

APPROACH TO DATA



Making the System Visible to Itself

A core function of Durham's Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare and Brief | HMIS-grounded by-name list | Monthly public reporting on the One Number Dashboard

Why It Matters

Durham can only reduce homelessness if it can track homelessness — every person, every month, with confidence the count is right. Quality, by-name data is what makes coordinated action possible. Without it, providers operate in parallel, sprints have no list to draw from, and the public has no way to judge whether the system is working.

The Approach

Durham operates a single by-name list, drawn from HMIS and updated twice a week, that captures households actively experiencing homelessness in the community. The same data feeds case conferencing, sprints, the One Number, and the public dashboard. Quality is assessed against the four-component framework that has guided Built for Zero communities to functional zero: effective outreach, broad provider participation, documented policies, and reliable data infrastructure.

Key Elements

- **An HMIS-grounded by-name list.** A comprehensive, real-time list of every household experiencing homelessness in Durham — name, household composition, homeless history, and known housing needs — built from data entered into HMIS by participating providers with the consent of each person on the list.
- **Quality assessed against a published standard.** Durham measures itself against the Built for Zero Quality Data Scorecards for single adults and families, with separate confirmation for veteran and chronic subpopulations. The scorecards evaluate outreach coverage, provider participation, inflow and outflow tracking, demographic accuracy, and policy documentation.
- **The One Number.** A single, publicly reported figure — total households actively experiencing homelessness in Durham, segmented by population — that serves as the system's headline metric. Drawn from the by-name list and reported monthly to partners and the public. If the number is not moving, the system is not working.
- **Inflow and outflow visibility.** Monthly tracking of who is newly entering homelessness and who is exiting to permanent housing, by population and pathway, so the system can act upstream and not just downstream.
- **Reliable data infrastructure.** Documented inactive policies, unique identifiers that follow a person across providers, historical tracking of every status change, and demographic fields collected with respect for self-identification — together allowing Durham to disaggregate outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities.

Why It Matters in Practice

Quality data is the difference between counting people and serving people. It is what providers act from in case conferencing, what Coordinated Entry uses to prioritize referrals, and what sprint cohorts are pulled from. Without it, the system can't see itself, its missteps, or its progress.