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LEFT OUT IN THE COLD? THE FUNDING POSITION OF YOUTH HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS IN A DATA-DRIVEN FIELD

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to youth everywhere who struggle with housing instability, especially M and J with whom I began my career in human services, and C who never ceases to impress me with their amazing accomplishments.

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Acknowledgements

I have always said that in my family, education is our religion. The feat of completing this dissertation has indeed served as a rite of passage and a labor of devotion. There have been many moments when I believed that this dissertation might never be completed, when I have suffered a crisis of faith. In these moments, I have relied on and benefited from the faith that others have had in me, and without whom I would never have come this far.

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Abstract

Data-driven decision making is a policy trend that purports to make funding decisions fair and effective by evaluating programs based on objective performance criteria. Disadvantages experienced by competitors for funding that serve specialized populations, such as youth homelessness organizations competing for HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) funds, can undermine the goal of promoting effective programs. Youth homelessness is an important social issue impacting 1.87 million young adults across the span of a year (Moulton et a., 2018), and prior research suggests that youth are most interested in seeking services from youth-specific providers. The purpose of this research is to determine the extent of HUD's investment in youth homelessness programs, the composition of the organizations that are funded to provide these services, and the utility of HUD's data-driven funding mechanisms in promoting access to HUD funding for youth-specific providers.

Compiling an administrative dataset of public HUD data and other sources revealed that HUD funding to address youth homelessness has doubled during the study period of 2014 to 2018, but outside of a large influx of funds with the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) that was awarded to just 21 out of over 400 CoCs during the study period, funding stagnated from 2016 to 2018. While most jurisdictions (75 percent of CoCs) had at least one youth-targeted program, fewer than half (40 percent of CoCs) funded any youth programs. The composition of organizations that provided youth homelessness programs were mixed with about 30 percent each being operated from within homeless-specific and youth-specific organizations. The strongest predictor of a youth program receiving funding is if the organization is an incumbent in the field, having received multiple HUD grants over the study period,

indicating that there is a barrier to entry that favors larger organizations and homeless-specific organizations to receive funding for youth homelessness programs. Finally, there are several issues with HUD's data-driven decision-making rules that undermine the overall effectiveness of HUD's data use, including poor data quality, data burden experienced by providers, and a mismatch between HUDs "objective" criteria and the realities of service provision with the specialized population of youth experiencing homelessness.

Policy proposals that would address these issues would be to expand HUD funding for programs for homeless youth, reduce barriers to access by providing technical assistance to providers seeking HUD CoC funds, develop alternative criteria on which to assess youth homelessness programs, and improve overall data quality.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

One policy trend that seeks to promote fairness in the distribution of public resources is data-driven decision-making. By clearly spelling out the rules of the game and the basis on which decisions will be made, data driven decision-making promises that competitors for scarce resources will be judged not on their personal relationships with decision-makers, the trendiness of their case for resources, or their history and reputation in a community, but rather on a single criterion: their ability to produce desired results. This is believed to clear the way for social entrepreneurs to disrupt fields with exciting innovations and to fight against the path dependency of the same old ineffective service providers receiving renewed funding year after year. It promises to be better for everyone: more objective, more open, and more fair.

Clearly defining the rules so that everyone can compete based on the same information is probably fairer than nepotism or path dependency, but the rules themselves are still subject to the priorities and preferences of those who create them. The measures on which allocation decisions are based reflect values and assumptions about the social problem they are designed to evaluate. Having clearly defined rules cannot make a process truly "objective" because the rules are still subjectively defined. As a result, it is important to evaluate these systems and processes to determine who is being advantaged and disadvantaged under the current rules and recommend improvements to make the rules and therefore the distribution of resources fair for all those competing for them. Do the objective criteria evaluate all organizations in a diverse field of service providers fairly? Are providers that serve specific populations, with distinct needs, goals, and outcomes able to secure resources in a highly competitive environment?

One social problem that is currently being addressed by government through a competitive data-based allocation process is youth homelessness. An estimated 4.2 million

young people aged 13 to 25 experience some form of homelessness, either explicit homelessness such as sleeping on the street, car, or shelter or staying with friends, known as "couch surfing," in a given year (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). While this social problem is addressed in part by $119 million in funding though Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (HHS, 2020), $75 million through HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) (HUD, 2019a)[1], it is also addressed as a portion of the nearly $2.2 billion in funding through the HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) program authorized by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (HUD, 2020a). The purpose of this dissertation is to describe the amount of funding that programs to address youth homelessness receive through the CoC process and what kinds of organizations are receiving these funds to assess how well this system is working to fund programs that address youth homelessness.

Research Context

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds many types of housing efforts across the country. To fund most homeless assistance programs, HUD requires communities to organize themselves into collaborative units called Continuums of Care (CoCs) to jointly apply for funding. Their responsibilities extend beyond the application process alone. CoCs are also responsible for counting the homeless population in their jurisdiction with their annual "Point in Time" count, monitoring and evaluating the use of funds by grantees, implementing a coordinated assessment and referral system, and maintaining data systems on all homeless service users. These responsibilities amount to CoCs acting as intermediaries that implement HUD's policy priorities.

1 The funding amounts listed here are for fiscal year 2019 because COVID-19 and associated CARES Act funds have altered government investment in homelessness and those additions are out of the scope of this dissertation. The role of RHYA and YHDP funds will be further explored, but the primary focus of this dissertation is CoC funding.

One such policy priority is to make objective, data-driven decisions. To advance this goal, HUD requires CoCs to collect and maintain data on their service provision and outcomes through implementation of a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Significant resources and efforts have been put into these systems across the country (Fitch, 2010). All providers in the homeless services field are expected to participate in HMIS, and those that receive any HUD CoC funding are required to do so. The findings that are produced from HMIS data are integral at two junctures of funding competitions during the period of this study.[2] First, HMIS data provide a basis for the case each program makes that they should receive CoC funding and that they should be considered a top (tier 1) funding priority for the CoC in the numerical ranking of all projects in the final CoC application. Then, HMIS data are used in the CoC's collaborative application to HUD in competition with all other CoCs, with higher scoring applications getting more of the projects on their ranked lists funded. This two-layered competitive process reinforces the need for the appearance of objectivity. If CoC members are to work together to collaboratively apply for funding from HUD, they are more likely to cooperatively contribute to the effort if they believe that a system that numerically ranks the relative importance of all applicants for funding to be fair.

Programs to address youth homelessness seek to meet the needs of a niche population, and they distinguish their programs as separate from the adult homelessness system. This distinction could present a liability in HUD funding competitions. Youth under age 25 who present for homelessness services without a parent or guardian were about 5.9 percent of the total homeless population in 2020, according to the annual Point in Time (PIT) counts (HUD, 2020b),

[2] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 award year was changed to a noncompetitive process that ensured reallocation of funds that were awarded in 2019 (HUD Public Affairs, 2021).

though other estimates of youth homelessness suggest that this population is under-represented in PIT count numbers (Morton et al, 2018). While some youth experiencing homelessness obtain services from the mainstream homeless service system for adults, there are also shelters and transitional housing programs that are designed to meet the unique and specific needs of youth. Such programs distinguish themselves as taking a more youth-centered and developmental approach to the provision of homelessness services, and HUD has recently infused additional resources to address the problem of youth experiencing homelessness with their Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) beginning in 2017 (HUD, 2016a). For programs and in communities that have not benefited from this additional funding, however, youth homelessness programs could experience a disadvantage in the HUD CoC funding competition by focusing on goals outside of those proscribed by HUD and measured through participation in HMIS.

HMIS systems require providers to input a range of client information, and they are designed to monitor, at minimum, several metrics HUD refers to as "System Performance Measures" (SPMs). These include length of time spent in homelessness, new entrants into homelessness, re-entry into services within 6, 12, and 24 months, accessing income through employment or other resources, successful exits from homeless services, and entry to and retention in permanent housing (HUD, 2019b). These outcomes reflect underlying assumptions about a successful homeless service delivery system looks like, and in turn, what a successful homeless services program looks like.

In such a program, clients enter services, are quickly linked to employment and other resources to support their income, exit services to permanent housing, either in a private lease with affordable rent for those experiencing a short-term housing crisis or in a permanent

supportive housing program for those who are chronically homeless and have a disability, and finally, avoid a return to homelessness for at least two years. This could sound to some like a great program, one that would help folks make the transition from homelessness to housing in a timely manner by focusing primarily on one major underlying cause of homelessness: inadequate income to afford housing. This model could work well for folks who become homeless after they have lost a source of income, such as losing a job, losing supportive ties to a partner or family member, or losing public benefits.

According to prior research on youth homelessness services, however, a primary focus on income as the pathway out of homelessness is unlikely to be successful in bringing youth into services and retaining them once there. In fact, services that are most likely to be successful for youth according to the literature would perform poorly on HUD-defined SPMs. First, youth are more likely to be successful in programs that engage in relationship building with them in the long term (Holtschneider, 2016), undermining such a program's performance on outcomes that emphasize a quick entry from street outreach and quick exit from services to permanent housing. Second, youth are also more likely to exit programs without concrete future plans, necessitating a need for "second chances" (Samuels, Cerven, Curry, Robinson, & Patel, 2019) and undermining a program's performance on the expectation the programs minimize the number of re-entries into homelessness and maximize the number of exits from services to permanent housing. Finally, youth experiencing homelessness are also less likely to qualify for permanent supportive housing, which is reserved for those determined to be "chronically homeless."

One is considered "chronically homeless" by HUD when they have a qualifying disability (such as substance use disorder or serious mental illness) and either at least 12 consecutive months of homelessness or 12 months of homelessness spread over at least 4 episodes of

homelessness in the last three years. Not only does that definition require a long time over which to be able to develop and document a history of homelessness, it is also a problem because youth are likely to manage housing instability with "couch surfing" by staying with other people temporarily (Samuels, Cerven, Curry, Robinson, & Patel, 2019), and this practice does not qualify as "homelessness" according to the HUD definition (Holtschneider, 2021). Disadvantage to youth in this regard is exacerbated by the fact that HUD has incentivized investment in permanent supportive housing in recent years which has garnered a large proportion of CoC funds, shrinking the pie of available funds for other kinds of project.

The mismatches between HUD expectations for successful homeless service delivery (SPMs) and the service needs and realities of homeless youth point to two issues that are important to this research. First, they highlight the necessity of having youth-targeted programming present within homeless service delivery systems. Perhaps because youth success looks different from HUD-defined success, youth are unlikely to even seek services in the adult homeless service system (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2010). Furthermore, for those that do receive services there, they are less likely to find that those services meet their needs (Bergman, Courtney, Stefancic, & Pope, 2019). Second, the mismatch highlights the uphill battle youth targeted homelessness programs face in demonstrating their effectiveness to the CoC to ensure being considered a high priority and therefore receiving continued funding. To understand the impact of these disadvantages, this project will investigate the incidence, funding levels, and funding positions of programs to address youth homelessness in CoCs to answer the broad research question: **how do youth homeless service programs fare in CoC funding competitions?**

Specific Research Questions

To answer this broad question, I have organized my findings into three analytical chapters. First, I introduce the topic and review the literature in Chapter 1 and provide an overview of methodology in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I describe the size, scope, and trends in CoC funding for youth-targeted programs. While the social problem of youth homelessness is an issue that has received increasing scholarly attention, the role of CoCs in funding programs that address this issue has not yet been thoroughly investigated, to my knowledge. This chapter answers the following research specific questions:

Q1: How invested are CoCs in addressing youth homelessness? Specifically, across all CoCs, what proportion of HUD CoC funding goes towards youth-targeted programming, and what proportion of programs with youth-targeted homeless beds receive HUD funding? How has the introduction of the YHDP impacted levels of investment?

Q2: What CoC characteristics are associated with variation in investment in youth homelessness across CoCs? Specifically, how does a CoC's size, population of youth experiencing homelessness, poverty rate, and urbanity impact a CoC's investment in youth homelessness and changes in their investment over time?

Using insights from Strategic Action Field theory, Chapter 4 situates youth homelessness service providers within the context of the larger homeless services field of providers, against which they are competing for funding. In this competitive context, organizations must draw on their credibility to justify their funding receipt and prioritization among other projects that represent incumbents in the field. This paper explores how credibility and incumbency may facilitate or undermine an organization's funding chances and addresses the following questions:

Q3: What kinds of organizations provide and receive HUD CoC funding to provide services that target youth homelessness? Specifically, are youth-related organizations more or less likely to receive HUD CoC funding to provide a youth-targeted homelessness program than programs categorized at homelessness-specific?

Q4: How are incumbency and credibility related to HUD CoC funding of youth-targeted homeless services? Specifically, how do prior history of HUD CoC funding (incumbency) and the organization type through which a program is being delivered (credibility) impact receipt of HUD CoC funding?

Finally, in Chapter 5, I critically examine the trend of data-driven decision-making as a performance management tool, including exploration of data quality issues, data burden and utility to providers, and the impact of serving a larger number of homeless young people on overall system "performance." This conceptual chapter calls into question the assumption that competition and accountability are effective means for serving not just the stereotypical homelessness services user, but all users in need.

Q5: How well does the data-driven performance management system used by the HUD CoC program serve the needs of homeless service providers and users, specifically for youth experiencing homelessness and the providers that serve them?

This dissertation helps shed light on the current state of HUD funding for youth homelessness services, the composition of organizations that receive these funds, the effectiveness of the current system, and ultimately, how well the needs of youth experiencing

homelessness are being met. As a society, if we care about doing a better job meeting the needs of this population, this research will build knowledge as to where we are and where we can improve.

Literature Review

Homeless Services

The homeless services sector is often a resource of last resort of many people who are struggling to find or maintain a safe place to live. Homeless services include a whole system of services from prevention provided through rental assistance programs, to supportive services for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to the most ubiquitous: the emergency shelter. All together, an estimated 1.46 million homeless people received services in HUD-funded programs in 2018 (HUD, 2020c).

In 1998 Kuhn and Culhane published a study of administrative data on shelter utilization in the cities of New York and Philadelphia. They organized patterns of shelter use to define three types of homeless service users: the transitional, episodic, and chronically homeless. They discovered that while the chronically homeless only comprised 10 percent of the total shelter user population, they used half of all shelter days. This landmark study has prompted decades of work prioritizing ending chronic homelessness, including a movement by HUD away from providing shelter care and towards providing permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of the chronically homeless population in a more efficient way.

Taking this research into account, along with other gains in knowledge and new policy tools and trends, HUD divides its homeless assistance funds into two categories, and youth targeted programs are able to apply for funds through either program. First, the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program funds short-term emergency shelters and homelessness

prevention through rental assistance programs. Second, people who leave the shelter need longer-term solutions, which are funded through HUD's CoC program. This includes funding for permanent supportive housing (PSH) that provides permanent homes for the chronically homeless who have major barriers to employment and self-sufficiency, including mental health and substance abuse disorders. CoC funds are also used for transitional housing (TH), rapid rehousing (RRH) and other models for people who fit the transitional and episodic categories of homelessness as defined by Kuhn and Culhane (1998), with the goal of obtaining long term housing solutions in the private market.

