MUSKEGON COUNTY ASSESSMENT & PRIORITIZATION: REFORM OF THE VI-SPDAT

presented by

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Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care Network

2025 DATA SUMMIT

AGENDA

- Welcome & Introduction
- The Role of Data in Advancing Equity
- Identifying Racial Disparities in the VI-SPDAT
- Community-Driven Assessment & Prioritization Reform
- Challenges & Lessons Learned
- Looking Ahead: A Vision for Equitable Data Practices
- Q&A and Discussion

PURPOSE

This presentation shares the Muskegon County Continuum of Care's ongoing work to address racial equity and disparities in the VI-SPDAT assessment process. Guided by ARC4Justice through the Assessment and Prioritization Pilot, we are using data, community voice, and system change to build a more equitable homeless response system. We'll highlight key findings so far and outline the work ahead.

MEET THE TEAM

Diolinda Sali – HMIS Administrator for MCHCCN

Madison Butler – CoC Coordinator for MCHCCN

Lisa Reinecke – Housing Solution Director for TrueNorth Community Services, Housing Assessment & Resource Agency for Muskegon County

Trina Burmeister – Harm Reduction Educator for The Red Project, CoC Board Member, Person w/ Lived Experience

With help from-

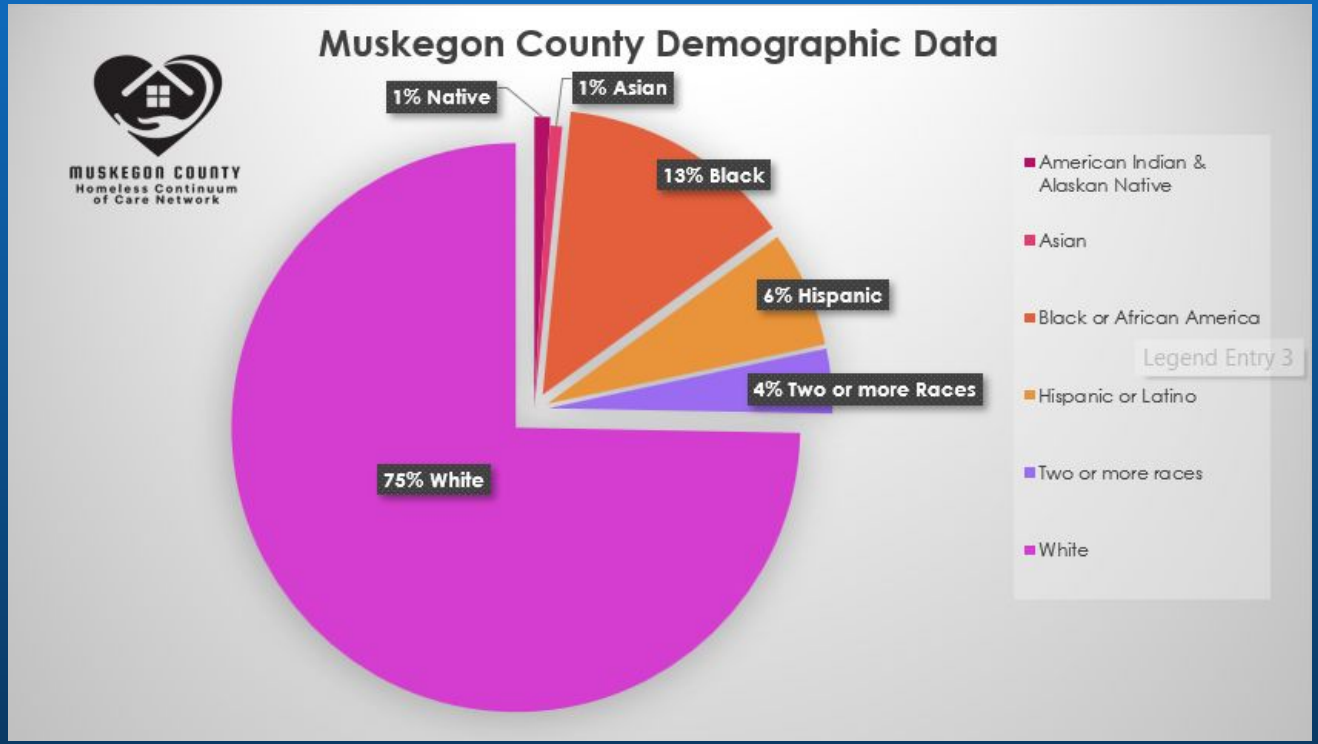
Josh Brubaker-Salcedo – Housing Program Manager for TrueNorth Community Services, Housing Assessment & Resource Agency for Muskegon County

