

GA HMIS Privacy Policy

This notice describes the privacy policy of the Georgia Homeless Management Information System (“GA HMIS”). GA HMIS is administered by the HMIS Lead Agency, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (“DCA”), operating on behalf of the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority (“GHFA”). DCA administers GA HMIS on behalf of the regional homeless services planning bodies (individually referred to as “Continuum of Care” or “CoC” and collectively referred to as “The Collaborative” or “CoCs”) in Georgia that participate in the statewide GA HMIS implementation. DCA may amend this GA HMIS Privacy Policy at any time, and will maintain a record of any changes made as well as post new versions on the GA HMIS website located at: <https://dca.georgia.gov/document/plans/2024-ga-hmis-privacy-policy/download>

This notice applies to the personal information of individuals whose personal data is collected in written form or verbally and/or maintained in hard copy or in electronic formats in the GA HMIS.

In relation to this personal information, users entering data in the GA HMIS are required to comply with the following terms:

- Collect personal client information only when appropriate or required by entities providing funding for homeless services (the “Funder” or “Funders”);
- May use or disclose information only to facilitate service delivery;
- May also use or disclose information to comply with legal requirements or other obligations as described in the notice;
- Will only disclose personal information as allowed as stated within the terms of this notice; and
- Assume that, unless stated otherwise, persons applying for or receiving services from one of the GA HMIS Participating Agencies agree to allow users of the GA HMIS to collect, use, or disclose information as described in this notice.

Each person providing personal information may:

- Inspect his/her personal information that is maintained in the GA HMIS, with the exception of case notes;
- Ask the agency entering data for the GA HMIS to correct inaccurate or incomplete information within the record;
- Ask about the GA HMIS’ privacy policy or practices;
- File a grievance regarding GA HMIS’ privacy policies and practices. DCA will respond to questions and complaints;
- Request a copy of this GA HMIS Privacy Policy for more details.

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A. Applicability of the Georgia HMIS Privacy Policy

1. This notice describes the privacy policy and practices of the GA HMIS, administered by DCA, which is the lead agency for the GA HMIS. DCA's main office is located at 60 Executive Park South, Atlanta, GA 30329. DCA's phone number for GA HMIS purposes is (404) 679-4840. Information about GA HMIS is on DCA's web site, which is located at <https://dca.georgia.gov/document/plans/2024-ga-hmis-privacy-policy/download>.
2. The policies and practices in this notice cover the processing of protected personal client information by users of the GA HMIS within The Collaborative. This notice covers all personal information policies set forth by DCA in its role as the HMIS Lead for CoC programs and in its role as the administrator of the GA HMIS. GA HMIS participating agencies may have additional privacy policies that apply to information entered and accessed by users.
3. Protected Personal information ("PPI") is any information GA HMIS maintains about a client that:
 - Allows identification of an individual directly or indirectly; **and**
 - Can be manipulated by a reasonably foreseeable method to identify a specific individual; **Or**
 - Can be linked with other available information to identify a specific client.

Any reference to personal information in this notice includes one or more of the foregoing types of information.

4. DCA and each CoC in The Collaborative have adopted this policy by the Homeless Management Information Systems Data and Technical Standards and subsequent HMIS notices issued by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") and their federal partners through the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness ("USICH"). DCA's policies and practices are consistent with those standards and with industry-standard best practices. DCA's policies are also consistent with requirements outlined in other applicable state and local laws and regulations.
5. This notice informs clients, staff, contractors, GA HMIS Participating Agency users, Funders, and others how personal information is processed by the GA HMIS Collaborative.
6. DCA and the GA HMIS Collaborative, may amend this notice and change the policy or practices at any time. Amendments may affect personal information that DCA or the GA HMIS Participating Agencies obtained before the effective date of the amendment. Any changes to this privacy policy will be posted as a notice at <https://dca.georgia.gov/document/plans/2024-ga-hmis-privacy-policy/download>.
7. DCA and/or GA HMIS Participating Agencies will provide a written copy of this notice to any individual or organization that requests one. DCA also maintains a copy of this notice on its website located at <https://dca.georgia.gov/document/plans/2024-ga-hmis-privacy-policy/download>.