Together, between ESG and CoC programs, HUD provided $2.6 billion in McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funds to address homelessness in 2019, including $280 million through ESG (HUD, 2020d) and $2.3 billion through CoC (HUD, 2020e)[3]. This amount has grown considerably from the about $200 million first authorized for homeless programs in 1987 (Perl, 2017). HUD funding for homeless assistance is the largest single source of funding for the homeless services sector with almost 90 percent of that funding coming through the CoC program. That said, homeless services are also supported with funds from local government, churches and religious organizations, private donors, foundations, and volunteer hours. The presence of these resources does impact a provider's involvement with the local CoC, according to Mosley (2012). However, Mosley finds that those that opt-out of CoC involvement represent a small subgroup of generally religiously-affiliated homeless service providers. As will be

3 HUD funding competitions for FY20 were impacted by the pandemic, and a significant investment of $4 billion for homelessness was includes in the CARES Act for COVID relief. These amounts are irregular and not representative of the context for this study which examines HUD funding between 2014 to 2018, and as such these older figures are included instead of more recent funding levels.

explored further below, the availability of funds also has an important impact on prevalence of programs for homeless youth (Esparza, 2009).

Despite increased investment and the hard work of providers and advocates, homelessness continues to be a serious social problem, and it is likely to become more severe due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the end of eviction protections that were first introduced during the lock-down (Thometz, 2021). While efforts in recent years have helped to make reductions in the incidence of veteran and chronic homelessness (HUD, 2020b), there were still 580,000 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people in January of 2020, according to the . Homeless counts in 2020 indicate that despite an overall reduction in homelessness since 2010, the number has increased slightly each year since 2016. Furthermore, these estimates of homelessness often underestimate the additional people and families who are "staying with" friends or family temporarily, "doubled up" in far less space than a particular housing unit was designed for, or are simply hidden due to limits in our ability to identify them (HUD, 2020b).

Youth Homelessness

Youth experiencing homelessness, as a population, have received increasing scholarly attention since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, they remain a population that is difficult to count and largely hidden (Morton et al., 2017), difficult to track to gain knowledge about long-term outcomes (Holtschneider, 2016a), and difficult to serve due to their position on the periphery of both adult and children's services systems (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2010). Youth experiencing homelessness face many risks, including high rates of exposure to violence and trauma, substance use, mental health issues, and sexual risk behaviors including higher rates of STIs and survival sex (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter & Karnik, 2012) and increased vulnerability to sexual and labor exploitation (Mostajabian, Santa Maria, Wiemann, Newlin, & Bocchini, 2019). Service

systems have struggled to meet these many complex needs (Selsnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem & Serovich, 2009). This section will define "youth experiencing homelessness," describe what is known about the system of services that target them, and how these organizations are funded.

Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, and Karnik (2012) present a comprehensive review of what is known about the causes and consequences of homelessness among youth. They identify one major weakness of the literature to be the inconsistent definitions provided for homelessness, youth, and youth experiencing homelessness. Morton et al. (2017) reiterate that this challenge continues in their study of the prevalence and correlates of youth homelessness. Another challenge in defining youth homelessness is that there are two major federal funding streams for youth homelessness services, and they have different definitions of homelessness.

First, the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) authorizes funding for runaway shelters and transitional living programs (TLPs) for youth experiencing homelessness. The RHYA defines homeless youth for the purposes of living in a TLP to be ages 16 to 21 "for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative; and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement" (FYSB, 2008). The second definition comes from HUD. With implementation of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) of 2009, HUD defines 'homeless unaccompanied youth' as those up to age 25 who have experienced unstable housing in the last 60 days and have either a disability, addiction, or multiple barriers to employment.

For the purposes of this research, the unit of analysis is organizations, so youth experiencing homelessness are defined as those youth eligible to receive services from programs that are funded through the HUD CoC funding stream to provide services to address youth homelessness. While individual organizational policies and practices vary, the general definition

includes unaccompanied youth ages 13 to 24 who lack a safe, stable, permanent living arrangement. Although the HUD definition of homelessness excludes youth who are "couch surfing" by staying with friends, family, or acquaintances temporarily, scholars have found that this population is just as vulnerable as those who would qualify as homeless under HUD definitions (Holtschneider, 2021), and consider "couch surfers" to be homeless.

The prevalence of youth experiencing homelessness has been a difficult figure to assess. Most recently, Morton et al. (2017) offered a nationally representative 12-month estimation. The authors separate out their age categories into households with children ages 13-17 and households with a member aged 18-25. An experience of homelessness was counted for those who were residing in a shelter, transitional living program, or other temporary housing and those who were sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. Additional questions captured experiences of "couch surfing," identified when a household member was staying with others while they had no permanent living situation. Using these definitions, they found a 12-month prevalence rate of 9.7 percent of youth ages 18-25 as experiencing either explicit homelessness or "couch surfing." This translates to an estimated total of 3.48 million young adults experiencing homelessness in a year. This estimate is in alignment with 3.27 percent prevalence among high schoolers using the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Cutuli, Treglia, & Herbers, 2020). These estimates are far higher than previous estimates that have been more limited in scope, including HUD's annual Point in Time count which identified only 34,000 sheltered and unsheltered youth experiencing homelessness on a night in January 2020 (HUD, 2020b). Limiting Morton et al.'s estimate to only incidences of explicit homelessness (excluding couch surfing), they still estimate 1.87 million young adults to experience explicit homelessness in a year. In their conclusion, Morton et al. (2017) echo the claims of many other scholars and

researchers that far greater investment is needed in services to address and prevent youth homelessness (Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, & Witkin, 2004).

Morton et al. (2017) also highlight some key demographic characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness. First, they find that the incidence of homelessness among youth in rural areas is similar to those in urban areas. They also find that young adults who are parents, who have not completed high school or a GED, are African American, and/or are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness. Youth with a history of foster care are also more likely to experience homelessness, with 29 percent of youth experiencing homelessness reporting a history of foster care in the Voices of Youth Count survey (Dworsky, Gitlow, Horwitz, & Samuels, 2019).

This large and diverse population has a variety of service needs, but they experience a number of barriers to accessing services. In a systematic review of program and intervention evaluations of services for runaway and homeless youth done by Selsnick et al. (2009), one theme was present in the seven different qualitative studies of youths' service experiences: negative interactions with providers. For example, in a qualitative study of "street youth" Thompson et al. (2006) found that youth were concerned about dirty, crowded, broken down, and unsafe facilities, unrealistic expectations of attending religious services or having identification to receive services, and being treated with disrespect by providers. Lack of trust in providers and adults more generally was also a major barrier identified by Bender et al. (2018) in their qualitative study exploring reasons homeless youth avoid help-seeking. Slesnick et al. (2009) conclude that across the literature, youth consistently reported that they wanted providers to be non-judgmental, to keep things confidential, and to offer flexibility rather than rigid expectations.

Gharabaghi and Stuart (2010) also find barriers to service access. They interviewed program participants and providers as part of their case study of the youth homeless services system in the Central East Region, north of Toronto, Canada. Both providers and youth emphasized the centrality of the relationship between youth and providers. Building this relationship, they said, is necessary so that providers are available for youth when they are ready to accept help and are looking to make a change in their lives. The relational basis of youth homelessness service providers was described in contrast with youths' interactions with larger mental health and housing institutions that provide longer term care and resources.

The authors delineated two types of services systems with which youth experiencing homelessness must interact. First, the "formal" institutional system is focused on either children's or adults' needs, and it is also designed for clients who have greater stability and resources than youth experiencing homelessness. Second, there is the "informal" system of providers that specifically tailor programs to the needs of youth experiencing homelessness, such as drop-in centers, emergency shelters, and semi-independent living programs. In contrast to the more formalized network of providers, they describe a major role of the informal providers as advocating for their clients and assisting them in navigating the formal services system. For example, a staff member from an "informal" youth homelessness provider may accompany a young person to seek mental health services from a more "formal" mental health clinic. These more formal providers are designed for a stable population with patients who can receive mail and phone calls, and the "informal" provider may serve as the address of record so that youth can receive paperwork and complete required documentation.

In the United States context, Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, and Witkin (2004) find a similar type of distinction between large and small providers in their case study of the services to

address youth homelessness in Los Angeles County. They describe that the large providers have the educated staff and extensive resources needed to address the many complex needs of the population. However, smaller agencies were better positioned to engage youth with more flexibility and fewer strict rules and procedures. Brooks et al. argue that this is evidence of the diverse needs of youth experiencing homelessness, and the need for a diverse service sector to meet those needs.

This work also highlights the importance of youth engagement as a pathway to service utilization. In an experiment testing service linkage resulting from outreach referral to either drop-center services or shelter services, Slesnick et al. (2016) find that youth assigned to the "drop-in center" condition were significantly more likely to present for services than youth in the "shelter" condition. Importantly, the authors mention that the youth crisis shelters in their study were only for those aged 12-17, and older youth were referred to general adult services. The mean age for participants in the experiment was 20.8, so those that would have qualified for the youth shelter would have been a smaller proportion of the group. While the authors did not discuss this issue in their article, the results are consistent with other research that has found that youth have mixed experiences with the adult homelessness system.

While many studies highlight the importance of having services that are specifically tailored to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, few have explored the experiences of youth within the adult service system. One exception is a qualitative study by Bergman et al. (2019) consisting of interviews with 27 young adults in supportive housing programs. While overall youth appreciated having access to safe housing, they also reported feelings of isolation and longing for supportive peer connections that were not forthcoming from their program experiences. The authors conclude that in the absence of other options, youth can

be successful in programs open to all adults, but tailored programming is more appropriate to address the developmental needs of youth.

In their report on youth pathways through homelessness from the Voices of Youth Count study, Samuels et al. (2019) also emphasize the importance of developmentally appropriate programming to address youth homelessness. They argue that due to the long-term instability, disruption, and trauma that this vulnerable population experiences, in combination with their developmental stage, that flexible, trauma-informed programs that allow youth to make mistakes and be offered "second chances" are needed to best serve youth experiencing homelessness.

This literature suggests that there are two characteristics that are important to the youth homelessness services field. First, there is a need for programs that connect with the population on a relational basis, going deeper than a transactional exchange of information and resources. Holtschneider (2016a) provides further evidence of these needs. In her assessment of the long-term impacts of a transitional living program (TLP) for young adults, she found that what youth reflected on over a year after program exit were the relationships they developed with one another and with staff, and the emotional support they received while there. They very much needed the concrete resource of housing, with many mentioning that the TLP had saved their lives (Holtschneider, 2016b), but the program's full impact went beyond the provision of resources alone.

Furthermore, these relational services are more likely to be delivered by youth-specific, informal, providers. The evidence follows from several qualitative studies mentioned above. Bender et al. (2018) and Thompson et al. (2006) report youth fear providers and avoid of adult services. Brooks et al. (2019) describe how smaller, less formal providers are able to engage youth with greater flexibility, which is exactly what Selznick et al.'s (2009) review highlighted.

Garabaghi and Stuart (2010) describe this process in action, where in "informal" providers assist youth with the navigation of "formal" system of care. While these do not offer the same strength of evidence as a large experimental design, these do offer the best evidence available as to the services youth seek (relational and youth-specific) and where they are likely to seek them (small and informal providers).

It is worth noting that these are all separate organizational characteristics: relational, youth-specific, small, and informal that may not all always describe organizations that could be able to be effective in engaging and retaining youth experiencing homelessness. Nevertheless, these characteristics do co-exist in many organizations and constitute a certain "type" of youth homeless services provider that will be referenced with these characteristics in several places in this dissertation. That said, they are disaggregated in Chapter 4 as distinct variables of size and youth-focus, with no information available to describe formality or relational basis. While this organizational "type" may indeed represent a stereotype of organizations, it does seem to have meaning based on the accounts of the many youth experiencing homelessness whose interviews comprise this body of qualitative work. In addition, these qualitative studies that draw on interviews with youth experiencing homelessness offer the best opportunity to gain insight from the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the youth themselves. In the absence of any stronger data indicating otherwise, it seems appropriate to synthesize the evidence that is available to understand youth preferences.

A second conclusion that can be drawn about the service needs of youth experiencing homelessness, a diverse field of providers is required to meet a variety of needs. As mentioned above, youth who identify as LGBTQ are disproportionately likely to be homeless, and they also have specialized service needs, according to the literature. For example, Prock and Kennedy

(2020) find that youth who identified as LGBQ had both higher service needs, lower service utilization, and shorter length of stay in a youth transitional housing program. Samuels et al. (2019) also found that many youth in the study, especially those who identify as LGBTQ, reported experiences of stigma and discrimination within their families and in society, including identifying structural barriers to service utilization. Given the over-representation in this population of parenting youth, there is also a need for specialized services to tailor to families. Finally, services must be culturally competent to the identities of this population, not only due to the over-representation of youth of color (Morton et al., 2017), but also due to the distinct "street culture" with which many youth experiencing homelessness identify (Thompson, McManus, Lantry, Windsor, & Flynn, 2006).

Given the specialized service needs of this population, it is important to understand how much diversity exists across programs in terms of what organizations are providing services to address youth homelessness in communities. One study by Esparza (2009) studied the community factors that influence the changes in the youth homelessness services sector over time. She created a database of the 982 programs in 344 organizations in 26 metropolitan areas by compiling data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics and cross-referencing this with national and local resource lists and lists of HUD grantees. After controlling for various characteristics of the metropolitan areas, she found that the size of the sector was not related to any of a variety of measures of community need, including the number of youth living in poverty, the number of youth experiencing homelessness, the number of foster care youth, or the number of youth offenders. Instead, she found that a major driver of the size of the youth homelessness service sector was the availability of funding, particularly for transitional living programs (TLPs).

TLPs are an important type of program in examining the composition of the youth homelessness field. They reside at the intersection of two major funding streams. TLPs are funded by RHYA, which also funds temporary shelters, street outreach, and drop-in center programs. Of these programs, TLPs were allocated $44 million across 239 programs through RHYA in 2020 (FYSB, 2020). TLPs and their specialized counterpart, Maternity Group Homes, are also the only RHYA programs that are eligible to receive HUD CoC funds because HUD CoC funds are exclusively for transitional, permanent, and supportive housing programs, and this does not include emergency shelter or outreach programs.

Since there is evidence that funding is a major driver of what services end up being available for youth to access, it is important to know how many youth homelessness providers are accessing funding through the HUD CoC process. Youth targeted programs are also competing for funds against a larger population of organizations that provide services to all people experiencing homelessness, including veterans, chronically homeless people, families, people living with AIDS, and those escaping domestic violence. To understand how this competition plays out, it is important to look closer at the results of this process.