TrueNorth community services

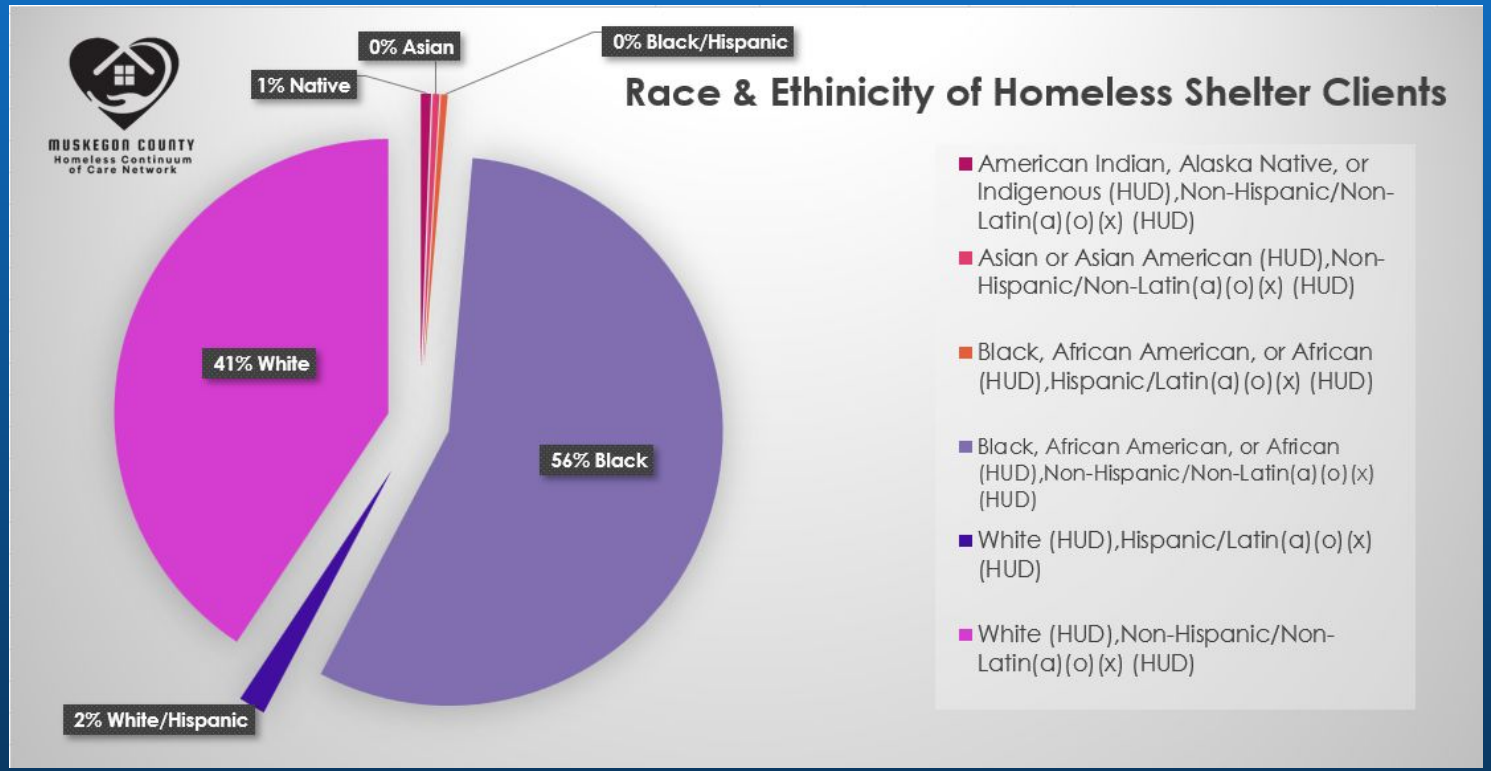
the grand rapids Red project

MUSKEGON COUNTY
Homeless Continuum of Care Network

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF MUSKEGON COUNTY VIA U.S CENSUS BUREAU



DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF MUSKEGON COUNTY VIA HMIS DATA WAREHOUSE



EQUITY VS. EQUALITY

Equity refers to **fairness and justice** in how people are treated, especially in access to **opportunities, resources, and support**. Unlike equality—which means giving everyone the **same thing**—equity recognizes that people have **different needs, experiences, and starting points,** and it aims to provide what each person needs to succeed or thrive.

WHAT IS THE VI-SPDAT?

The VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) is a pre-screening tool (questionnaire) used to quickly assess the vulnerability and needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. It is designed to help communities prioritize clients for housing resources, especially when those resources are limited.