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B. How and Why We Collect Personal Information

1. DCA (including DCA's contractors), CoC Administrator Agencies (an agency other than DCA, duly authorized in writing by a respective CoC, to have an employee(s) with access to the client-level data of that specific CoC for purposes of system administration activities) and the GA HMIS Participating Agencies may collect and/or maintain personal information for some or all the following purposes:
 - To provide or coordinate services to clients;
 - To refer to other programs that may be able to assist clients;
 - For functions related to payment or reimbursement from others for services provided by DCA or DCA's contractors;
 - To carry out administrative functions, including legal, audit, personnel, oversight, contract monitoring, program evaluation, and other management functions;
 - To comply with government and Funder reporting obligations;
 - For research, data analysis, and community reporting purposes, including reporting to the GA HMIS Steering Committee to inform policy decisions; and
 - When required by law.
2. DCA (including DCA's contractors), CoC Administrator Agencies, and the GA HMIS Participating Agencies use only lawful and fair means to collect and/or maintain personal information.
3. By seeking assistance at one of the GA HMIS Participating Agencies and providing personal information, it is assumed that a person consents to the collection of information as described in this notice and that the collected information may be entered into the GA HMIS.
4. DCA (including DCA's contractors), CoC Administrator Agencies, and the GA HMIS Participating Agencies may also obtain information about those seeking services from:
 - Other individuals who are accompanying the person seeking services, such as a guardian, caretaker, or advocate;
 - Referring organizations and/or service providers;
 - DCA's contractors and/or GA HMIS Participating Agency users that are providing services.
5. GA HMIS Participating Agencies are required to post a sign at their intake desks or offices explaining the reasons personal information is requested. GA HMIS Participating Agencies may have additional policies not required by DCA that they must follow, but at a minimum, they must adhere to this notice. While GA HMIS Participating Agencies are required to adopt their own privacy policies and postings for data collection unrelated to GA HMIS, DCA provides a posting template to GA HMIS Participating Agencies which reads:

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Template Privacy Posting

Georgia Homeless Management Information System

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other federal and state partners require that each jurisdiction that receives homeless funding have a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in place. Therefore, this Agency is required to participate in the GA Homeless Management Information System (GA HMIS), a computerized system that collects and stores basic information about the persons who receive services from this Agency. The goal of the GA HMIS is to assist us in determining your needs and to provide a record for evaluating the services we are providing to you.

We only collect information that is needed to provide you services, or that we consider relevant to helping us understand the scope and dimensions of homelessness in order to design effective service delivery. Information may be disclosed as required by funders or by law, or for specific administrative or research purposes outlined in our privacy policy. By requesting and accepting services from this project, you are giving consent for us to enter and share your personal information into the GA HMIS.

The collection and use of all personal information is guided by strict standards of confidentiality as outlined in our privacy policy. A copy of our agency's Privacy Policy and a copy of the Georgia HMIS Privacy Policy is available upon request for your review.

C. Usage and Disclosure of Personal Information

1. ***DCA, CoC Administrator Agencies, and the GA HMIS Participating Agencies and approved 3rd party*** may use or disclose personal information for the following purposes:
 - a) To provide or coordinate services for individuals to help them end their homelessness. GA HMIS users may share portions of client records with GA HMIS Participating Agencies that, at a minimum, must adhere to this notice and may have additional privacy policies and that may allow different uses and disclosures of the information;
 - b) For functions related to payment or reimbursement for services;
 - c) To carry out administrative functions, such as legal, audit, personnel, oversight, contract monitoring, program evaluation, and other management functions;
 - d) When required by law to the extent that use, or disclosure complies with and is limited to the requirements of the law.
 - e) To avert a serious threat to health or safety if:
 - It is believed in good faith that the use or disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of an individual or the public,
 - The use or disclosure is made to a person reasonably able to prevent or lessen the threat, including the target of the threat.

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- f) DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, or a GA HMIS Participating Agency is authorized by law to receive reports of abuse, neglect or domestic violence and report the same to a governmental authority (including a social service or protective services agency) under any of the following circumstances:
- Where the disclosure is required by law and the disclosure complies with and is limited to the requirements of the law;
 - If the individual agrees to the disclosure;
 - To the extent that the disclosure is expressly authorized by statute or regulation;
 - DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, or a GA HMIS Participating Agency believes the disclosure is necessary to prevent serious harm to the individual or other potential victims;
 - If the individual is unable to agree because of incapacity, then a law enforcement or other public official authorized to receive the report must represent that the PPI for which disclosure is sought is not intended to be used against the individual, and must represent that an immediate enforcement activity that depends upon the disclosure would be materially and adversely affected by waiting until the individual is able to agree to the disclosure;
 - When DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, or a GA HMIS Participating Agency makes a permitted disclosure about a victim of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence, DCA, the CoC Administrator Agency, or the GA HMIS Participating Agency will promptly inform the individual who is the victim that a disclosure has been or will be made, except if:
 - i. in the exercise of professional judgment DCA, the CoC Administrator Agency, or the GA HMIS Participating Agency believes informing the individual would place the individual at risk of serious harm, or
 - ii. DCA, the CoC Administrator Agency, or the GA HMIS Participating Agency would be informing a personal representative (such as a family member or friend) and reasonably believe the personal representative is responsible for the abuse, neglect or other injury; such that informing the personal representative would not be in the best interests of the individual as DCA determines in the exercise of professional judgment.