CoCs and the HUD CoC Funding Process

As introduced briefly above, CoCs are a policy tool designed to encourage cross-sector collaboration to address challenging social problems (Mosley, 2021). Starting in 1993 HUD began incentivizing communities to work together collaboratively to identify community needs and priorities (Burt et al., 2002). The HEARTH Act of 2009 codified the CoC system into law, and it is now a requirement for any organization or locality seeking to secure HUD funding through the CoC program (Blasco, 2015). CoCs are able to organize themselves into jurisdictions of their own choosing that make the most sense for their region. Given this context, jurisdictions

vary drastically in size from a single municipality or county, to multi-county regions, to balance of state CoCs that usually cover all counties outside of the major metropolitan areas, to an entire state or US territory (Jarpe, Mosley, Ray, & Reed, 2015). Virtually every part of the United States is considered part of a CoC jurisdiction, with only a handful of isolated counties and suburbs that may be in transition between CoCs, in the process of applying for CoC funding, or opting out of participating in the CoC process.[4]

One major advantage of the CoC system as a policy tool to address youth homelessness at the national level is its independence from policy variations produced at the state level. One example of how these variations can serve to fail vulnerable young people depending on their location is the Chafee Program that allows states to use federal Title IV-E funds to extend foster care and accompanying services and supports to age 21 or 23 for older youth meeting certain conditions. These federal resources, totaling $180M in 2019 along with matched and expanded state and local resources as well (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019), offer vital housing support for youth experiencing homelessness, 29 percent of whom have had a history of involvement in foster care (Dworsky, Gitlow, Hortwitz, & Samuels, 2019)[5]. While these resources do represent a contribution to the overall federal response to youth homelessness, only up to 20 percent of non-education and training funds, totaling $27.6M of federal Chaffee funds on housing supports in 2019 (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). Another issue is that there may be limitations on resources to

4 An examination of grantees using HUD's GIS mapping tool of CoC grantees revealed very few areas for which no information was available, that is, areas not covered by a CoC jurisdiction. That does not guarantee that all localities or providers within a given CoC are active participants or able to secure HUD CoC funds, but they should be eligible as part of a CoC jurisdiction.

5 Notably, not all 29 percent of youth experiencing homelessness would qualify for services under the Chafee program due not only to their location as described but also due to their age when they left foster care and the circumstance of their case closure, whether reunification, adoption, or kinship guardianship (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

which youth may be eligible depending on the state where they reside. Some states do not offer federally funded extended foster care, some have eligibility restrictions on who can qualify for extended foster care (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019), and some do not allow youth who leave care to re-enter foster care and receive a funded housing placement (Juvenile Law Center, 2021). If these youth become homeless, they often end up seeking homeless services available regardless of foster care history in either adult or youth homeless services system. Due to these variations, the HUD CoC system has potential as a vehicle for reaching vulnerable young people in all locations in the United States, not just those with more generous policy contexts. Whether CoCs are able to secure the maximum amount of resources that may be available, however, still depends on the quality of their application to HUD, which can be challenging given the many responsibilities CoCs much fulfil.

There are numerous expectations that CoCs are expected to meet, including: preparing the annual collaborative application for HUD, administering HMIS systems, conducting annual Point in Time (PIT) counts of the sheltered homeless population and biannual counts of the unsheltered homeless population, conducting an annual Homeless Inventory Count (HIC) of beds and their usage, implementing a coordinated entry system to assess people seeking homeless assistance and connect them with appropriate services based, monitoring grantee performance, and submitting reports including an Annual Performance Report (APR), Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR), System Performance Measures (SPM), and Longitudinal Systems Analysis Report (LSA) (HUD, 2019c). The resource library on HUD's website designed for community partners, hudexchange.info, contains 1072 resources for the CoC program, reflecting a high degree of specialized knowledge and expertise required of administrators in lead agencies, grantees, non-grantees, and other active participants in CoCs.

This breadth of responsibilities is staggering when considering that many CoCs operate with low staffing levels and face capacity challenges. A report of national survey of CoCs conducted in 2014 stated that only a third of CoCs had a full-time director and half of CoCs had two or fewer employees (Jarpe, Mosley, Ray, & Reed, 2015). In a qualitative study of 18 CoCs, Mosley (2021) finds that capacity is an issue across CoCs of various sizes and structures. Lack of capacity was also associated with inequity within CoCs, both by population and geography. Mosley finds that within the CoC networks she studied, participants and leaders reported concerns that greater resources being directed towards HUD priorities like the development of permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, detracting from resources to more niche populations such as youth. Inequities were reported by region as well, with some rural areas of CoCs being left out of the process and the resources. Jarpe, Mosley, and Smith (2018) also report higher levels of service gaps among rural CoCs when compared to suburban or urban CoCs, and they highlight the importance of provider networking, local government support, and advocacy in reducing service gaps. Another capacity issue, reported by Valero and Jang (2020), is the educational credentials of CoC leaders. In a separate national survey of CoCs, they find that having a leader with a postgraduate degree is significantly associated with both perceived network effectiveness and receipt of HUD funding, but only half of leaders in their study reported having postgraduate degrees.

This relatively recent work examining CoCs, their leadership, structure, and challenges represents important new knowledge in our understanding of CoCs. Prior work has included case studies and reports of CoC activities, but overall, the scholarly literature on CoCs is small but growing. On the other hand, there are huge range of resources, guidance, and reports put out by

HUD about what they expect CoCs to do and how they ought to do it. The most important aspect of this to understand for the purposes of this research is the HUD CoC funding process.

CoCs are responsible for putting together their own collaborative applications, ranking projects according to their importance to addressing homelessness in their jurisdiction, and providing the monitoring and oversight of funded projects. As one can imagine, the various sizes and types of CoCs have different kinds of needs and resources to address homelessness, and the idea behind the CoC program is to allow each locality to determine the services that are offered and how important they are to addressing homelessness in their area.

While there is some room for individual CoCs to express their own priorities, at all levels in the process HUD provides tools and incentives to guide CoCs in the ways they believe will best address homelessness. HUD begins by laying out their priorities in the annual Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). This document—83 pages in 2019 (HUD, 2019d)—outlines the exact scoring system and calculations HUD will take into account in this competitive process. The competition occurs at two levels—within the CoC and across CoCs. HUD scores all CoCs' applications on a 200-point scale (HUD, 2019d). Those that achieve higher scores are prioritized to receive renewal funding and funding for new projects. Within the application submitted by each CoC, all projects, both new and renewal, are ranked, generally by using HUD's "ranking tool" as a guide. The ranking tool features measures for tracking program performance and a template for ranking projects.

The annual NOFA and the ranking tool are highly influential in determining what CoCs get more projects funded, and which of those projects are ranked as the highest priority for funding by CoCs. There are a few key priorities that HUD has made manifest in these documents that impact the fate of youth-targeted programs in CoC funding competitions: the fact that HUD

identifies youth experiencing homelessness as a special population, the de-prioritization of transitional housing (the typical housing solution for youth) due to lack of evidence regarding its effectiveness, and a mismatch between the goals of programs that address youth homelessness and performance measures identified by HUD.

Youth Homelessness as a Special Population

First, the 2015 NOFA (HUD, 2015) included a new opportunity to target up to 10 percent of CoC funds to youth-specific projects. They have also increased efforts to more accurately count youth experiencing homelessness. Since 2013, Point in Time counts have included age categories to identify the number of youth experiencing homelessness 17 and under and those ages 18-24. In addition, HUD requests that any youth-targeted programs that lose funding, whether by closure of the program or agency, poor financial stewardship, poor performance, or by choice of the program or CoC, should be replaced with other youth-targeted projects to keep the proportion of the CoC's funding that goes to youth-targeted projects at a comparable level. Finally, in 2016 HUD (2016a) initiated a special competition for programs that target youth experiencing homelessness called the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). In the first year, funds were awarded to 10 communities and then to 11 additional communities during the following year. This program has continued to grow, adding 23 more communities to the program in 2019 bringing the total to 44 CoCs having received this important investment in addressing youth homelessness. The program is currently accepting applications for additional rounds.

HUD is taking important steps, neither trivial nor token, to address youth homelessness throughout the system by endeavoring to more accurately count youth experiencing homelessness within the shelter system and on the street and by making major investments in

CoCs actively engaged in collaborative planning around the issue of youth homelessness. Concurrent with these investments, PIT count estimates indicate that the number of unaccompanied homeless youth has dropped steadily since 2017 when they first began separating counts out by accompaniment with families to track "unaccompanied" homeless youth, totaling a 10 percent reduction overall, attributable to reductions in both the sheltered and unsheltered populations. These data may suggest that progress has been made, but youth are still likely to be underestimated, according to other sources of information about youth homelessness (Moulton et al, 2017; Zaveri, 2020; Cutuli, Treglia, & Herbers, 2019). Furthermore, CoCs are still working on refining their PIT methodology for counting homeless youth, leading to unreliability in the estimates. That said, HUD is currently able to say they are invested in addressing youth homelessness and youth homelessness is on a downward trend.

In the past, other special populations have been prioritized, including people with AIDS, the chronically homeless, veterans, and families. Now youth have been emphasized as an important homeless population with specific needs, but they are still in the position of competing against other organizations for limited resources. The extent to which funding for youth programs is changing in CoC competitions outside of the demonstration program is currently unknown. Furthermore, decreases in the PIT count of homeless youth make it more difficult for CoCs to make the case that programs to address youth homelessness should be a high priority for the CoC, especially when facing increased numbers in other subgroups.

De-prioritization of Transitional Housing

Beginning in the 2016 NOFA, HUD has de-prioritized transitional housing programs due to their lack of evidence base. While transitional housing programs for youth are specifically exempt from the 5-point deduction all other transitional housing programs receive (HUD,

2017a), the move away from transitional housing generally calls into question the evidence base of transitional programs for youth as well, and a broad agenda against transitional programs may sweep up youth programs in the process, even with exemptions in place. For example, the CoC serving the City of Chicago classifies all transitional living programs as a lower priority, under "tier 2," regardless of target population (Holtschneider, personal communication). Many youth programs have been defined as "transitional housing programs" with a 2-year tenure limit and/or an age limit for services. This is linked to the fact that programs that are also funded under the RHYA are called "transitional living programs" and designed to provide time-limited assistance to youth, generally for 18 months.

HUD's recommendation to phase out transitional housing programs appears to come from the results of a large randomized trial, HUD's Family Options Study (2016b). The study found that at three-year follow up, families assigned priority access to permanent housing subsidies had more stable housing, more stable families, and better outcomes for children in the family than groups assigned to community based rapid rehousing, transitional housing, or usual care conditions. This intervention showed far superior outcomes and came at a lower cost than emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. Due to its high cost and lack of evidence, HUD has recommended that CoCs phase out transitional housing in favor of more permanent options.

While this may be the case for families, it has not yet been established what the best options are for youth experiencing homelessness. That said, there is also some evidence that TLPs for youth experiencing homelessness have had some positive impact, though no study has compared interventions with the same rigor as the Family Options Study. Only three studies of residential programs for youth experiencing homelessness evaluate outcomes with some form of

a comparison group. Upshur (1986) found that a transitional housing program for 16- and 17-year-olds produced significantly better outcomes in stable housing and employment among 22 program participants than a control group of 18 young people who received other types of services. Kisely et al. (2008) completed a pilot study the effects of a transitional housing program that offered support services for 15 youth and compared health, education, and employment outcomes against those of 30 youth in the control group who attended the drop-in center and received support services only. Comparisons between the groups indicated that those in supportive housing had lower substance use rates, were more likely to report "excellent" health, and were less likely to report having accomplished less in the past month due to "emotional problems" (p. 1090). While results are promising in both cases, these quasi-experiments have low sample sizes and no random assignment, undermining confidence in these programs' effectiveness.

A third study by Raithel et al. (2015) utilized administrative data on program participants at one transitional housing program with supportive services. After obtaining data on 138 housing program participants, they constructed a comparison group of 159 individuals who were eligible for the program but did not participate. These individuals were matched using propensity scores and were compared on outcomes at two-year post program entry and one-year post-program exit. They found statistically significant differences between groups in terms of lower shelter utilization and jail stays in the treatment group at the first time-point, but differences were not significant at the second time-point. This finding supports those from the Housing Options Study. Short-term programs produce short-term results, and perhaps a more permanent housing solution like a voucher program would provide long term benefits to youth experiencing homelessness as well.

In general, there is an overall lack of evidence about any interventions to address youth homelessness including rapid rehousing or supportive services only[6], as reaffirmed in a recent systematic review by Morton, Kugley, Epstein, and Farrell (2020). While there may be limited evidence of long-term effectiveness for transitional housing, there is no evidence of long-term effectiveness for any other programs either. Based on the literature reviewed above that emphasizes the relational nature of programs, transitional housing may be a good fit for fostering peer relationships and support while also providing housing and convenient access to needed support services (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2010; Holtschneider, 2016a; Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, & Witkin, 2004).

Performance Measurement

Encouraging the use of evidence-based programs as demonstrated by research has long been a basis for incentives built into the CoC application process. Also important to the general goal of data-driven decision-making, however, is evaluating the performance of funded programs. The literature on performance measurement and management is vast and examines the internal systems implemented by managers to measure and manage progress towards organizational goals to optimize organizational performance. However, in this case, performance measurement is not being used as a management tool but rather as an accountability mechanism. Because public funds are being distributed to private nonprofits for service delivery, there is pressure on the government bodies distributing funds to ensure their good financial stewardship.

6 Two well-designed studies of intensive case management programs did provide evidence of reductions in homelessness, including the Youth Villages Study (Valentine, Skemer, & Courtney, 2015). However, evidence was mixed across studies and another well-designed study of a less intensive case management showed null effects resulting in the overall conclusion that Support Service Only as a CoC-funding eligible type of program lacked sufficient evidence as did the other types of interventions.

Many of the policy tools and mechanisms developed for this purpose are broadly characterized as New Public Management.

New Public Management emphasizes applying business practices to the delivery of human services to monitor the achievement of targeted policy outcomes as defined by public agencies (Smith, 2010). The intention of emphasizing performance is to promote innovation and creative problem-solving at the local level (Martin, 2006), and allow market-based mechanisms to exert accountability on private agencies (Willging, 2005). Accountability measures in government-nonprofit relationships, and measurement to maximize performance in human services more generally, have been objects of scholarly emphasis and attention since the 1960s (Heinrich, 2002). Focus on performance at the organizational level has been associated with many large-scale trends affecting the human services sector, including the formalization and professionalization of nonprofits (Jaskyte, 2011) and the marketization of nonprofits (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004).

Performance measurement as defined by Tilbury (2007) is the identification of desirable policy outcomes and using quantitative indicators to measure and monitor organizations' progress in achieving the desired outcomes. This rational approach to performance, with an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, is a hallmark of New Public Management to improve accountability without undermining organizational autonomy (Lewis, 2015). While the use of this policy tool is widespread, it is not without its problems and critiques.

