



COLORADO COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Jon Pushkin
Pushkin Public Relations
303-733-3441
jon@pushkinpr.com

HOMELESS SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM ALARMS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCIES

Domestic Violence and Homeless Advocates to Meet August 18 to Discuss Safety and Confidentiality Concerns Raised by Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) – Homeless Agencies Provide Safe Haven for Victims of Domestic Violence

(DENVER, CO – August 17, 2004)

Who: Domestic violence agencies worry that a new directive from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will require battered women's shelters, domestic violence service providers, homeless shelters, and food banks to collect sensitive personal information that could threaten the safety of the very victims they are trying to protect.

In 2001, Congress directed HUD to obtain an unduplicated count of homeless individuals in order to better understand and address chronic homelessness in the United States. HUD created what amounts to a tracking and surveillance system for America's homeless, including victims of domestic violence – the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

In 2003, HUD directed that data on disability status, status as a domestic violence victim, HIV status, pregnancy status, and other individually-identifying or sensitive data would be required for all HUD-funded program clients and strongly recommended for other programs' participants. To receive funding, programs must keep the data for at least seven years in a centralized database run by a locally managed Continuum of Care (CoC). Each Continuum of Care will each receive HUD funding based on the participation level of all local agencies serving the homeless. Even agencies not funded through HUD's Homeless Assistance Act have to participate in HMIS or full funding would not be received by the local CoC for homeless services. This creates pressure within each CoC to preserve the ever-dwindling government assistance for homeless programs at the expense of agency autonomy, client confidentiality, and civil rights.

Domestic violence victims have special safety and confidentiality concerns arising from HMIS. Agencies serving DV victims collect as little information as possible on their clients, to limit the risk that the victim's location is discovered or personal data accessed. Because a large proportion of women receiving mainstream homeless assistance are victims of domestic violence, the concern goes beyond domestic violence agencies and reaches into every homeless service provider, including food banks, soup kitchens and traditional shelter programs. Further, the intrusive nature of HMIS will create an additional barrier for other marginalized communities— including immigrants, people of color, and HIV positive clients—to receive crucial homeless services.

Although HUD acknowledged the risk to vulnerable populations, in the final HMIS standards released on July 30, 2004, language permitting qualified participation for domestic violence victims was removed and domestic violence agencies were directed to collect client-identified information for the victims they serve. HUD stated that “technological and administrative solutions...will adequately protect data on victims of domestic violence,” and that without full participation of domestic violence agencies, it would be impossible to obtain an accurate picture of the homeless in many jurisdictions.

The Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV — www.ccadv.org) disagrees. **Data can be extremely dangerous. No one's safety, confidentiality, or access to services should be risked to satisfy the requirements of a research project.**

What: HUD is inviting homeless and domestic violence advocates to an August 18 meeting to discuss the strengths and risks of HMIS. A HUD representative will talk about the vision for the program and answer questions from stakeholders

Where: Colorado Mental Health Institute at Fort Logan-Auditorium - 3550 W. Oxford Avenue - Denver, CO 80236

When: Wednesday August 18 from 9am-12:30pm

Why: Domestic violence programs provide a safe, confidential haven for survivors of abusive relationships. CCADV does not support any client-identifying information being directly entered into the Colorado HMIS.

Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) - www.ccadv.org - is a 25-year old statewide, grassroots, nonprofit organization providing resources, education, and training, and serving as a voice to more than 80 members and 60 programs serving some 40,000 battered women and children in Colorado each year.