HMIS Job Aid

How to Anonymize a Client

Why Do Agencies Anonymize Their Clients?

Some of our clients either do not want or cannot have identifying information in our HMIS. For instance, you may be working with clients whose safety may be jeopardized by adding their identifiable to HMIS. Alternatively, you may have clients who refuse to sign an HMIS ROI. In these situations, you can anonymize your clients, which will allow you to document your work in the system while maintaining their privacy and safety.

Step One: Create an Internal System

When we say, "anonymize your client", what we mean is that you will create a client profile in HMIS that has no identifying information in it. You can use this profile to document your program enrollments, services, assessments, and notes with no risk to your client. In order to anonymize clients, you must have an internal system so you can match up the HMIS Unique Identification numbers (UIDs) with your clients.

Naming Convention for Anonymized Clients

To create uniformity, we request that you follow these steps to name your client. When you initially set up your client, please use the name of your organization as their **temporary** first name and the word "Anonymous" as their last name. Once you have saved your client, change their first name to their HMIS UID, which you can find on the top right section of their global profile page.

UNIQUE IDENTIFIER
999688397 ⓘ

"999688397 Anonymous"
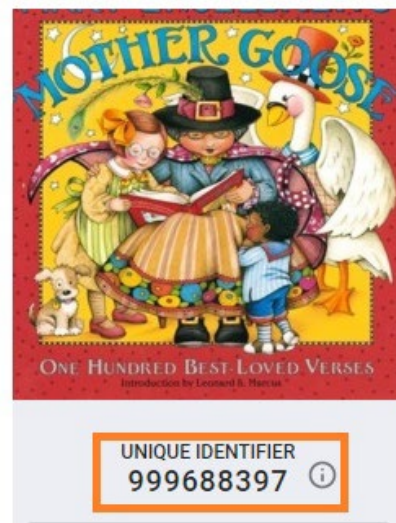
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Step Two: Create the Client Profile in HMIS

When entering the client into HMIS, you should not enter anything that would allow the reader to identify your client. Because of this you will not enter their Social Security Number, Name, or Birthdate. Please follow the rules below on how to enter data into the system.

SSN: Use all zeros for the social security number. If you get a pop-up stating that the ssn is already being used, please click "cancel".

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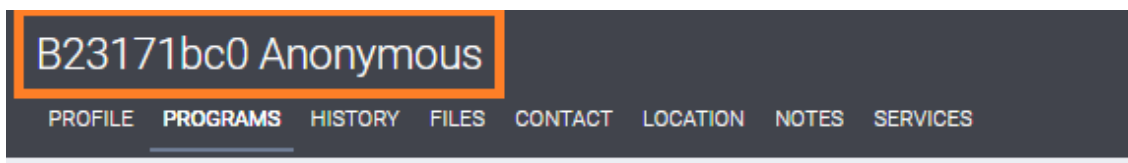**NAME**: Following the naming convention on the previous page.

DOB: Birthdate should be listed as Jan 1st of the year they were born. For example, if your client's date of birth is 3/13/2001, you would list it as 1/1/2001.

Gender and Sexuality: If your client's Gender and/or Sexual Orientation is uncommon, we recommend using "Client Refused." The vast majority of HMIS clients identify as male or female and heterosexual. Despite the importance of gathering gender and sexual orientation demographics, adding this data may put them at risk.

Once saved, make sure you change their first name to their UID.

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Step Two: Program Enrollments for Anonymized Clients

Now that you have a client profile, you can enroll the client into your program. Enrollment information is unlikely to allow a reader to identify your client, so it should be collected and reported accurately. If you are concerned that a specific answer will put your client at risk, you can use "client refused" as the answer. Please make sure you use the first date that you began serving the client as their program start date.

B23171bc0 Anonymous

PROFILE **PROGRAMS** HISTORY FILES CONTACT LOCATION NOTES SERVICES

Enroll 'Shelter Navigation' program for client B23171bc0 Anonymous

Program Start Date	03/08/2023
Name of Case Manager/Housing Specialist	

PRIOR LIVING SITUATION (WHERE THE CLIENT SLEPT LAST NIGHT.)

Reason For Homelessness	Domestic Violence
Type of Residence	Place not meant for habitation (e.g., a vehicle,
Length of Stay in Prior Living Situation	One week or more, but less than one month
Approximate Date this Episode of Homelessness Started	02/21/2023
Total Number of TIMES on the Streets or in an Emergency Shelter in the Past Three Years (Episodes)	One Time
Total Number of MONTHS on the Streets or in an Emergency Shelter in the Past Three Years	Two Months

GENERAL HEALTH STATUS

General Health	Very good

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Can I Add Assessments, Services, Notes, Files, or Pictures?

The key to all questions regarding anonymous clients is, "Will this put my client at risk?". Adding assessments to the system is an important part of getting services for your clients. In the case that you are trying to get your client into a shelter or a housing program, you will need to get separate releases of information (ROIs) so you can share information with those specific programs. You can, and should, add services and notes to the system to document the work you are doing with these clients. However, due to security issues you should never add any files or pictures as they are likely going to put the client at risk.

Just remember:

No Names, Social Security Numbers, or Birthdays

No Uploaded Pictures of the Client or their ID Documents

No Uploaded Files with Names, Social Security Numbers, or Birthdates

No Household Members who are not Anonymized

When in doubt, simply don't add it to HMIS. These may seem like obvious statements, but these are common mistakes. Let's work together to protect these vulnerable clients.