Privileging the achievement of policy outcomes as the definition of performance within the context of public accountability is potentially problematic for few reasons. First, McMillen et al. (2005) describe many facets of social service delivery that go into understanding and determining the quality of services, beyond simple client outcomes. They point out that there are

some clients who achieve outcomes despite poor service and others who fail to achieve outcomes even with excellent service (p. 183). As a result, attention to processes and client experiences is also needed in understanding quality of services. In addition, risks of performance measurement include "gaming" or manipulating data to distort outcomes measurements, misalignment between performance measures and policy goals, failure of measures to measure performance, and adverse impacts on employees, to name a few (Cuganesan, Guthrie, & Vranic, 2014).

Another issue is that this process advantages larger organizations with the capacity to track outcomes on a regular basis, and those that can make programmatic adjustments regularly in order to better meet measured outcomes. In their study of the impacts of non-reimbursed accountability measures on small nonprofits with government funding, Never and Leon (2017) found adverse financial impacts on small nonprofits. They argue that despite the association of government funding with stability and security for small nonprofits, the costs of maintaining those contracts results in decreased operating margins and return on assets. The capacity disadvantage to smaller nonprofits is especially problematic in the field of services to address youth homelessness due to the findings by Gharabaghi and Stuart (2010) and Brooks et al. (2004) showing that youth favor smaller and more informal providers and are more likely to seek help there than with larger "mainstream" providers.

These larger organizations with data-tracking capacity are also more likely to be highly professionalized organizations that take a data-driven decision-making approach to service delivery, as opposed to organizations that adopt relational, cultural, or empowerment-based decision-making. Thus, a focus on performance measurement in effect prioritizes results—specifically easily-measurable short-term results—over process, resulting in a mismatch between

what is measured and what matters most to frontline workers (Benjamin, 2012) and youth experiencing homelessness (Selsnick et al., 2009).

Finally, by advantaging organizations with large capacity and data-driven decision-making frameworks, this system ends up undermining the very diversity it seeks to promote. If the only organizations likely to be successful in this competitive environment are large and professionalized, there is less room for a diverse range of organizations that can respond to unmet needs and take innovative approaches to service delivery to meet the diverse needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

If small, relational, process-oriented programs are already at a disadvantage in any system based on performance measures, the problem is made worse for organizations serving homeless youth by the fact that HUD-defined measures are a poor fit for youth-serving homelessness programs. These measures are outlined in the Project Ranking Tool[7] (HUD, 2017b), and they are based on four main outcomes that are used to compare all programs: length of stay (better if lower), exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, and increases in income. These are reflective of HUD's System Performance Measures introduced in the first section of this chapter. The use of the same measures in the Project Ranking Tool illustrate how system performance gets translated into program performance and can result in the appearance of ineffectiveness.

In terms of length of stay, given the relational nature of programs for youth experiencing homelessness, a quick exit from the program may not necessarily be a good thing. In fact, Prock and Kennedy (2020) integrate findings from Dowling et al (2004), Nolan (2006), and Pierce,

7 CoCs are not required to use these ranking criteria and may choose to alter them or adopt different guidelines. For example, the CoC for the city of Chicago cites local evaluation tools and their own program-specific outcome measures in their notification of their rankings for their 2017 application (Allchicago, 2017).

Grady, and Holtzen (2018) to argue that "the single greatest predictor of success (i.e., improvement in outcome of interest from admission to discharge) was time in the program; the longer the youth remained in the TLP, the more likely they were to improve their mental health, education, or employment." (p. 2). This association has not been demonstrated to be causal based on the evidence provided, and the relationship between length of stay and positive outcomes could be due to confounding characteristics of those participants. That said, program-level characteristics can also be predictive of length of stay, with youth staying longer in programs that provide greater flexibility and more "second chances," as is recommended by Samuels et al. (2019) to be responsive to the histories of trauma and instability reported in this population. If it is possible that programs can extend length of stay above and beyond youth characteristics, rewarding short length of stay within the Project Ranking Tool may inadvertently prioritize less effective programs for youth experiencing homelessness.

For program exits and returns to homelessness, youth experiencing homelessness may be at a distinct disadvantage for developmental reasons, including lower levels of impulse control and more immature decision-making skills (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter & Karnik, 2012). As the pre-frontal cortex continues to develop into early adulthood, lower levels of executive functioning are associated with higher risk behaviors, in adolescents generally and in the youth experiencing homelessness population specifically (Piche, Kaylegian, Smith & Hunter, 2018). For example, a younger individual with poor impulse control may be more inclined to exit the program without having permanent housing lined up, or they may take an ill-advised chance on reuniting with family only to end up homeless again a few months later.

In terms of increases in income, youth experiencing homelessness may also be at a disadvantage. First, youth-targeted programs may place a higher emphasis on education as a

longer-term path to reaching income goals, and they would thus demonstrate poorer performance on immediate increases in income during the person's stay in the program. Second, youth experiencing homelessness face a variety of barriers to employment, including mental health, substance abuse, victimization, transience, and engaging in survival behaviors (Ferguson & Thompson, 2012). While homeless adults also face similar types of barriers to employment, young people are at a disadvantage without prior socialization to work and limited adult role models to support work-related behavior (Ferguson & Thompson, 2012). Taking a longer view in programs for youth experiencing homelessness to develop interest in formal employment and the education and skills needed to obtain it may put these programs at a disadvantage in documenting increases in income. Furthermore, young people are unlikely to have any work history that may qualify them to receive unemployment or disability benefits that older homeless individuals may be more likely to access.

To summarize, youth who are homeless have different needs and challenges and may not measure up on the same outcomes and standards applied to programs targeting other populations. While youth programs may be given a priority as a specifically targeted population in recent years, they also may be at a disadvantage due to the de-prioritization of transitional housing and emphasis on performance goals that youth-targeted programs may be at a disadvantage in meeting. This puts youth programs in a tough position if they are seeking to secure HUD funding through the competitive and data-drive CoC funding process.

Strategic Action Field Theory

This "tough position" as an organization facing an uphill battle seeking resources from a system dominated by existing players is described well by Strategic Action Field (SAF) theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for this research. SAF, put forth by Fligstein and

McAdam (2012), establishes a microfoundation of individual action within the context of larger field structures and accounts for power dynamics at the individual and field levels. Specifically, they describe a nested system of individuals operating within organizations operating in various strategic action fields, from a few staff members implementing a small program to international professional organizations.

A strategic action field exists when mutually identifiable members share a consensus about the rules that govern legitimate action within the field, though they may differ in their evaluation, application, and implementation of those rules. Homelessness services delivered by CoCs are strongly influenced by the rules and priorities that HUD includes in their mandates and incentives, so while agreement is certainly not presumed to exist among actors, there is still a set known rules, standards, and expectations that come from HUD. In fact, disagreement about the validity and impact of HUD-driven priorities was found to be a point of potential discord and a strain on effective collaboration by Mosley (2021). Therefore, while disagreement about the appropriateness of the rules exists, there are still a recognized set of rules that govern this field.

SAF has been utilized in studies across a wide range of domains, including in the public and nonprofit sectors. For example, Taylor, Barringer, and Warshaw (2018) explore the strategic partnerships between universities and university-boosting nonprofits, and Anasti (2020) explores strategic framing and authority in the sex work/sex trafficking field. Moulton and Sandfort (2017) have argued that SAFs are an appropriate framework for examining policy implementation. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) posit that actors within SAFs seek to challenge power structures and existing rules and allocation of resources, setting up tension between incumbents who have made the rules and challengers who seek to change them. In this research, incumbency is conceptualized as a status within an SAF that is associated with having

demonstrated capacity to meet expectations in the past and presumed trustworthiness with additional resources. Challengers are organizations that have not received funding in the past but are seeking to win access to resources.

Moulton and Sandfort (2017) describe how actors draw on various sources of authority to justify why an issue or policy should be interpreted in a particular way. One study, following Moulton and Sandfort's conceptual framework, argues that actors in SAFs utilize their credibility to influence the implementation of agricultural policy in China (Fan, Zhang, & Li, 2020). One form of authority conceptualized in this research is an organization's credibility with the specialized population of youth experiencing homelessness.

Other work has also begun to build on Moulton and Sandfort's application of SAF to policy implementation, but its application to the homelessness services sector has not yet been explored. One article that touches on similar themes is by Garrow and Hasenfeld (2016) exploring the power dynamics of professionals within a permanent supportive housing program. They argue that a power relations perspective within the homeless services context lends insight into the relative power and authority between social workers and property managers. In their in-depth case study of a permanent supportive housing program, they find that property managers that prioritized the organization's financial interests relating to private investors and HUD wielded greater power in decision-making about the eviction of clients who exhibited substance misuse, mental health, or other behavior problems along with failure to pay rent. Although social workers favored a more supportive clinical approach to addressing client behaviors, including nonpayment of rent, the organization ultimately prioritized the interests of those that held financial power over them—private investors and HUD. Based on these results, it could be that the credibility of organizations in terms of substantive expertise such as in addressing youth

homelessness could be de-prioritized against an organization's perceived capacity to deliver in terms of organizational performance, which would be conferred with incumbency.

CoCs represent a relatively formalized SAF, in which there are numerous predetermined rules, room for interpretation in the implementation of those rules, and an annual system that explicitly ranks members in ways that determine who gets access to the resource of HUD funding. The specific kinds of actions and influence that go into the complex process of policy implementation, namely the creation and reformation of "rules" that bound the players in individual CoC networks and fields, is beyond the scope of this research. However, SAF theory focuses on both rules and *resources*. While the exact nature of the "rules" and the strategic approaches of actors seeking to change these "rules," cannot be determined in this study, this research will bring insights from SAF to help understand trends and end-results observed in the form of resources.

This research specifically uses the concepts of incumbency and credibility to understand what forces are shaping the composition of organizations that receive HUD CoC funding to address youth homelessness. Although the literature reviewed here indicates that smaller, youth-specific programs could be best positioned to engage and retain youth experiencing homelessness in their programs, lending them credibility, it could be that a stronger driver of which organizations receive funding is incumbency within the field and a history of successful management of funds in the past.

Summary

The literature reviewed here provides the background and context that underlies this dissertation. The service needs of youth are complex and distinct, necessitating specialized services, and funding for these services is limited. As a result, service providers that address

youth homelessness that choose to seek HUD CoC funding to support their programs face a complex policy field environment where they must compete for funding against providers in the larger homeless services field. At the same time, they must demonstrate their alignment with HUD's priorities and performance demands in order to achieve high rankings in the competitive process, and they are likely to be disadvantaged in achieving comparable service outcomes due to the specialized service needs of youth experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the organizations that may be in the best position to reach and engage this vulnerable population—small, informal, niche service providers—may be most disadvantaged in the competitive funding process due to the system's reliance on performance measurement as an accountability system. Seeking HUD CoC funding could be challenging, given the population's particular developmental stage and associated service needs, and therefore this field lends itself to SAF theory to understand the end-results of which organizations receive funding and which do not.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into six chapters, and this first chapter has provided the literature review to serve as the underlying basis for all subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2, I describe the methodology of data compilation and integration to create the empirical basis of my analyses. In Chapter 3, I answer the descriptive question of how much McKinney-Vento money HUD spends on programs to address youth homelessness through the CoC funding program and explore what CoC characteristics are associated with greater investment in youth homelessness. I specifically examine how the HYDP has influenced overall and non-HYDP spending on youth homelessness and track how investment is changing over time within the policy context described in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, I explore the composition of the youth homelessness service provider field while drawing on insights from Strategic Action Field theory around incumbency and credibility and how those factors are associated with receiving CoC funding for youth programs. I have made the argument in this chapter that youth experiencing homelessness are best served by youth-targeted programs, and Chapter 4 explores whether the types of organization being funded to deliver these programs have credibility as youth providers. Ultimately, I argue that the data-driven competitive process used by HUD to allocate CoC funds disadvantages providers of youth homeless services.

In Chapter 5 I broaden that argument to examine the emphasis on data in CoC processes overall. There, I critically examine the utility of the CoC funding process and performance measurement accountability mechanisms in addressing youth homelessness. Finally in Chapter 6, I integrate findings across the three analytic chapters into a discussion of implications, policy and practice recommendations, and the limitations of this research.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter describes the processes of data gathering, compiling, and integrating that have been undertaken to form the data used for analysis in this dissertation. I describe the publicly available data sources from HUD, issues encountered regarding data quality and data matching, and retrieval processes for organization-level data using IRS Form 990 data using Guidestar.org. This chapter focuses on the overarching data compilation process. Details regarding operationalization of specific variables, sources of supplemental data from additional projects, and analytic approaches will be provided in each relevant analytic chapter.

The primary basis of the longitudinal data analyzed in this dissertation is administrative data made publicly available by HUD. There are a few key sources of this information: Homeless Inventory Counts (HIC), awards data, and Point in Time (PIT) counts provide the major sources of variables for data at the project and CoC levels. Once the HIC data were used to identify programs that were youth-targeted, a secondary data collection process was undertaken using Guidestar.org.

HIC Data and Identifying Youth-Targeted Programs

The first dataset used was the HIC data. These data are available in an Excel spreadsheet on the HUD Exchange website (HUD, 2021a). The raw data files I downloaded include program-level data for all CoCs from 2007 to 2018. The primary purpose of this data is to provide an accounting of how many beds of various types for various populations are available to service users with each CoC. These data include the CoC, organization and program names, target population, program type (emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing, or rapid rehousing), the total number of beds available in the program by household type (households with children, households without children, and households with only children, which would later generally be referred to as unaccompanied youth), and indicator variables as to the sources

of federal funding that each program receives, whether RHY, CoC, or ESG. While analysis dating back to 2007 when the data begins may have been enlightening, the variable tracking the "target population" of each program did not include an option to indicate youth-targeted programs until 2014, which serves as the starting point of the time period covered in this dissertation. These data were used to identify which programs would be considered for the purposes of this project as "youth targeted programs."

To identify "youth targeted programs," I included programs that were ever designated as youth-targeted in three ways. Starting in 2016, programs were asked to report on how many of each of the program's beds were identified as serving specific subpopulations, including youth, veterans, and chronically homeless people. This generated the primary list of programs that serve youth, but I only included those that listed at least half of their beds as being for youth were indicated as being "youth programs." While many programs did indicate a small number of "youth beds," this may have been due to a program setting these beds aside, but it would not indicate that the entire program is targeted to youth. Another likely reason for a small number of beds being identified as "youth beds" would be if those beds happened to be occupied by a young adult at the time of the HIC count. There were relatively few programs that fell close to the 50 percent threshold, with most being clearly identifiable as majority youth or majority non-youth, and the 50 percent cutoff was determined to sort out the few programs that fell somewhere in between.

Because the youth-specific bed counts were not provided until 2016, I also included as "youth targeted" programs that were ever indicated as such in the "target population" variables in the HIC. A third indicator used to identify youth-targeted programs was using a funding variable that tagged recipients of RHY funding. As shown in Table 1, in the vast majority of cases (97

percent), these three indicators agreed—programs that receive RHY funding were designated as having youth as their target population and listed most beds as youth beds.

However, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5, there were inconsistencies across years and variables for many of these programs. When inconsistencies occurred, I reviewed conflicting cases to ensure that most newly included observations were indeed youth programs. I did this by scanning project names, organization names, or finding further information about the program or organization through an internet search. Taking this closer look at programs that changed definitions across variables indicated that excluding programs due to inconsistencies tended to exclude more youth programs than include non-youth programs. Therefore, the youth-targeting variables were inclusive of records that met any of the criteria. The method of determining youth-targeting with any of the three criteria minimized the number of youth-targeted programs that may have been missed using only one of the three criteria.

Given the inconsistencies, however, it is likely that at least a few programs have been mis-identified in either direction—some youth programs being missed and some programs tagged as youth programs incorrectly. Inaccuracies in the data could have been caused by misinterpretations of the HIC instructions or definitions. As these new categories were introduced during the time period, unless those inputting the data were looking very carefully at HUD definitions, varying interpretations of the term "youth" could result in errors. For example, some programs may have indicated themselves as having a target population of "youth" due to their focus on families with children, or young adult programs may not have indicated themselves as "youth targeted" because no one under 18 years old was served in the program. Ultimately, with about 24,000 project-level observations per year, not all can be individually reviewed, and it is necessary to put some faith in those who have prepared and submitted that

data that they are reasonably accurate. After making these final determinations, across the five-year data period from 2014 to 2018, 2,485 youth-targeted programs were identified.

Table 1. Youth Targeted Program Definition Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	>.50 Beds for Youth	Percent in Agreement	Additional Programs Identified
Has at least 50 percent of total beds listed as youth beds	6550		(n/a)
Target Population Youth	2639	96%	100
RHY Funding	4241	98%	78
Total Youth Program Observations	**6728**	97%	
Unduplicated Total Youth Programs	**2,485**		
Unduplicated Total Youth-Serving Organizations	**1109**		

One validity challenge of these data is that it is impossible to know how many additional targeted programs to address youth homelessness are out there but have no relationship with the local CoC. If programs to address youth homelessness are not seeking or receiving HUD funding, they may have little incentive or perhaps even awareness of the inner workings of the adult homeless service system and the mandates associated with pursuing HUD funding. Having no relationship with the CoC would result in exclusion from the HIC data, as would a lack of interest in complying with requests for data from the CoC.

There are two reasons why I believe the number of these hidden programs to be minimal. First, programs that receive RHY funding are expected by FYSB who administers their grants to be involved in the local CoC and to participate in HMIS, so at the very least these programs are sure to have awareness of CoCs. Secondly, CoCs are incentivized to want to identify all programs in their jurisdiction to demonstrate a positive appearance of a comprehensive service network within their community or jurisdiction. Furthermore, with HUD's increased attention to and requirements for more detailed data on youth homelessness in their communities, CoCs

would likely benefit from the involvement and participation of any existing programs that address youth homelessness. Whether those programs are interested in complying with HUD's requests for data in the absence of the dependency relationship created when an organization is a HUD grantee is unknown. However, given the high level of self-reported networking CoCs report, with an average of 4 on a 5-point scale (Jarpe, Mosley, & Smith, 2018), it seems unlikely that there is a substantial population of unidentified organizations.

Nevertheless, there are organizations that will be missing from the denominator, potentially resulting in an over-estimation of the proportion of programs that target youth homelessness that receive HUD CoC funds. However, there is much greater confidence in the determination of the numerator—programs focusing on youth homelessness that do receive funding from HUD since they are necessarily involved with the CoC to access that funding. Since this dissertation focuses primarily on understanding the extent of our federal response to youth homelessness through the competitive and data-driven HUD CoC process, bias in the denominator is of less concern that bias in the numerator to the overall validity of this dissertation's findings.

A second limitations with this source of data and methodology is the emphasis on youth targeted programs that provide beds, primarily in the form of transitional housing and rapid rehousing programs. There are many other important kinds of programs that can and do address youth homelessness and serve the population of youth experiencing homelessness, like case management support, drop-in centers, and street outreach. These programs are omitted from this dissertation due to data availability and because such services are not generally funded through the HUD CoC program. Instead, HUD favors funding programs that provide beds. Only three percent of all HUD CoC funds in 2020 were allocated to programs designated as "Support

Services Only" (HUD, 2021b). The implication of the exclusion of non-bed-providing programs could be an underestimation of the overall scope and scale of our response to youth homelessness, but again it does not significantly bias understanding HUD's role in addressing youth homelessness since they are not an important funder of such programs.

Organizational Data Gathering Using Guidestar.org

Once youth-targeted programs were identified, the second step in the process was to gather organization-level information for each of the organizations that were identified as administering programs that target youth homelessness, totaling 1109 organizations as shown in Table 1. Using the criteria described above to identify programs, I then collapsed these records by year and by organization to create a list of organizations and programs to search for nonprofit data. Although nonprofits are exempt from paying most taxes as a result of their nonprofit status, most nonprofits are still required by the IRS to file a Form 990 disclosing financial data on assets, spending, income, donations, and compensation, among other things. These forms are then made publicly available and searchable on Guidestar.org. Guidestar is a nonprofit organization that hosts a database of all nonprofits that file Form 990s and their IRS data in the interest of helping donors find information and make informed decisions about the organizations to which they are considering donating funds. They provide several additional products and services utilizing their database as well.

Once I identified each organization's record on Guidestar.org, I copied and pasted the items that Guidestar makes available for each organizational profile, including annual expenditures, total assets, IRS nonprofit status ruling year, mission, NTEE code (or codes), address, and keywords, into an Excel spreadsheet. The vast majority of all identified organizations were nonprofits for which records were able to be copied, totaling 86 percent of all

organizations that manage at least one youth program. The remaining 14 percent did not have data on Guidestar. Organizations without Guidestar data included 86 public entities such as housing authorities, and state and local governments, 63 religious organizations that are not required to file IRS Form 990s even though they are nonprofits, and 2 for-profit organizations. As a result, Chapter 4 analyses that required organization-level financial data excluded government, religious, and for-profit organizations and findings were interpreted as only applying to the secular nonprofit organizations.

HIC and Awards Data Matching

The next step in the data compilation process was to combine the HIC data with the CoC Awards data. CoC Awards data were also publicly available on hudexchange.info, but they were exported to Excel from a database that lists all awards (HUD, 2021c) This data includes a smaller set of variables including the CoC, organization name, program name, and award amount. I had naively assumed that HUD Awards data would contain the same or even similar program and organization names to those listed in the HIC data. However, these data proved difficult to merge, with less than 20 percent of programs being matched on either organization or program name alone, and fuzzy matching programming provided little further help. As a result, I undertook a hand-matching process focusing on 2465 program-year observations that were both 1) listed as having youth-targeted programs identified in from the HIC data and 2) indicated as having received CoC funds. I did this by cross-referencing the lists of award recipients and HIC programs, primarily by searching for HIC programs in the Awards database. For each record, I examined program and organization names, which were sometimes reversed in the data. When no awards were located for an HIC record, I also utilized internet searches to identify programs that may have changed names or for records that were identified with ambiguous names. There

were numerous cases where one organization had been acquired by another resulting in a change to the organization name listed on the award but retaining the original organization name in the HIC data. I cleaned out and updated some organizational ids as needed in that case, but I kept the record otherwise intact since it was clear that the program itself was still being funded even if under a different organizational name.

This hand-matching process produced paired records for most of the youth-targeted programs identified in the HIC data as receiving a CoC award, as shown in Table 2. A few CoCs did not always list all awards out with the level of detail down to organization and program names. A few organizations and programs had absolutely no identifiable web presence in their service area and were probably operating under a different name, but they were unable to be identified. In total, of 2465 total program-year records that were indicated as youth programs and were indicated as receiving CoC funds in the HIC data, 2081 were matched with a CoC award for a fully matched rate of 84 percent.

Table 2. Merged HIC and CoC Award Data: Matched and Missing Observations

Data Missingness	Observations	Percent of Expected Total
Fully Matched Observations	2081	84%
Presumed Zero Unmatched	178	7%
Unknown Unmatched	206	8%
Total Expected Matched Observations	2465	
Added Award-Only Observations	175	7%
Total Youth Award Observations	**2640**	

An additional 178 records (7 percent of the total) were "partially matched" and presumed to be zero. The values themselves are assigned as missing in the data, but in the matching process it appeared for these records that they were once CoC funded but had lost funding prior to the beginning of the data window. These programs had a history of CoC funding, which may

explain why they were tagged as having received CoC funds in the HIC data, but records of funding at some point stopped appearing. Records were only coded as "presumed zero" when there were no changes to naming conventions in other records and no new records listed as "consolidated." The "presumed zero" code is helpful in mitigating concerns about systematic bias in the data that could be underestimating CoC's investment in youth programming. The most likely explanation for these records is that funding was lost, so this proportion of missing data is not believed to contribute to bias.

The remaining 206 fully unmatched records (8 percent of expected records) could introduce bias into the data, but I believe the observations are being substantially offset by additional observations as I explain below. The fully unmatched records were deemed to be unmatched when there was a lack of awards data information to match on, such as when changes to naming conventions occurred or consolidated grants appeared that may have been linked to the record. While lacking a matched award could lead to underestimation of overall youth-targeted awards, there were an additional 175 records that appeared in the awards data with labels including, "youth," "teen," "young adult" or "TAY" standing for "transition aged youth." These records were unable to be matched with an HIC project, but they were presumed to be youth awards and were counted in total estimates of CoC investment in youth programs. Because the number of records in each of these categories are comparable (206 unmatched, 175 award-only), the bias introduced by either cancels the other out, increasing overall confidence in the accuracy of total estimates of investment in youth homelessness by HUD and CoCs. Missing records revealed no systematic differences across the years of data with Chi Square test of independence between year and missing data tags yielding a nonsignificant p-value of 0.61.

Point In Time (PIT) Data and Validity Issues

The last large HUD data file to be compiled was the annual PIT count data. These data files were also made available by HUD (2021a) and downloaded in Excel spreadsheets from the hudexchange.info website. Each year file contained detailed accounts of the numbers of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness, also broken down by special populations such as veterans, families, and those experiencing chronic homelessness. While data collected during the 2014-2017 time period always delineated age in the homeless counts, in 2016 they began also distinguishing whether youth were "unaccompanied." This change then differentiated between teens and young adults that were part of families that were seeking assistance from those that are on their own. Variables using both designations in 2016 and after did not yield significant differences, so a 2014 age-based measure was selected to ensure that data was represented across all 5 years in the study time period.

It is important to note that PIT counts do come with some serious methodological limitations. It has long been acknowledged that there are inaccuracies in the annual Point in Time count numbers (Schneider, Brisson, & Burns, 2016), particularly for obtaining counts of youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2017). In a comparative case study of three metropolitan areas' PIT count processes, Schneider, Brisson, and Burns (2016) find variation in both the methods and the rigor of the three CoCs' approaches. Different methods lead to different counts, and overall reliability across CoCs is unknown. Nevertheless, HUD utilizes these numbers in conjunction with other factors in formulae to determine the allocation of funding for homeless services across the country. Despite limitations in measuring youth homelessness across CoCs, comparing counts of homeless youth year to year within a CoC is

likely to be more reliable since the same methodology is generally used year after year. Limitations and inconsistencies in these data will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Additional Data Sources

Additional CoC-level data came from a few other spreadsheets that were downloaded from the hudexchange.info website to identify additional variables. This includes the annual System Performance Measures (SMP) aggregated for each CoC by year since 2015 (HUD, 2021d). I also merged in the award amount data for each CoC that received YHDP funding for the first two rounds, which awarded funds for 2017 and 2018. Another source of some regional characteristics such as poverty rate, were gathered from a HUD tool used to understand differences to the formula that determines that "Preliminary Pro Rata Need" (PPRN). An Excel spreadsheet posted all the source variables that go into HUD's calculation of the PPRN (HUD, 2016c), including housing costs, population, median income, among many others. Therefore, these variables are only available at a single point in time. That said, these characteristics tend to be relatively stable across years, so multiyear data on these is not critical to understanding relevant interrelationships between variables.

Taken together, these data create a five-year longitudinal multilevel nested dataset. The most detailed data is at the program-year level. The next level up is the organization-year level. While award amounts can be aggregated for all programs in an organization within a given year, most organizational characteristic variables have only one year of observation. Finally, there is the CoC-year level. Most of these data are available for each year, with the exception of some jurisdictional demographic and housing information. Having so many variables at multiple timepoints and multiple levels offers many options for analysis.

Data analysis in this study primarily uses multilevel modeling (MLM), carried out in STATA 16 following methods described in *Multilevel Analysis* by Snijders and Bosker (2011). This approach ensures that program-level, organization-level, and CoC-level clustering is controlled for or investigated, depending on the research question. To support MLM models, all variables have been mean-centered and many have also been log transformed due to overdispersion in the data. Further details on the analytic approach are included in each chapter.

A last source of data in this dissertation is secondary data analysis from another CoC-related project, where I helped to collect the data (PI: Jennifer Mosley). Data from the study's national survey of CoC's is utilized in Chapter 3, and qualitative analysis of interviews with CoC stakeholders utilized in Chapter 5. More details on these sources of data will be discussed in those chapters as well.

HUD appears to take the prioritization of data-driven decision-making seriously. With all this data made publicly available, there is great potential offered to CoCs to conduct benchmarking analysis with peer CoCs. However, by failing to integrate these data with one another, the data's utility for research purposes is limited in the absence of the intensive compilation work completed here. This dissertation seeks to address the gap in research knowledge by exploring how data from these multiple sources interrelate to one another to discover both descriptive and inferential trends and relationships during the study period.

Chapter 3. HUD-CoC Funding for Youth-Targeted Programs

The analyses presented in this chapter fulfill two main purposes. First, they describe the progression of HUD's investment in programs for homeless youth in CoCs across the country. Second, they explore the impact of HUD's policy changes on the progression of youth funding across CoCs and the CoC characteristics that are associated with investment in youth programs. In this chapter, I will briefly review the motivation behind these analyses, describe the methods used to conduct them, present findings, and discuss their implications.

The first purpose in conducting theses analyses is to establish how many CoCs are investing in programs for homeless youth, how extensive this investment is, and how it has been changing over time. There has been increased attention to the issue of youth homelessness, both in the larger public conversation and in HUD, as exemplified by the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) initiated by HUD in 2016 (HUD, 2019a). While the YHDP represents a significant investment and continues to expand (HUD, 2021e), we do not know the extent of HUD CoC funding for youth programs prior to the YHDP, the amount of HUD CoC funding for youth programs in communities that have not received YHDP funds, and the impact of YHDP on HUD CoC funds for youth programs overall. This information is important for benchmarking future progress on funding for homeless youth overall and within CoCs as well as for assessing how well U.S. policy is addressing the social problem of youth homelessness.