It is not a full assessment, but a triage tool used within Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) to determine:

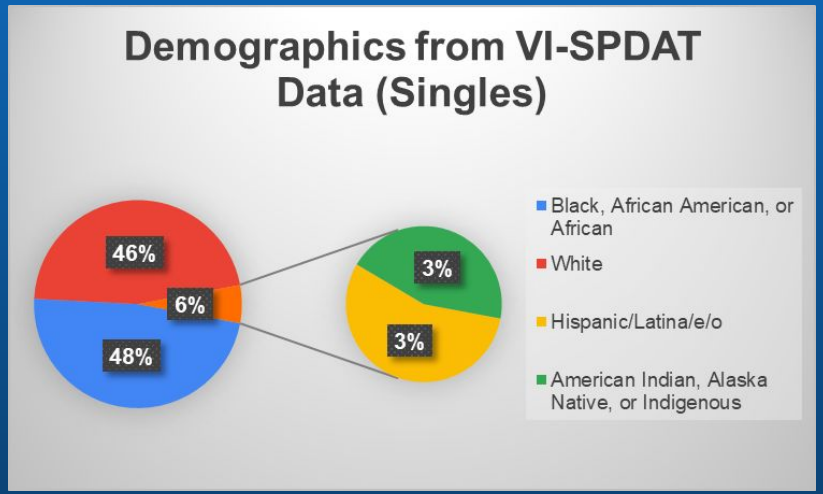
- The acuity of needs
- Which clients may require Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Rapid Re-Housing (RRH), or other interventions
- Who should be prioritized for limited housing resources
- There are different versions of the tool for different populations:
- Adult Households (which do not include children)
- Families (which include children)
- Transition Age Youth (18-24 yrs old)

ROLE OF DATA IN EQUITY WORK

Data is a powerful tool that can reveal patterns and inequities that may not be visible from the outside perspective. With this insight comes a responsibility—we must analyze the data critically and be willing to reexamine our processes to ensure they promote equity for everyone navigating the homeless response system.

A custom report was generated from HMIS and exported for analysis to review the VI-SPDAT questions, how they were answered, and who answered them. Once the report was downloaded, the team used Python to process and refine the data. Specifically, we used Python to clean up the dataset, correct coding inconsistencies, and restructure certain racial and ethnic identifiers. This allowed us to produce more accurate and meaningful racial breakdowns, ensuring the data was properly aligned with the type of analysis we needed to conduct. Through this process we were able to gather additional data to work from to identify the racial disparities from within the regularly used assessment tool, the VI-SPDAT.

IDENTIFYING THE DISPARITY



Of those completing the VI-SPDAT, the division of Black and White households completing the assessment were very close in comparison.

Among single adult households – **White individuals were scoring a full point higher on average than Black and Hispanic individuals.**

Across the four sections of the VI-SPDAT, **White clients** score higher in three key areas—Risks, Socialization & Daily Functions, and Wellness—with average scores approximately **30% higher than those of Black clients**. In contrast, Black clients score only about **10% higher than White clients** in the fourth section, History of Housing and Homelessness.

IDENTIFYING THE DISPARITY

Primary Race	n	GRAND TOTAL	A. HISTORY OF HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS	B. RISKS	C. SOCIALIZATION & DAILY FUNCTIONS	D. WELLNESS
Black, African American, or African	146	5.12	**0.84**	0.91	1.76	1.38
White	141	6.12	0.76	**1.28**	**1.91**	**1.99**
Hispanic/Latina/e/o	10	5.3	0.8	1.2	1.8	1.4

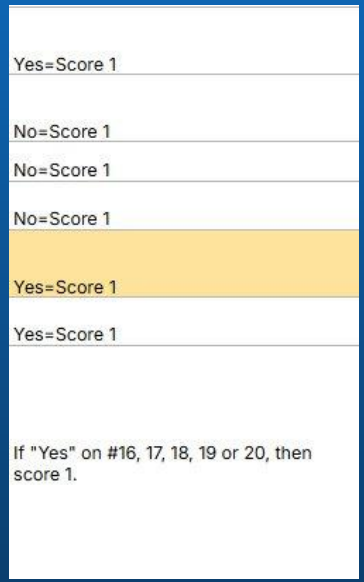
Above is an overall summary of the four sections of the VI-SPDAT and the average score of clients.