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- g) To a law enforcement official for a law enforcement purpose (if consistent with applicable law and standards of ethical conduct) under the following circumstances:
- In response to a lawful court order, court-ordered warrant, subpoena or summons issued by a judicial officer, or a grand jury subpoena;
 - If the law enforcement official makes a written request for PPI that:
 - i. is signed by a supervisory official of the law enforcement agency seeking the PPI;
 - ii. states that the information is relevant and material to a legitimate law enforcement investigation;
 - iii. identifies the PPI sought;
 - iv. is specific and limited in scope to the extent reasonably practicable in light of the purpose for which the information is sought; and
 - v. states that de-identified information could not be used to accomplish the purpose of the disclosure.
 - If it is believed in good faith that the PPI constitutes evidence of criminal conduct that occurred on the premises of DCA or the premises of a GA HMIS Participating Agency;
 - In response to a written request as described above for the purpose of identifying or locating a suspect, fugitive, material witness or missing person and the PPI disclosed consists only of name, address, date of birth, place of birth, Social Security Number, and distinguishing physical characteristics; or
 - If the official is an authorized federal official seeking PPI for the provision of protective services to the President or other persons authorized by 18 U.S.C. 3056, or to foreign heads of state or other persons authorized by 22 U.S.C. 2709(a)(3), or for the conduct of investigations authorized by 18 U.S.C. 871 and 879 (threats against the President and others); and if the information requested is specific and limited in scope to the extent reasonably practicable in light of the purpose for which it is sought.
- h) To comply with government reporting obligations for homeless management information systems and oversight of compliance with homeless management information system requirements.
2. ***DCA and CoC Administrator Agencies*** may use or disclose personal information for activities set forth below and for activities that DCA and the GA HMIS Collaborative determine to be compatible with such activities. DCA assumes that you consent to the use or disclosure of your personal information for the following purposes:

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- a. To carry out maintenance and operation of GA HMIS;
 - b. To create de-identified (anonymous) information that can be used for research and statistical purposes without identifying clients;
 - c. To the release of PPI for academic research purposes if:
 - The research is conducted by an individual or institution that has or enters into a formal relationship with DCA and/ or with a CoC Administrator Agency if the research is conducted by either:
 - i. an individual employed by or affiliated with the organization for use in a research project conducted under a written research agreement approved in writing by DCA and/ or the CoC Administrator Agency, (other than the individual conducting the research); or
 - ii. an institution for use in a research project conducted under a written research agreement approved in writing by DCA and/ or the CoC Administrator Agency.
 - There is a formal relationship contained in a written research agreement that must:
 - i. establish rules and limitations for the processing and security of PPI in the course of the research;
 - ii. provide for the return or proper disposal of all PPI at the conclusion of the research;
 - iii. restrict additional use or disclosure of PPI, except where required by law;
 - iv. require that the recipient of data formally agree to comply with all terms and conditions of the agreement;
 - The written research agreement is not a substitute for approval (if appropriate) of a research project by an Institutional Review Board, Privacy Board, or other applicable human subjects protection institution;
 - Requests for PPI by a Third-Party that coordinates services, provides administrative functions, or for research purposes;
 - This access or request by a Third-Party for the release of PPI will be reviewed and evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with final approval by the applicable CoC(s) and DCA; if the request includes data across the entire Regional Implementation, then the request must come before the GA HMIS Steering Committee.
 - CoC's will have the option to opt-out of participating in the project.
 - Recipients will be required to complete a Third-Party request form, formally enter into a memorandum of agreement, and to comply with all terms and conditions of the agreement.
 - Additional provisions pertaining to the specific way in which the CoC and the Third Party intend to handle and oversee the protection of PPI will be included in the memorandum of agreement between the parties.
 - The client can request a list of 3rd parties the respective CoC has chosen to share data with, if any.
3. DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, or the GA HMIS Participating Agencies will seek the consent of an individual before making any use or disclosure of the individual's personal information that is not described herein and above.

