



## CENTRE FOR SOCIAL DATA ANALYTICS

The Housing Assistance Screening Tool is a triaging tool to support better outcomes and prioritize resources for the highest-need housing clients.

- Accurately identifies at-risk clients
- Respects privacy and minimizes intrusive questions
- Can eliminate reliance on self-reported risk factors that might be stigmatizing
- Supports better engagement with human services teams
- Enables faster assessment of eligibility
- Shorter waitlist and more certainty for clients
- Allows resources to be directed towards the highest need
- Potential to flag risk in Black and African American clients more accurately than theoretically validated methods
- Potential to operate with no evidence of race or age bias, positive discrimination for disability



## HOUSING ASSISTANCE SCREENING TOOL

### CLIENT SURVEY & HMIS VERSION

*Empowering human services teams to more accurately assess and support at-risk housing clients*

## HOW DOES THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE SCREENING TOOL WORK?

The Housing Assistance Screening Tool (HAST) uses data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) together with a short series of questions (approximately 15 questions from VI-SPDAT or another survey instrument) to more accurately identify clients at risk of adversities associated with homelessness.

A risk score is generated, based on the HMIS data and question responses, that indicates the likelihood a client will experience harms related to homelessness within 12 months of the assessment, for example: a jail booking, inpatient mental health services, or four or more emergency room visits. Risk scores can be embedded into the triaging process to improve the quality of decisions about the allocation of assisted housing.

By pairing HMIS data with select questions – rather than relying solely on an off-the-shelf assessment tool – the HAST reduces reliance on self-reporting and lessens stress and intrusion for vulnerable clients.

Most Continuums of Care (CoCs) currently using HMIS can use the HAST and will be supported to achieve transparent and ethical implementation of the tool. The tool is validated for each CoC, so it provides an accurate measure of risk for local clients.



**1** CLIENT CALLS COORDINATED ENTRY

**2** STAFF ESTABLISH PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

**3** HOUSING ASSISTANCE SCREENING TOOL

**4** STAFF BEGIN PROGRESSIVE ENGAGEMENT



CoCs can replace traditional off-the-shelf assessments with the Housing Assistance Screening Tool in existing triaging systems for more accurate identification of clients at risk of adverse outcomes associated with homelessness.

## CASE STUDY

# ALLEGHENY COUNTY: TRIAGING NEED WITH HOUSING ASSESSMENT TOOL

Allegheny County's Department of Human Services has been using a housing assessment tool since 2020, to help prioritize admissions to supportive housing services for individuals or families experiencing homelessness.

Allegheny County runs a data warehouse so the majority of calls are triaged using a Housing Assistance Screening Tool (DW), called the Allegheny Housing Assessment.

For a proportion of calls, however, where there is not enough administrative data available to use the data-driven tool, the county uses a tool that develops a risk score based on HMIS homelessness data and client responses to a short series of questions.

This Alternative-Allegheny Housing Assessment tool which functions like the HAST, shows significantly greater accuracy than off-the-shelf assessments (such as VI-SPDAT) in identifying clients most at risk of adverse outcomes and allows the Allegheny County team to prioritize them for support.

To learn more about Allegheny County's experience with the screening tool [visit their website](#)

**"Using these triaging tools has enabled our team to quickly identify the clients most at risk of harms, and to prioritize them for housing support."**

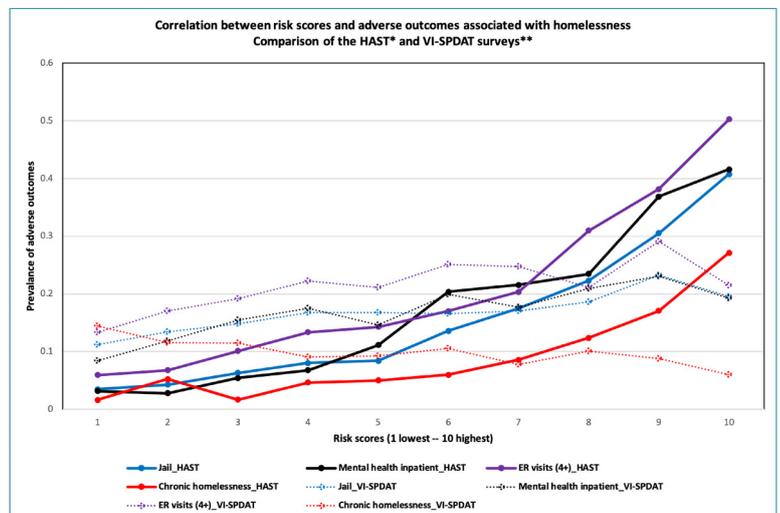
*Erin Dalton,  
Director, Allegheny County  
Department of Human Services,  
Allegheny County, PA*

## PREVENTING HARM BY PRIORITIZING RESOURCES FOR AT-RISK HOUSING CLIENTS

Demand for homelessness programs is outstripping capacity. Prioritization of housing resources for vulnerable people is now more crucial than ever.

Risk scores calculated using the HAST are more accurate than risk scores based on theoretically validated assessments, such as VI-SPDAT, and the HAST data-supported tool shows substantive differentiation in risk ratings.

Human services teams can readily identify and support the clients most at risk of harms associated with homelessness including jail bookings, inpatient mental health services, four or more emergency room visits, and even mortality and chronic homelessness.



**With the HAST we can see the risk score corresponds to the prevalence of adverse outcomes – in contrast to off-the-shelf assessment tools such as VI-SPDAT, where the relationship is not clear.**

\* Based on Allegheny County data

\*\* The VI-SPDAT is only described as being predictive of housing stability and mortality

To learn more about this tool, visit: [csda.aut.ac.nz/hast](https://csda.aut.ac.nz/hast)

The team behind the development of the Housing Assistance Screening Tool (DW) is a part of a partnership focused on the safe and ethical use of data to support better outcomes for housing clients, led by: Professor Rhema Vaithianathan (Director of the [Centre for Social Data Analytics](#), Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand) and The University of Queensland (Australia)) & Professor Dennis Culhane (Chair of the [Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy Network](#), University of Pennsylvania). For more information about this team or the Housing Assistance Screening Tool please visit [csda.aut.ac.nz/hast](https://csda.aut.ac.nz/hast) or email [vivienne.hunt@aut.ac.nz](mailto:vivienne.hunt@aut.ac.nz)