Primary Race	4. e) Talked to police because you witnessed a crime, were the victim of a crime, or the alleged perpetrator of a crime, or because the police told you that you must move along?	4. f) Stayed one or more nights in a holding cell, jail, or prison, whether that was a short-term stay like the drunk tank, a longer stay for a more serious offense, or anything in between?	5. Have you been attacked or beaten up since you've become homeless?	6. Have you threatened to or tried to harm yourself or anyone else in the last year?
Black, African American, or African	0.65	0.29	0.21	0.14
White	**1.07**	0.32	**0.22**	**0.27**
Hispanic/Latina/e/o	0.7	**0.4**	0.1	0.1

Above is an example of questions and how each race had scored.

IDENTIFYING THE DISPARITY – SCORING METHODOLOGY

The team also conducted a thorough analysis of the scoring methodology associated with these questions to determine whether it aligned with our proposed revisions to the questions themselves. On the left, you'll find the original scoring approach for the questions presented on the previous slide. On the right, we've included an additional example illustrating how certain responses influenced the scoring of other questions within the assessment.



IDENTIFYING THE DISPARITY

While reviewing VI-SPDAT scores, the team found that Black clients were often scoring lower than white clients, especially on questions related to police contact and criminal involvement. This appeared to stem not only from scoring issues, but also from how these questions were framed. Many questions felt intrusive or accusatory, which may have led Black individuals—particularly those with lived experiences of systemic bias or criminalization—to withhold information or answer cautiously. This highlighted the need to revise the questions to be more culturally sensitive, transparent, and trust-building.

In terms of gender, approximately 8% more female-headed households have completed the assessment compared to male-headed households. However, across the four sections of the VI-SPDAT, the distribution of scores was relatively even, suggesting no clear disparities based on gender.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Although **Black individuals make up 13.6% of the population**, their scores on key indicators such as **behavioral risk, pregnancy, and eviction due to mental health** are significantly **lower than expected**. On average, Black respondents scored just **0.04** for both risky behavior and pregnancy, and **0.06** for mental health-related eviction—**reflecting scores that are 20 to 34 times lower** than what would be anticipated based on their population representation.

Substance use and behavioral health questions showed some of the largest scoring disparities. **Hispanic** respondents **averaged 0.00** on whether substance use impacted their housing, **compared to 0.12 for Native Americans—a 100% gap.** For eviction due to substance use, **White respondents averaged 0.17,** scoring **65% higher than Black respondents**, who averaged just **0.06**.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITIZATION REFORM

Throughout this process, the team has centered the voices of people with lived experience, inviting their insights on how the VI-SPDAT questions felt in practice and how individuals experiencing homelessness might perceive or respond to them. This also became a great opportunity to learn about how those in different types of homelessness situations would respond to questions differently as well.

Moving forward - The CoC is planning to roll out a survey for partner agencies to share with their clients—particularly those completing the VI-SPDAT—to gather additional demographics data and insights directly from individuals with lived experience. This survey will also be shared with those currently listed on the Muskegon County By-Name-List to gather more data.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- This work is not easy. It involves many moving parts—from technical challenges to deeply human ones.
- Gathering data from people with lived experience takes time, trust, and intention. Building rapport and coordinating listening sessions is essential, but not always quick or simple.
- Reforming the VI-SPDAT is not a one-time fix. It will be an ongoing process—one that requires continuous reflection, revision, and collaboration to ensure the tool truly supports equity across our system.
- This process costs time and money and a commitment to racial equity

LOOKING FORWARD: THE VISION FOR EQUITABLE DATA PRACTICES

- Development of a unique report built out for the continuous monitoring of VI-SPDAT data. It will likely be reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- Continue to collect data from clients who have traversed the homeless response system through surveys and listening sessions.
- The team hopes to continue cross regional collaboration among other CoCs and LPB to continue to learn from each other.
- Holding ourselves accountable by reporting to our CoC Board of the progress of work and new developments within the process

Q € A

REFERENCES

- Lindsey Giblin Consulting, LLC. *Quantitative Disparities in VI-SPDAT Assessment Data: Report for Norton Shores, Muskegon City & County CoC.* Provided by Lindsey Giblin.
- MSHMIS Data Warehouse. (2024). *Muskegon County, Core Demographics Report – Sheltered Clients.*
- Muskegon County HMIS. (2024). *Adult Singles VI-SPDAT Report (vi_singles_analysis_by_fields).*
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *2020: DEC Demographic and Housing Characteristics.* Retrieved from race/ethnicity - Census Bureau Tables.

THANK YOU!

We hope that you enjoyed this session and found the information to be of value! If you have any questions, you can reach out to the presenter:

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Or you could contact the MCAH help desk:

Michigan: **mihelp@mihomeless.org**

North Carolina: **nchelp@nchmis.org**