While the emergence of YHDP demonstrates HUD's acknowledgement that more needs to be done to address youth homelessness, the HUD CoC program is not the only federal funding available to address this social problem. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), first authorized in 1974, provides funding for three youth housing programs. It funds emergency youth shelters, which provide temporary shelter (up to 21 days) for youth ages 12 to 17,

operating under grant program known as “Basic Center”, and transitional housing for up to 18 months for youth ages 16 to 22, operating as either a “Transitional Living Program” (TLP) for individual young people or a “Maternity Group Home” (MGH) for young mothers and their children. The existence of these programs may lessen the responsibility CoCs take to address youth homelessness. They could also contribute to a perception that programs receiving no federal funding of any kind should be prioritized over those for homeless youth that could be eligible to receive RHYA funding. However, RHYA grants are both competitive and limited. According to a 2018 report to congress regarding fiscal years 2014 and 2015 (FYSB), the most recent available, TLP awards were granted to only 200 programs across the country in 2015, with an award of around $250,000 per program per year. Basic Center awards were granted to 296 programs with awards around $200,000 per program per year. While this funding, totaling $97 million dollars in 2015, makes an important contribution in addressing youth homelessness, it is dwarfed by the much more expansive $2.2 billion dollars that came through HUD CoC funding in 2018. Due to the limited availability of funding under RHYA, it is also important to examine the role of CoCs in addressing this problem as well.

The second purpose of this chapter is to understand what CoC characteristics are associated with funding for homeless youth programs. Specifically, I will examine what factors are associated with the likelihood that a CoC will fund any youth programs, and what factors are associated with growth in funding for youth programs. Intuitively, it makes sense that larger communities like urban areas would have distinct advantages in funding programs for homeless youth: enough demand for specialized programming, enough service providers to meet specialized needs, and enough funding overall to have room to fund specialized services. That said, prior research shows that youth homelessness is a social problem in rural as well as urban

areas (Morton et al, 2018), and it is important to know how extensively non-urban areas are investing in addressing youth homelessness. These analyses will test whether size and urbanity are important factors in determining whether a CoC funds programs for homeless youth, and where gaps in funding may be more likely to occur.

Because of the nature of CoCs, in which individual localities are empowered to determine what programs to fund, even if those choices are incentivized in various ways by HUD, there is bound to be variation across CoCs in terms of how they respond to youth homelessness. If we care as a society about tackling the problem of youth homelessness, then we need to understand the full measure of our response to it, not just in terms of specialized programs like RHYA and YHDP, but also within our primary funding mechanism to address homelessness, the CoC program. Knowing this information could help encourage CoCs that are not currently funding programs for homeless youth to do so and determine which CoCs are at greater risk of underfunding homeless youth programs compared to their peers so they can make adjustments accordingly.

Methods

Data examined in the following analyses come from several sources, most of which are data that HUD makes accessible to the public online. However, these data are siloed in separate reports, making it impossible to see the full picture in any one source published by HUD. A complete accounting of data sources, matching, and merging processes is provided in Chapter 2: Methodology. Here I will outline the specific variables I created for these analyses.

The primary data that is used to determine whether a program is a "youth-targeted" program is the Homeless Inventory Count (HIC) data. These data are published by HUD on an annual basis and include listings of all homeless programs that have provided services in the

form of beds, which may be permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, temporary/overflow, or other designations. These beds are then identified if they are targeted to a particular population, including chronically homeless, veterans, and youth. In these data, youth are defined as those 13 to 24, and these groups are broken down between ages 13-17 and 18-24. One challenge with using the HIC data across this time period is that the designation of a bed as being for "youth" has changed. In 2014 and 2015, those reporting submitted a "youth targeting" indicator at the program level, followed by an age-group. Then from 2016 to 2018, those reporting were asked to break down each program's beds into separate counts for how many beds fall into each designation—youth, chronically homeless, or veteran. This resulted in many programs having a partial designation for youth. Therefore, programs were identified as "youth targeted" when at least 50 percent of all program beds were identified as "youth beds" from 2016-2018, or by having the "youth-targeted" designation in 2014-2015. In these longitudinal analyses by CoC, each project is considered to be youth targeted according to its designation by at least one criterion in that year.

The second key sources of data for determining the investment in youth programs were published by HUD as awards data, which is annually released at the project level and parses out data by CoC and project. Unfortunately, these data rarely contain any identifiers in common with projects listed in the HIC data, outside of sometimes sharing the same program or organization name, which in turn may have been combined or parsed differently between datasets. Thus, youth programs as identified in the HIC data were hand-matched to award data as much as possible, according to procedures described more fully in Chapter 2. Total CoC awards were aggregated at the CoC-year level. Total youth awards were aggregated at the CoC level by summing the award amounts for youth programs identified as described as above.

Data on YHDP awards were available from HUD at the CoC-level reflecting amounts awarded to CoCs through the YHDP in year 2017-2018. In descriptive statistics reported in the next section, total awards per CoC are designated as either including or not including YHDP funds. Where YHDP funds are included, CoC totals reflect combined amounts for the 10 CoCs that received YHDP funds starting in 2017 and the 11 additional CoCs that began receiving YHDP funds in 2018, and the simple total amount for the rest of the CoCs. Where YHDP data are indicated as being excluded, data from the 22 CoCs that received any YHDP funds have been treated as missing in calculations of means or totals in the years when they received YHDP awards. This was done to isolate the trends in CoC funding outside of the YHDP program, and exclusion from means will ensure that calculations are not inflated by the additional funding from YHDP.

Additional control variables came from various sources. First, the total number of homeless youth came from the annual PIT counts published by HUD. How youth are counted in the PIT data also changed during the data collection period, by asking those reporting to identify "unaccompanied" youth as separate from those presenting for services as members of families. Since this designation was not available for the earlier years of my data, I used a method constant across all years that summed the total counts of sheltered and unsheltered youth from ages 13 to 17 and 18 to 24, and these did not differ significantly from later numbers that provided separate counts for "unaccompanied" youth. Second, the poverty rate was taken from a HUD-published tool that was designed to help CoCs understand the calculation of the Preliminary Pro Rata Need

(PPRN)[1] amount for their CoC. It is only available for the year 2015 and is therefore included in models as a CoC-level variable rather than a variable across years. Finally, a variable identifying a CoC as being in an urban area was taken from a survey of CoCs conducted in 2015 (Jarpe, Mosley, & Smith, 2019) and is also a CoC-level variable held constant for each CoC across all years.

Measures

For these analyses, I have conceptualized a CoC's investment in youth programming with two dependent variables. The first is "Any Youth Funding" which is a binary outcome variable coded as 1 when the CoC funds any youth programs, including receiving YHDP funds, and 0 if no youth funds are identified in that CoC. The second is the percent of funds that are going to youth programs, which was calculated by diving the total CoC award by the total amount of funds going towards youth programs.

The independent variables at the CoC-year level are the CoC's award amount and the count of homeless youth in the CoC from the annual PIT count. Both of these variables are log-transformed and mean-centered. The independent variables at the CoC level are the poverty rate and an indicator of whether the CoC is in an urban area. Finally, year is used as an independent variable in the multilevel models to determine how funding is changing over time, and it has been adjusted to reflect the year relative to the datapoints position within the dataset time frame ranging from 1 to 5.

1 PPRN cannot be used as a proxy for community needs within the CoCs because it is so closely tied with CoC award amount resulting in multicollinearity.

Models

The analytical approach was to first provide descriptive statistics examining the trends in investment in youth programs over time, both with and without YHDP funding. The next step was to use regression models to predict what CoC factors are associated with CoC investment in youth services in a given year. A logistic regression was used to predict whether a CoC will fund any youth programs in the year 2016 (the median year in the dataset), using the following regression equation:

Model 1: $\text{AnyYouthFunding} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CocAward} + \beta_2\text{HomelessYouthCount} + \beta_3\text{CoCPovertyRate} + \beta_4\text{UrbanCoC} + \varepsilon$

Whether a CoC received any funding for a youth program in 2016 is predicted by the CoC's award, the count of homeless youth, the CoC's poverty rate, and whether it is an Urban CoC. The next model examines how the variable of whether a youth program is funded varies over time. To do this, I conducted a mixed effects multi-level logistic regression including the year and adding the poverty rate and urban variables at the CoC level where they have been measured, using the following equation:

Model 2: $\text{AnyYouthFunding}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CocAward} + \beta_2\text{HomelessYouthCount} + \beta_3\text{Year} + \beta_4\text{CoCPovertyRate} + \beta_5\text{UrbanCoC} + \nu_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Any youth funding in year i for CoC j is predicted by the CoC Award in year i, the homeless youth count in year i, the year i, at the CoC-year level, and by the CoC's poverty rate and whether it is an urban CoC at the CoC level.

Next, a Poisson regression was used to predict what factors are associated with what percent of a CoC's total funds going towards youth programs in 2016. Poisson regression was

selected due to the skewed distribution of the dependent variable, and it was transformed to reflect an integer rather than a percent, as appropriate for this model.

Model 3: $PercentYouthFunding = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CocAward + \beta_2 HomelessYouthCount + \beta_3 CoCPovertyRate + \beta_4 UrbanCoC + \varepsilon$

For the mixed effects Poisson model:

Model 4: $PercentYouthFunding_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CocAward + \beta_2 HomelessYouthCount + \beta_3 Year + \beta_4 CoCPovertyRate + \beta_5 UrbanCoC + \nu_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Due to over-dispersion in the data, the CoC award, number of homeless youth, and number of non-youth beds were log transformed, and all independent variables were mean-centered for use in a multi-level model (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). These mixed effects models will predict fixed effects at the CoC-year level with a random intercept at the CoC level, controlling for clustering by CoC.

Results

When YHDP funding is included, the total amount of funding for youth programs has nearly doubled from 2014 to 2018, from $63.2M in 2014 to $127M in 2018, representing an overall proportion of funding for the time period of 4.5 percent of all CoC funding going toward youth-targeted programs, which has also increased over time, as shown in Table 3. However, when CoCs that received YHDP are excluded, the proportion of overall CoC funding that goes to youth programs shows a slight decline from a peak of 4 percent in 2016 down to 3.8 percent in 2018. However, investment in youth programming is not evenly distributed across CoCs. The mean proportion of funding by CoC per year is lower than the total proportion, at about 3

percent. This indicates that a smaller number of CoCs are spending more on youth programs compared to others, resulting in a higher total proportion and lower mean proportion by CoC.

Table 3. Total and Proportional CoC Funding for Youth Programs Over Time

Year	Total Youth Awards (in Millions)		Percent Change in Youth Funding		Total CoC Awards (in Millions)		Percent Change in Total Funding		Proportion	
2014	63.2		-		1810.6		-		3.5%	
2015	70.7		12%		1939.8		7%		3.6%	
2016	78.9		12%		1957.3		1%		4.0%	
	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP
2017	78.2	112.7	-1%	43%	2019.7	2054.2	3%	5%	3.9%	5.5%
2018	80.5	127.0	3%	13%	2152.6	2199.1	7%	7%	3.7%	5.8%
Total	**371.5**	**452.5**			**9879.9**	**9960.9**			**3.8%**	**4.5%**

In addition to growth in the overall amount of funding going towards youth program, the number of youth-targeted programs is also on the rise, increasing from 1099 in 2014 to 1656 in 2018, as shown in Table 3, and most CoCs (over 75 percent since 2016) have at least one youth-targeted program. Youth programs have also grown as a proportion of all programs from 4.8 percent of all programs in 2014 to 6.7 percent of all programs in 2018. This increase in proportion reflects greater growth in the number of youth-targeted programs included in the data than non-youth targeted programs, and growth in funding for youth programs has also outpaced growth in CoC funding overall, also shown in Table 3.

Despite this growth trend, the number of CoCs that fund at least one youth-targeted program was less than 40 percent in 2018, even when YHDP funds were included. In addition, the number of youth-targeted programs that receive HUD CoC funding has not significantly changed, and in fact, the proportion of all youth programs that receive HUD CoC funding is on a downward trend, even when YHDP funds are included, as shown in Table 4. This table also shows that youth-targeted programs are funded at a lower rate than other kinds of programs at an average rate of 26.1 percent (including YHDP) compared to an average funding rate of 32.5 percent for non-youth programs, and when compared using a t-test, these means are significantly different at $p<.001$. While reduction in the proportion of projects that are funded is in alignment with an overall trend of lower proportions of programs being funded across the time period regardless of youth-targeting, and YHDP funding has decreased the disparity between funding for youth-targeted and non-youth programs, youth-targeted programs are still receiving CoC funding at a lower rate than non-youth programs.

Table 4. Changes in Proportion of Youth Programs that Receive Funding Over Time

Year	Total Youth Programs	Total Coc-Funded Youth Programs		Proportion of all Youth Programs that are CoC Funded		Proportion of Non-Youth Programs that are CoC-Funded
2014	1099	305		27.8%		37.8%
2015	1262	326		25.8%		33.9%
2016	1496	369		24.7%		32.3%
		w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	w/o YHDP	w/ YHDP	
2017	1592	349	430	21.9%	27.0%	30.5%
2018	1656	324	415	19.6%	25.1%	27.8%
Mean	**1421**	**335**	**369**	**23.9%**	**26.1%***	**32.5%***

***T-test for mean differences is significant at p<.001

Regression outputs are presented in Table 5 and show that a CoC's overall investment in funding for youth programs, including YHDP funds, is greater when CoCs have a larger award size overall and count more homeless youth, and these relationships are statistically significant in the multiyear models as well. The single year models indicated that in 2016, CoCs with higher poverty rates are less likely to fund or have a large proportion of funding go towards youth programs. In the multi-level models that examine changes over the time period, there is evidence that investment is increasing over time, with year being a significant predictor of both the likelihood of funding a youth program and to have a greater proportion of funding go towards youth programming, controlling for other factors.

CoC award size is a particularly strong driver of results in the single year and multilevel models. For a one-logit increase in CoC award above the mean, a CoC is twice as likely to fund at least one youth program in the single year model controlling for homeless youth count, poverty rate and urbanity. In the multilevel model, a one-logit increase in CoC award above the mean, a CoC is 30 times more likely to fund at least one youth program, controlling for homeless

youth count, year, poverty rate, urbanity, and clustering across CoCs. The large contribution that CoC award size makes to explaining investment in youth programming could explain why the poverty rate and urbanity variables are not significant in the multilevel model. Since poverty rate and urbanity are CoC-level factors, no test of significance is available, but the variance attributable to either variable is so small that they do not contribute explanatory power to the model, as indicated by nonsignificant likelihood ratio tests between models. Therefore, the finding that poverty rate reduces the likelihood and proportion of youth funding must be interpreted with caution, since it is not robust by remaining significant in the longitudinal model. This is also surprising because of the high interclass correlation (ICC) for the mixed logistic regression model is around 90 percent, indicating that most of the variation occurs between rather than within CoCs, making it more likely that CoC-level variables would produce significant results.