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D. How to Inspect and Correct Personal Information

1. Clients may inspect and have a copy of their PPI maintained in GA HMIS except for case notes. DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, and/or the GA HMIS Participating Agency will respond to any such request made by a client within a reasonable time frame, usually 5-7 business days. GA HMIS Participating Agency staff will offer to explain any information in the file. For data that is maintained by DCA as the administrator of GA HMIS but was not entered by the DCA staff, DCA may require that the request for inspection be managed through the GA HMIS Participating Agency that entered the information.
2. DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, and/or the GA HMIS Participating Agency will consider requests for correction of inaccurate or incomplete personal information from clients. If DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, and/or the GA HMIS Participating Agency agrees that the information is inaccurate or incomplete, the personal information may be deleted or supplemented with additional information.
3. To inspect, get a copy of, or ask for correction of personal information, a client can contact any GA HMIS Participating Agency staff member at the GA HMIS Participating Agency at which he or she received services. The appropriate GA HMIS Participating Agency staff member will be the resource to assist with the review and/or correction of the file within a reasonable period, usually 5-7 business days.
4. DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, and/or a GA HMIS Participating Agency may deny a direct request for inspection or copying of personal information if:
 - the information was compiled in reasonable anticipation of litigation or comparable proceedings;
 - the information is about another individual;
 - the information was obtained under a promise of confidentiality and if the disclosure would reveal the source of the information; or
 - disclosure of the information would be reasonably likely to endanger the life or physical safety of any individual.
5. If a request for access or correction is denied, the organization that denies the request (DCA, the CoC Administrator Agency, and/or the GA HMIS Participating Agency) will explain the reason for the denial. DCA, the CoC Administrator Agency, and/or the GA HMIS Participating Agency will also include, as part of the personal information that is maintained in the client file, documentation of the request and the reason for the denial.
6. DCA, a CoC Administrator Agency, and/or a GA HMIS Participating Agency may reject repeated or harassing requests for access or correction

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E. Data Quality

1. The Collaborative collects only personal information that is relevant to the purposes for which it plans to use it or as required for reporting to our Funders. To the extent necessary for those purposes, The Collaborative seeks to maintain only personal information that is accurate, complete, and timely.
2. DCA may implement a plan to dispose of personal information not in current use seven years after the information was created or last changed. As an alternative to disposal, DCA may choose to remove identifiers from the information so that the data can be maintained for analysis purposes.
3. DCA may keep information for a longer period if it chooses or if it is required to do so by statute, regulation, contract, or another requirement.

F. Complaints and Accountability

1. DCA, on behalf of The Collaborative, accepts and considers questions or complaints about GA HMIS' privacy and security policies and practices. To file a complaint or question, a person should do the following:
 - If the complaint is about one of the GA HMIS Participating Agencies using GA HMIS, the client should first follow the questions and/or grievance procedure of that organization. If the grievance cannot be resolved at the GA HMIS Participating Agency level, the question/complaint should be addressed to DCA in writing or in person for resolution. DCA's main office is located at 60 Executive Park South, Atlanta, GA 30329. DCA's phone number for purposes of GA HMIS is (404) 679-4840;
 - If the complaint is received by DCA, in writing or in person, about a GA HMIS Participating Agency or about an internal program, it will be reviewed by the staff responsible for administering GA HMIS first. If the question or complaint cannot be resolved at that level it will be brought to the attention of the GA HMIS Steering Committee and/or DCA's Office of General Counsel, whichever is most appropriate for the particular situation.
2. All members of DCA (including employees, volunteers, affiliates, contractors and associates), CoC Administrator Agencies and GA HMIS Participating Agencies and 3rd party systems are required to comply with this notice. Each individual with access to GA HMIS must receive and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this notice and pledge to comply with this notice.

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G. Privacy Policy Change History

Each copy of this notice will have a history of changes made to the document. This document's change history is as follows:

- Version 1 – 2005 - Initial Policy
- Version 2 – New policy Draft (Insert approval date here and remove drafts below)
 - October 19th, 2015 (Initial revised Draft)
 - Appendix D: GA HMIS Client Consent Form December 14th, 2015 (2nd revised Draft)
- Version 3 – GA HMIS Interim Policies and Standard Operating Procedures
 - December 2017
- Version 4 – GA HMIS Policies and Standard Operating Procedures – January 2018
- Privacy Policy Temporary Emergency Addendum Extension – June 10, 2020
- Version 5 – Update to Reflect New Changes to the Privacy Policy – April 15, 2021
- Version 6 – November 23, 2022
- Version 7 – Update to reflect changes incorporating language for 3rd parties - August 15, 2024