPDAT

### What Is the VI-SPDAT?

VI-SPDAT stands for Vulnerability Index — Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool. It is the standardized screening tool used at CoC OK-504 coordinated entry points to objectively rank housing vulnerability. When someone experiencing homelessness in Cleveland County first seeks help — through 211, Thunderbird Clubhouse, or another access point — a trained and certified case manager administers the VI-SPDAT.

### The Three Tools: Which One Is Used and When

CoC OK-504 uses three versions of the SPDAT family depending on the population being served. Each tool is designed for a specific group and produces scores that feed directly into HMIS for housing prioritization.

Tool	Population	Duration	Score Range	Key Difference
VI-SPDAT	Single adults (18+)	7–10 min	0–17+	Focuses on health history, substance use, daily functioning
Family VI-SPDAT	Families with children	10–15 min	0–20+	Adds child safety, parenting capacity, school enrollment questions
TAY-VI-SPDAT	Youth ages 15–24 (unaccompanied)	15–20 min	0–17+	Adds school/justice involvement, family conflict, exploitation history

### How It Is Administered

The VI-SPDAT is conducted as a casual, conversational interview — often over coffee at a shelter or during a street outreach visit. The case manager explains that the tool helps prioritize housing and works through 20+ yes/no questions covering:

- History and duration of homelessness

- Mental health and substance use history
- Physical health and medical needs
- History of violence or victimization
- Social supports and daily functioning

Scores are entered live into HMIS during or immediately after the interview, placing the individual on the coordinated entry by-name list for housing prioritization.

## Scoring Thresholds and Housing Prioritization

Score	Adults	Youth (TAY)	Families	Housing Intervention
0–3	Low	Low	Low	Prevention / diversion services
4–7	Medium	4–7	4–8	Rapid Rehousing (RRH)
8+	High	8+	9+	Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
12+	Chronic/severe	—	—	PSH — navigator assigned within 48 hours

## Training and Certification Requirements

Every case manager who administers the VI-SPDAT must be formally trained and certified. Uncertified administration produces unreliable scores that compromise housing prioritization and HUD data quality requirements.

Level	Format	Duration	Cost	Best For
Level 0	OrgCode online webinar	2 hours	\$99/person	VI-SPDAT only; new outreach workers
Level 1	OrgCode full-day group	8 hours	\$1,200/25 staff	Comprehensive; all SPDAT tools; supervisors
Recertification	CoC-hosted annual	1 hour	Free	All certified staff; January post-PIT

- **Certification process:** Complete training → pass 20-question quiz (80% minimum) → receive OrgCode digital certificate → register in OK-504 HMIS admin portal

- **Quality assurance:** Monthly inter-rater reliability checks (3 mock VI-SPDATs scored by supervisor); 95% HMIS data completeness required for HUD SPM points

**OK-504 Action Item:** Certify 12 frontline staff at Thunderbird Clubhouse and Food & Shelter, Inc. by August 2026 (\$1,500 total). Contact CDSA to schedule: [hmis@cdsaok.org](mailto:hmis@cdsaok.org). Next Level 0 webinar: July 15, 2026 at [orgcode.com](http://orgcode.com).

## Common Pitfalls — What Goes Wrong and How to Fix It

Even well-trained case managers encounter consistent challenges when administering the VI-SPDAT. Awareness of these pitfalls is the first step to better data quality and fairer housing outcomes.

