

# Massachusetts CSPTech Data Release Parameters

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## Representativeness

Based upon policies developed by the project's Steering Committee, aggregate data must meet a minimum threshold criterion before they can be released: data must represent at least 60% of those persons served in a region.<sup>1</sup> Based on a calculation of client records contained in the database versus shelter system capacity for a particular period, the data are deemed eligible for release.

This Massachusetts CSPTech report represents information on (individuals and families) who utilized the state (emergency) shelter system in (DATE). The data presented in this report represent (XX% of individuals and XX% of families) served at Massachusetts homeless shelters between (DATE). See appendix for a detailed breakdown of these records by participating agency.

These coverage rates are determined by calculating the total number of beds in the shelter system, and multiplying that figure by the average annual turnover in those beds, thus estimating the proportion of total persons served by the shelter system represented in the data. For example, if the individual shelter system has 4,000 beds across all of the emergency shelter programs, using a turnover rate of 5, the shelter system would serve 20,000 persons over the course of the year. If there were 12,500 individual records for the year, coverage would be 12,500/20,000, or 63 percent. For family programs, the turnover rate used is two, as the latest DTA data shows that statewide, the average length of stay in emergency shelters is six months. For individuals, the Steering Committee agreed (as specified in the Three Year Workplan) on a turnover rate of 5, the average of the actual turnover reported by Dennis Culhane in Philadelphia and New York City in 1994. However, beginning in 2000 the Massachusetts rate was increased to 6.5, based upon actual data from the programs showing that individual stays are shorter in Massachusetts than in the other two cities.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Total} \\ \text{Beds} \end{array} \times \begin{array}{l} \text{Turnover} \\ \text{Rate} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Total Persons} \\ \text{Served} \end{array}$$
$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Total Records} \\ \text{Served} \end{array} \div \begin{array}{l} \text{Total Persons} \\ \text{Served} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Coverage} \\ \text{Rate} \end{array}$$

These calculations are based upon assumptions that will be clarified as more data are gathered. As more programs utilize the CSPTech system, the turnover rate will become

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<sup>1</sup> There will be some cases where a "slice" of aggregate data does not meet the 60% test; however the available data are needed to support an important policy debate about an identified trend. Slices of data not meeting the 60% threshold require a judgment call; in those cases a three person Access To Data executive committee (a member representing homeless families, another representing homeless individuals, and another representing funders of the system in Massachusetts) is consulted. This committee decides whether data not meeting the 60% test will be publicly released.

more accurate. Additionally, as the number of shelter beds, particularly for individuals, is not constant or easily attainable, it too will become more accurate as the CSPTech system is refined and broadened. In upgrading to ServicePoint web-based software, information on the number of beds and utilization of the shelter system will be continually updated. In addition, the Access to Data Committee recommends moving to a more streamlined method for calculating coverage of beds, rather than persons. That method would involve dividing the number of beds in the overall shelter system, by the number of beds for which ServicePoint was being utilized. These data will be available as programs convert to the new CSPTech system and complete the Program Information sheet as part of the start-up materials. For example, if the individual shelter system has 4,000 beds across all programs, and ServicePoint is being used for 2,600 of those beds, then coverage would be 2,600/4,000 or 65 percent.

$$\frac{\text{Total Beds in System}}{\text{Total Beds}} = \text{Coverage Rate}$$

Presently the two largest homeless shelters in Massachusetts are the Pine Street Inn Men's Inn (the rest of Pine Street agency has been gathering and submitting data regularly) and the Long Island Shelter. These large shelters have been hindered by the need for a comprehensive nightly bed list, and have just developed a method for this function in ServicePoint. Utilization of the ServicePoint bed list will allow these two large shelters to continuously account for the people they serve and the services those participants request and need. Their daily participation, now more possible with ServicePoint, will greatly enhance the coverage rate for the statewide aggregate data.

### Limitations

These data were collected in large part by interviewing people experiencing homelessness, sometimes on the street, and most often in shelters or other homeless service agencies. These data do not capture information on people who are in doubled-up living situations, and others who are homeless but do not come into contact with the service system.

It should be noted that the homeless individuals and families who are interviewed as part of this project respond to specific questions with varying levels of depth. As can be seen in the tables in the report, information on demographic characteristics is based upon a much higher level of accuracy than is that for prior residence, income sources, etc. These data are limited in their informative value and cannot be extrapolated to the whole data set.

In the trend analyses in the report, the numbers of respondents in the various categories are often quite different; for example, in (DATE), (XX)% of family heads provided information on (date element), while in (DATE), (XX)% shared these data. While these comparisons provide noteworthy information, the variations in response proportions should be taken into account when making generalizations about the data that follow. The results can, however, still provide some indication of the differences between the various homeless populations across the (PERIOD).