Table 5. Regression Results for Models Predicting CoC Investment in Youth Programming

	Model 1: CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program In 2016			Model 2: CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program 2014-2018			Model 3: Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs In 2016			Model 4: Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs 2014-2018		
Independent Variables	OR	SE	p	OR	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
CoC-Year Variables												
CoC Award	2.1	.37	.00	30	16	.00	-.05	.04	.13	.50	.10	.00
Homeless Youth Count	1.6	.29	.01	2.1	.23	.00	.29	.04	.00	.33	.06	.00
Year		n/a		1.3	.11	.00		n/a		.08	.01	.00
CoC-Level Variables												
Poverty Rate	.00	.00	.01	>0	>0	n/a	-4.9	.83	.00	>0	>0	n/a
Urban CoC	2.8	.97	.00	>0	>0	n/a	.64	.08	.00	>0	>0	n/a
	N=290 Pseudo R2=.27			N=1446 observations N=290 CoCs ICC=.91			N=290 CoCs Pseudo R2=.07			N=1426 observations N=290 CoCs		

NOTE—all variables include YHDP funding; All models are significant at p<.001

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the broad trends in CoC funding for youth programs. One positive highlight is that most CoCs, over 75 percent in 2018, do have at least one youth-targeted program involved in the CoC. However, while most CoCs *have* programs for homeless youth, reflecting some form of a community response to the issue, fewer than half of CoCs *fund* programs for homeless youth. Nevertheless, the overall picture of funding for youth programs has dramatically improved during this time period, especially with the advent of YHDP funds. While only 21 CoCs out of over 400 CoCs received YHDP funds during this period, it contributed to a doubling of the funding for youth-targeted programs. At the same time, regardless of YHDP, there has been an increase in the number of youth-targeted programs over the time period, and year is a significant predictor of both likelihood of funding a youth-targeted program and the amount of funding that goes towards youth-targeted programs. However, these data also highlight some areas that could be strengthened to improve the funding situation for youth programs.

The first major issue is that youth-targeted programs are disproportionately less likely to receive HUD CoC funding than non-youth programs. This could be due to the issue highlighted above, that CoCs may de-prioritize funding for homeless youth programs since other federal funding for them is available through RHYA funds or other funding may be available through state, local, and community sources. Given the comparatively smaller scope of funds available through RHYA, however, CoC funds for youth programs can significantly bolster the federal funds a homeless youth program receives. CoC awards for youth programs average $211,564, on par with the about $250K awards granted through RHYA, and they can help to cover the cost of

providing services by nearly doubling the amount of federal funds going to these programs with just an average-sized reward.

Regression findings that indicate that CoC size is a powerful predictor of whether and how much a CoC will invest in youth-targeted programming is in alignment with the only study that has previously examined programs for homeless youth at the cross-community level. Esparza (2009) found that the availability of funding was the biggest predictor of whether a community has programming designed for homeless youth, and these findings echo those results with CoCs that receive larger awards also being more likely to invest in programming for homeless youth and invest at higher levels. This finding also points to an area where further research is needed, regarding the influence of the poverty rate on a community's likelihood and levels of funding for youth programs. High-poverty communities face a complex set of social problems with limited resources to be able to tackle them, so meeting the needs of homeless youth whose programs may have access to federal funds elsewhere could be lower on the community's priority list when resources are scarce. That said, this is the exact reason why we have federal programs that allocate funds (at least in part) on the basis of community needs. Research shows that youth from low-income families are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness (Morton et al, 2018; add others), making youth programs all the more vital as poverty in the community goes up. When a community has fewer resources to fund such programs through local government or private donors, it should be CoCs and HUD funding that step in to fill that gap. Further research should seek to better understand how these factors interact and relate to one another.

The last trend that stands out is the influence of YHDP funding on the CoCs that did not receive any YHDP funds. In these data, only 21 CoCs received any YHDP funds, resulting in disparities across CoCs in the proportion of funds going to youth programs. Ideally, an opportunity like the YHDP could result in more attention to youth programs among CoCs, or even a desire to establish a stronger track record of addressing youth homelessness by increasing funding for youth programs. While the differences are slight (and not statistically significant), it is disheartening to see that the proportion of funding going to youth-targeted programs in CoCs that did not receive YHDP funding stagnates and even slightly declines after 2016. Again, why this trend appears in the data cannot be explained with the variables available here, but it does point to a potential exacerbation of inequities across CoCs.

While these data are not able to identify the causal factors that have created the conditions for investment in youth homelessness, such as a vocal youth advocate taking on leadership roles in a volunteer-run CoC or a local news story that highlights the stories and struggles of homeless young people in a particular community, they do reveal a story of increased attention to the issue of youth homelessness in CoCs across the country and increased investment in addressing youth homelessness by HUD, particularly with the advent of the YHDP. While trends are generally moving in a direction that has resulted in a more robust response to youth homelessness, there is still room for additional progress to ensure that youth homeless needs are being met with targeted programming and that HUD funds are accessed by youth programs to help preserve and protect the vital services they provide.

Chapter 4. Organizations Addressing Youth Homelessness

This chapter will move away from looking at variation across CoCs to examining how funding differs for organizations within CoCs. One of the key concerns driving the research questions addressed in this chapter is: what kinds of organizations are providing services that address youth homelessness, and which organizations are getting HUD CoC funding to do so? To answer this question, I will draw on Strategic Action Field theory (SAF) to understand how organizational characteristics play a role in determining which organizations have youth programs and which of those youth programs receive HUD CoC funding. In this chapter, I will review the underlying questions motivating these analyses, review methodology relevant to variables introduced in this chapter, present findings from analyses, and briefly discuss their implications.

One critical factor in determining which organizations receive CoC funding is experience and expertise in navigating the complex and competitive HUD funding process. While many homeless service organizations are small, the introduction of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funds in 1987 has been a game-changer in this field (Mosley, 2012). In developing processes for the nationwide distribution of these funds, HUD has been a leader in incentivizing both collaborative governance and data-driven decision-making. As a result, organizations that have had a long history with the local CoC and those that have already integrated Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) into their operations have gained valuable technical expertise and network connections that put them at an advantage in securing HUD CoC funds for their organizations and their projects. I argue that establishing a pattern of HUD funding is a form of *incumbency* within this field.

My use of the term incumbency draws from Strategic Action Field theory, which posits that fields are comprised of various incumbents and challengers, where incumbents are those to whom power and authority have been conferred, and challengers are those who are vying for resources and influence in the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). It is incumbents who then determine the rules that govern the field and the distribution of resources within it. Competitive CoC funding processes are a good fit for this theory because we can directly observe both the formal rules in the form of HUD policy and the resulting distribution of resources. Organizations that have primarily or historically focused on housing and homelessness services are likely to be the incumbents in this field, with greater likelihood of having established a track record of receiving CoC funds in the past and a greater likelihood of securing funds for programs for homeless youth.

If the incumbents get and keep the resources, it is up to challengers to try to break into the field to influence the rules and try to secure resources. One way that challengers may attempt to do this is to draw on their various forms of authority (Moulton & Sandfort, 2017). One way an organization may demonstrate its authority is by demonstrating its experience and expertise in working with the target population, in this case youth.

As I explore in Chapter 1, effectively tackling youth homelessness requires a different kind of approach from that typically used to address adult homelessness. The underlying reasons for homelessness across the lifespan differ, and therefore the intervention approaches should differ as well. Whereas adult homeless programs may focus on employment and treatment goals for substance abuse and mental health, programs for youth may focus more on education goals, repairing family ties, and identity development. Prior research has found that youth are more

likely to seek services at “informal” providers with more flexible rules (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2010) and those that engage with the population and develop relationships over time (Brooks et al, 2004). Ultimately, the success of these programs depends on the relationships they are able to build with the youth in need of services, and these relationships are what youth have reported make the biggest difference in their lives upon reflection after program completion (Holtschneider, 2016). Based on these findings, I have argued that youth organizations have greater *credibility* with youth and in providing youth services than other kinds of providers. By credibility, I mean that organizations are seen as having adequate expertise in the field to legitimately operate and, for some programs, to receive government funds to support their work. For an organization to have youth credibility, it should have a track record of successful engagement in youth development work.

In the landscape of CoCs, being seen as an organization that is credible for running youth programs is not the same as being seen as credible for running a program to address youth homelessness. An organization may also be seen as credible in running a youth homelessness program based on their expertise in the homeless services field, at least from the perspective of the CoC if not as much from the perspective of youth seeking services. Since programs to address youth homelessness operate at the intersection of two major nonprofit fields (youth services and homeless services), both forms of credibility in these sectors could come into play. In this chapter, I will explore which types of organizations are operating programs to address youth homelessness and whether different kinds of credibility play a role in which organizations receive HUD CoC funding for youth homelessness programs.

Beyond incumbency within the CoC and credibility regarding the target population, there are two additional factors that I explore in this paper: the organization's age and size. Given the potential importance of CoC incumbency described above, it may be quite difficult for a newer organization to break into this field and secure a competitive award, and older organizations are more likely to have developed a strong reputation in the community, making age a potentially important factor in an organization's ability to secure HUD funds. Older organizations likely also have valuable experience securing competitive funds from other sources. As for size, preparing materials to submit an application for CoC funds requires both technical expertise and ample resources to devote to the process, which are both more likely to be available in larger organizations. Having staff, a team, or multiple teams dedicated to grant-writing and data management could give large organizations an advantage in securing HUD CoC funds over smaller organizations.

For the purposes of these analyses, age and size are considered as additional characteristics, separate from population credibility and incumbency within the CoC. However, size and age can confer incumbency and credibility on their own, which is why it is important to include them in these analyses. A large, long-standing youth-serving organization could be practically universally well-known and established within the nonprofit field in a given community, helping to pave the way to access a competitive CoC Award. In the analyses presented here, I have separated these out in regression analyses to determine each characteristic's unique contribution to the likelihood of receiving HUD funding for a youth program.

In this chapter I will explore what kinds of organizations are providing programs that target youth-homelessness, which are receiving HUD CoC funds, and how incumbency within the CoC, credibility with the target population, size, and age impact the likelihood of an organization receiving HUD CoC funds for a youth-targeted program.

Methods

The process for determining which programs are considered youth-targeted was discussed in Chapter 2. In short, Homeless Inventory Count (HIC) data that track the beds available in each CoC were used to identify programs that indicated at least half of their program's beds as being "youth beds" or "youth-targeted beds." In addition, programs that were ever listed as being targeted to youth were considered to be "youth programs." Due to the multi-year nature of the data, some programs went in and out of being listed as "youth" programs along with changes in the way CoCs were asked to record which beds and programs were targeted to youth. Case-by-case examination of programs that changed status identified numerous programs that are indeed youth-targeted. This was confirmed either by program name (ex. Teen Shelter), organization name (ex. XYZ Youth Services), or by web search of the program and organization name and examination of program eligibility criteria where available. As a result, if a program was ever identified in the data as being youth-targeted, all years of data were considered to be "youth programs." Organizations that have at least one youth program are identified as "youth providers." Data were then merged and hand matched to CoC Awards data, and all awards to programs ever determined to be youth programs were considered to be "youth awards."

In aggregating "youth awards" at the organizational level, organizations in CoCs that received YHDP funding (21 total CoCs during the time period) were excluded from these

analyses. Unfortunately, YHDP funding data only reflects the amount of the total award and the CoC to which it was awarded. No project or organization-level data is available, and CoCs may have stopped funding youth-targeted programs when they knew that YHDP funds were coming, which if those projects were included may have appeared to have lost funding, when funding for youth projects in YHDP CoCs was actually sustained or expanded. Since these data are effectively missing from the dataset, they are omitted from analyses that track funding rates.

Once the list of youth programs was created, a database of the organizations in which these programs are housed was created by searching each organization's name using Guidestar.org. Once the Guidestar profile was accessed, information from the organization's IRS Form 990 that is populated either by Guidestar or the organization's voluntary disclosure was gathered, including annual expenditures, assets, ruling year of their tax-exempt status, mission statement, website, National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) code or codes, and keywords. Most Guidestar data were gathered in the fall of 2019 when most organizations' posted IRS Form 990 reflected data from the 2017-2018 fiscal year. When organizations were not locatable on Guidestar, further web searching sought to determine if the program was housed by a government, religious, or for-profit entity and coded as such.

The next step was to use the NTEE codes to determine the organization type, or the basis of their credibility in terms of target population and field. NTEE codes are organized alphabetically by subfield which was helpful as a first attempt to begin organizing the codes. However, 115 different NTEE codes were present among the organizations, across 17 letters of the alphabet. Further complicating things was that the P-category represents "Human Services" including subcategories for both homelessness-serving (for example, P85 "Homeless Centers")

and youth-serving organizations (for example, P76 “Homes for Children and Adolescents.”) To get more specific and manageable, I coded them first into 37 categories, then into 6 broad categories: housing and homelessness, youth and families, multiservice, health and mental health, government, and special populations which also included other misfit categories. These categories and a sampling of their largest subcategories are featured in Table 6. For analytical simplicity, these categories were then combined again into youth, housing, and other categories.

To prepare data for these analyses, project-level data were first collapsed to the organization-year level, then collapsed by organization with mean calculation across years. This is how the variable for “incumbency” was calculated. It represents the mean number of HUD-funded programs that an organization received across years. The means are lower for more recent entrants into the dataset, and higher for those with all four years of funding and those with a higher number of funded projects. While this variable does not have the range to be able to differentiate between organizations with long and longer incumbencies, it does have the ability to detect the relative impacts of being a more recent entrant into the field and having a smaller number of funded projects. As a result, it is a better measure of barriers to access than of the protective factors of long-term funding relationships.

Measures

In the models analyzed here, the dependent variable was whether a youth-service providing organization received any HUD-CoC funding for at least one youth program. This is a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the organization ever received HUD-CoC funding during the time period and 0 if it did not. For these analyses, time is not included in the data structure since the organizational factors of interest do not vary during the study period.

The independent variables in these analyses were the organization type, created based off the NTEE codes as described above and divided into three categories of youth-focused, housing-focused, and all other. These categories are fairly evenly split between the three groups, and due to the wide variation across the many organizations that fall into the "other" category, and to facilitate the direct comparison of housing and youth organizations, housing organizations were selected as the reference group in the analyses. Other independent variables include the organization age, which was created from the "Ruling Year" of their tax-exempt status from the IRS, which was then mean centered. Lastly, incumbency is the last independent variable, which reflects organization's history of funding over the previous 5 years as described above, which is also mean-centered. The variable of an organization's annual expenditures is added as an indicator of the organization's size, and it is log transformed to address overdispersion and mean-centered for use in a multilevel model.