<p><b>Self-Reporting Pressure</b></p>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Clients downplay symptoms to appear more stable, or exaggerate needs to score higher and access housing faster. Either direction distorts the score.</p>	<p><b>Fix:</b> <i>Build rapport before beginning. Explain clearly that honest answers produce the most accurate housing match. Never rush the interview.</i></p>
<p><b>Leading Questions</b></p>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Inexperienced administrators unconsciously prompt answers, especially on sensitive topics like substance use or mental health history.</p>	<p><b>Fix:</b> <i>Stick to the script. Use the exact question wording from the tool. Practice with mock assessments before working with real clients.</i></p>
<p><b>Language and Literacy Barriers</b></p>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Non-English speakers and clients with limited literacy may misunderstand questions, producing inaccurate scores that do not reflect true vulnerability.</p>	<p><b>Fix:</b> <i>Use certified interpreters. Never rely on family members to translate — they may soften answers to protect the client. Allow extra time.</i></p>
<p><b>Trauma Responses During Interview</b></p>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Questions about violence, abuse, and mental health history can trigger trauma responses that derail the interview or produce incomplete data.</p>	<p><b>Fix:</b> <i>Train in trauma-informed interviewing. Create a safe, private environment. Pause and offer support if distress occurs. Never force completion in one session.</i></p>
<p><b>Inconsistent HMIS Entry</b></p>	<p><b>Problem:</b> Scores entered incorrectly or delayed in HMIS undermine the by-name list and can cause the most vulnerable individuals to be missed for housing prioritization.</p>	<p><b>Fix:</b> <i>Enter scores into HMIS on the same day as the interview. Supervisors review entries weekly. Monthly inter-rater calibration catches systematic errors.</i></p>

<b>Using the Wrong Tool</b>	<b>Problem:</b> Administering the adult VI-SPDAT to a 17-year-old or a family produces scores that do not accurately capture vulnerability for that population.	<b>Fix:</b> Always confirm age and household composition before selecting the tool. TAY-VI-SPDAT for ages 15–24 unaccompanied. Family VI-SPDAT for any household with children.
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## Honest Assessment: Limitations and the Path Forward

Transparency about the limitations of our tools is a requirement for the trust of every partner, funder, and person we serve. The VI-SPDAT, while widely used and genuinely useful, has documented limitations that CoC OK-504 is committed to addressing.

- **Racial Equity Concerns:** Research shows Black clients score 15–20% higher on risk behaviors — resulting in prioritization that may reflect systemic inequity rather than true vulnerability. OK-504 monitors this actively.
- **Self-Reporting Inaccuracy:** Studies show approximately 30% over- or under-reporting on key questions. Validation against administrative data improves accuracy.
- **Industry Shift:** Since 2022, approximately 25% of CoCs nationally have moved away from the VI-SPDAT toward community-specific tools using objective administrative data rather than self-reporting.

**Looking Ahead: The Norman Risk Index CoC OK-504 is developing a community-specific vulnerability assessment tool — the Norman Risk Index — built on local jail booking data, emergency room visit records, and HMIS history via MOUs with Cleveland County Health Department and the Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office. Target: Phase 1 July 2026. See the NRI Planning Document in Partner & Administrative Resources.**

## How HMIS and VI-SPDAT Work Together

The VI-SPDAT and HMIS are inseparable in practice. The VI-SPDAT generates the vulnerability score. HMIS stores it alongside every other data point about that person. Together they power the by-name list that case managers review in weekly Coordinated Case Management meetings.

Step	Action	Tool
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1	Person seeks help at coordinated entry point	211 / Thunderbird Clubhouse
2	Certified case manager selects correct tool and administers interview	VI-SPDAT / Family / TAY
3	Score and profile entered into HMIS same day	HMIS / Bitfocus ShelterCare
4	Person added to by-name prioritization list	HMIS by-name list
5	Weekly CCM meeting matches person to housing	Coordinated Entry / case managers
6	Housing placement and outcome tracked over time	HMIS — HUD Measure 7

## Coordinated Entry Access Points in Cleveland County

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To begin the coordinated entry process and receive a VI-SPDAT assessment:

- **Thunderbird Clubhouse — CoC OK-504:** OK504CoC@gmail.com · (405) 321-7331
- **211 Oklahoma:** Dial 2-1-1 — available 24/7
- **Food & Shelter, Inc.:** 201 Reed Ave, Norman
- **HomewardNORMAN.org:** Full county-wide resource directory