Models

The first step in seeking to understand differences in whether programs are funded and their organization type was to run a Chi Square test for independence between the dependent and independent variables described above of whether the organization received HUD CoC funding and the type of organization. The next step in this analytical approach was to fit a multilevel logistic regression model in a stepwise regression using the dependent and independent variables described above. The multilevel model controls for clustering at the CoC level. This accounts for variation in CoC size, poverty rate, urbanity, and the number of homeless youth a CoC counts that were included in multilevel models in Chapter 3, without needing to include those additional independent variables at the CoC level. The stepwise regression models are as follows:

Null Model: $AnyYouthFunding_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AnnualExpenditures + \nu_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Model 1: $AnyYouthFunding_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AnnualExpenditures + \beta_2 OrgTypeYouth + \beta_3 OrgTypeOther + \nu_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Model 2: $AnyYouthFunding_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AnnualExpenditures + \beta_2 OrgTypeYouth + \beta_3 OrgTypeOther + \beta_4 Age + \beta_5 Incumbency + \nu_{0i} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

This approach has the ability to reveal how these various independent variables contribute to explaining whether organization i in CoC j receives funding. In this model, all independent variables are at the organizational level producing fixed effects at the organizational level with a random intercept to control for differences across CoCs, represented by the residual term ν_{0i} in the above models (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). These models will first add the credibility characteristics of the organization's type in Model 1 and then add the incumbency characteristics of funding history and organizational age in Model 2.

Results

Youth programs that target homeless youth are distributed across a variety of organizational types, as shown in Table 6. The largest number of youth programs are delivered in housing and homelessness organizations, at 29 percent of all youth providers, followed closely by youth and family organizations at 27 percent of all youth providers, with no significant difference between the two proportions. When examining the proportion of programs that receive funding, they are also funded at similar rates, with 36 percent of youth programs in housing and homelessness organizations receiving funding and 29 percent of youth programs in youth and family organizations receiving funding, although differences are not significant.

Table 6. Organizational Types of Youth Providers: Frequencies and Proportions Receiving Funding

Organization Types (Based on NTEE Codes)	All Youth Programs in CoC Inventory Data			Organizations Receiving CoC Funding	
	N=1104 Organizations			N= 352 Organizations	
	Frequency	Percent of Total Within Category	Percent Of All Orgs	Number Receiving Funding	Percent Receiving Funding[a]
Housing and Homelessness	**323**		**29.3%**	**115**	**35.6%**
Shelters	92	28.5%		33	35.9
Religious (ex Salvation Army)	41	12.7%		11	26.8
Housing Development	35	10.8%		14	40.0
Public Housing	22	6.8%		6	27.3
Other/General	133	41.1%		51	38.3
Youth and Families	**299**		**27.1%**	**86**	**28.8%**
Child Welfare	33	11%		11	33.3
Youth Development	33	11%		10	30.3
Youth Housing	12	4%		2	16.7
Other/General	221	74%		63	28.5
Multi-Service Organizations	**203**		**18.4%**	**58**	**28.6%**
Community Development	30	14.8%		10	33.3
Y(W/M/F)CAs	18	8.9%		3	16.7
Religious (ex Catholic Charities)	12	5.9%		1	8.3
Other/General	143	70.4%		44	30.8
Health and Mental Health	**135**		**12.2%**	**52**	**38.5%**
Mental Health	87	64.4%		35	40.2
Addiction/Recovery	32	23.7%		12	37.5
General/Other	16	11.9%		5	31.3
Special Populations/Other	**80**		**7.3%**	**20**	**25.0%**
Domestic Violence	29	36.3%		6	20.7
People with Disabilities	25	31.3%		5	20.0
Other	26	33%		9	34.6
Government	**64**		**5.8%**	**21**	**32.8%**
County Government	25	39.1%		7	28.0
Other Government	39	60.9%		14	35.9
Totals	**1104**			**352**	**31.9%**

a. Chi Square test of independence between receiving funding and org type not significant.

When examining differences between organizational types on other characteristics, however, there are significant differences, as shown in Table 7. Housing and homelessness organizations are younger, smaller, and have a higher number of HUD-funded programs than other organizational types. Youth and family organizations are the oldest type and have the lowest rates of incumbency in terms of a track record of receiving CoC funding. Finally, all other organizations, which collapses categories including multiservice organizations and health and mental health organizations are the largest with mid-range age and incumbency.

Table 7. Organizational Credibility and Incumbency Descriptive Statistics of Nonprofit Youth Program Providers by Organization Type

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (SD)[a]	Median
Expenditures (All Orgs)	**$0**	**$591M**	**$14.5M (33.8M)**	**$4.59M**
Youth Orgs	0	255M	13.0M (28.8M)	3.5M
Housing Orgs	0	256M	9.27M (20.6M)	3.2M
All Other	43K	591M	18.8M (42.2M)	6.8M
Ruling Year (All Orgs)	**1864**	**2018**	**1981 (19.6)**	**1983**
Youth Orgs	1864	2017	1979 (21.5)	1980
Housing Orgs	1926	2016	1987 (16.8)	1989
All Other	1931	2018	1979 (19.3)	1980
Incumbency—Number of HUD Funded Projects (All Orgs)	**0**	**20**	**1.8 (2.6)**	**1**
Youth Orgs	0	10.2	.9 (1.4)	.4
Housing Orgs	0	20	2.5 (3.1)	1.4
All Other	0	20	1.9 (2.7)	1

N=907
Youth Orgs (N=261); Housing Orgs (N=249); All Other Orgs (N=379)
a. ANOVA tests for mean differences by organization type were significant at $p<.01$ for all variables.

Stepwise regression results indicate that among nonprofit youth providers, annual expenditures is a consistent predictor of receiving funding, with a one logit increase in annual expenditures above the mean being associated with a 1.4 times increased likelihood of receiving HUD CoC funds, when no other predictors are included, as shown in the null model in Table 8.

In Model 1, with credibility characteristics added, youth and family organizations are significantly less likely to receive funding for a youth program than housing and homelessness organizations with an odds ratio of .57 (95% CI .38-.89), when controlling for annual expenditures and clustering at the CoC level, and other organization types compared to housing organizations similarly, with an odds ratio of .56 (95% CI .41-.88). However, when incumbency is accounted for in Model 2, there is no longer a significant difference between housing and homelessness organizations and other organization types, controlling for other factors. In all models, expenditures continues to be a significant predictor of whether a program receives HUD CoC funding for a youth program.

Table 8. Regression Results for Models Predicting whether a Nonprofit Organization Receives HUD CoC Funding for at least one Youth Program[a]

	Null Model[b]			Model 1[b] (With Credibility)			Model 2[b] (with Incumbency)		
Independent Variables	OR	95 % CI		OR	95 % CI		OR	95 % CI	
Organization Variables									
Annual Expenditures	1.4*	1.3	1.6	1.4*	1.3	1.6	1.2+	1.0	1.3
Youth Organization Type[c]				.57*	.39	.89	1.3	.79	2.0
Other Organization Type[c]				.59*	.41	.88	.93	.60	1.4
Age							1.0	.99	1.0
Incumbency							1.5*	1.4	1.7
CoC Clustering Constant (control)	.19	.04	.87	.22	.06	.86	.18	.03	.90

N=864 Organizations
N=276 CoCs
ICC=.05
* Significant at p<.01
+ Significant at p<.05

a. All CoCs that received any YHDP funding are excluded.
b. All models are significant at p<.001
c. Housing organization type is the reference group.

Conclusions

The analyses presented in this chapter reveal a diverse array of organizations that deliver programs targeted to homeless youth, led by housing and homelessness organizations (29 percent) and youth and family organizations (27 percent). While youth organizations may have credibility when it comes to the provision of youth services, these results show that they are not the obvious, or even "go-to" choice for programs to address youth homelessness. That said, these programs are not overwhelmingly being delivered by housing and homelessness organizations

either. While this may not be surprising in subfield operating at the intersection of two major fields, housing services and youth services, it could pose challenges for youth seeking services or other referral sources to try to locate and identify the best program to meet one's needs.

That these two types of organizations top the list of organizational types to administer these programs could represent the push and pull between credibility with a population and incumbency within the CoC. It could also indicate that in the sector of programs to address youth homelessness, an organization can garner credibility either by having expertise in youth services or by having expertise in solutions to address homelessness. While I have argued that youth-based credibility is paramount for programs to be successful, they are not the organizations housing the majority, or even a plurality, of youth homelessness programs. There may be two sides to this equation as well—perhaps youth-based programs are not interested in running youth homelessness programs or doing so in collaboration with a CoC. Unless a program is seeking or receiving federal funds or seeking to strengthen its legitimacy in the homeless services field, there may be little incentive to participate in the CoC which could require participating in HMIS, centralized assessment and referral, and HIC and PIT reporting, without any financial resources to support this work. Improving accessibility and lowering barriers to entry into the youth homelessness field by financially and technically supporting providers in their CoC participation could help promote and protect the youth expertise in youth homelessness programming.

Looking beyond descriptive statistics, inferential analyses conducted here confirm, as Strategic Action Field theory would predict, that an organization's size and incumbency are both significant predictors of an organization's likelihood of securing HUD CoC funding for a youth-targeted program, with organizational age not playing a significant role. This finding suggests

that organizational size and capacity may indeed help organizations adequately prepare both a CoC application for funding and comply with data and reporting once an award is received. In addition, even after controlling for size, when an organization has a proven track record of funding with multiple HUD awards over multiple years, they are more likely to receive funding [1]. This supports the notion that both the capacity to apply and comply with HUD requirements and the established relationship with the CoC are important for a youth provider in securing CoC funding for a youth program.

The strong predictive power of size and incumbency, combined with the trend identified in Chapter 3 that the number of youth programs that receive CoC funding is stagnant or on a slight decline, indicate that this field appears to be very difficult to break into. Only 10 percent of all youth-targeted programs gained any new youth funding during the time period, and only 11 percent lost funding as well. While this could indicate good news for organizations already receiving CoC funds for their youth programs—their funding is likely to continue to be stable—the outlook is less positive for organizations seeking to win CoC funding for the first time. Incumbents in this field are indeed powerful, as SAF theory would predict, and existing rules appear to function as barriers for small organizations positioned as challengers in the field.

The findings about size and incumbency are clear, but the findings about credibility will require additional research. In the stepwise regression approach taken here, when controlling for organizational size and clustering at the CoC level, there is a decreased likelihood that youth-targeted programs will be funded in youth and family organizations compared with housing and

1 While these variables may seem to not be independent, they are significantly correlated at r=.42, not high enough to be problematic for the model.

homelessness organizations. These differences are not extreme, not detectable in bivariate analyses, and disappear when incumbency is accounted for, but they do suggest that youth and family organizations could be at a disadvantage in the tight and tough competition for CoC funding. With awareness of this lower funding rate, CoCs could consider finding ways to help youth-serving organizations pursue CoC funding and providing them the support they may need to obtain it. Without more fine-grained analyses at the CoC-project level, it is impossible to determine whether youth organizations are at a disadvantage in funding competitions due to differences in performance metrics, but these data would be compatible with any disparities detected there. Further research into the impact of organization type on performance metrics is warranted.

On a positive note, this set of findings do not tell a story of struggling youth providers swimming against the current in a sea of housing organization big fish. I find that youth organizations are delivering a substantial proportion of the youth programs, and for those that have both size and history of CoC funding, they are doing just as well if not better at securing funding than their housing organization peers. That said, more research is needed, and more can be done to facilitate the provision of homeless youth services by youth organizations and expand support for those programs through HUD CoCs.

Chapter 5. A Critique of Data-Driven Processes

In this chapter, I will critically examine the trend of data-driven decision-making in the human services sector, while building on work that calls into question the assumption that competition and accountability will lead to improved "performance" (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000, Sandberg, 2016). While data analysis certainly ought to have an important place in public policy decision-making, I argue that the way it is currently being used by HUD and CoCs poses problematic barriers to funding access for providers serving niche populations like youth experiencing homelessness. Ultimately, this system fails to deliver on the promise of fairness in how HUD CoC funds are allocated.

There are three main issues with this system: data quality, data tracking burden, and performance measurement. For each of these issues I will discuss how they are conceptually problematic with support from the literature, and I will support these claims with empirical evidence from my dissertation. I will begin by highlighting some of the validity issues with HUD data, both as described in the literature and as they have appeared in the data compiled for this dissertation. Next, I will describe some limitations and burdens of data tracking that comes with pursuing CoC funding. I support this with secondary analysis of qualitative data on CoC participants across the country. Finally, I will describe how performance metrics can be biased against certain providers that prioritize outcomes other than those defined by HUD, both in principle and with some evidence from HUD System Performance Measures at the CoC level. Together, these findings call into question HUD's belief in the utility of intensive data tracking to promote positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, and in the objectivity of using performance data to make funding decisions. While I do not recommend completely

abandoning the valuable data infrastructure HUD has supported the creation of over the past 20 years, I do recommend that HUD and CoCs do more to decrease data burden and promote access to CoC funds for smaller organizations that serve niche populations.

Data Quality Issues: PIT and HIC

Data-driven decision-making is only as good as the data on which decisions are based, and the quality of the many forms of data produced by and for HUD is not high quality. An immense amount of time and energy goes into the creation and reporting of extensive data from each CoC, ranging from the annual Homeless Inventory Count (HIC), Point in Time count (PIT), and the CoC Awards data that provide the basis for this project, to Systemwide Performance Measures, Annual Performance Reports, and the Project Ranking Tool data that come from each CoC's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Reports that compile these data include caveats and disclaimers warning the reader to interpret with caution and to contact specific CoCs with questions. While all data is prone to some degree of inaccuracy and error, the challenge lies in attempting to determine just how much error there is likely to be in any given set of data.

One approach to making this determination is to compare HUD-published data with other data sources that examine the same or similar questions. For example, a major data collection effort on the part of the entire CoC system is the annual Point in Time count (PIT). The purpose is to collect snapshot data as to how many people are experiencing homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered, on a given day in January. The shortcomings of this annual data collection effort have been documented by Schneider, Brisson, and Burns (2016). In a comparative case study of three CoCs and their PIT methodologies, they found that the resources devoted to the

process, methodological sophistication, and resulting accuracy were highly variable across the three locations studied. While all three were compliant with HUD expectations, they each utilized unique surveys, utilized varied volunteer training and recruitment strategies, and validity checks were present in only one of the three locations. The authors recommend better methodologies such as sampling and control measures, great public communication and support, and more specific dissemination of results and methods so that CoCs have the information from peer as to how they might improve counts and to promote feedback from the process to improve overall investment in the endeavor.

The issues described above are about the entire PIT count system, and counting youth experiencing homelessness has even more challenges. The first problem is accuracy. Morton and colleagues found a much higher incidence of youth homelessness than what would have been expected if HUD's PIT count were accurate, and the authors highlight underestimation in the PIT count specifically. HUD has made efforts to improve their guidance on counting youth, including collaborating with other federal agencies to support YouthCount, a partnership to support improvements to counting youth in 9 CoCs and sharing best practices with other CoCs to improve counts. Narendorf et al. (2016) describe various enhanced counting efforts utilized for the Youth Count project in Houston, including a longer time period of data collection, targeted rather than generalized canvassing at "hot spots," and creating recruitment events for youth. These are similar to strategies promoted for counting youth by Chapin Hall's Voice of Youth Count project (Horwitz et al., 2018). Unfortunately, it is not clear whether HUD would allow a youth-specific count to take place outside of the single-night PIT count process, but many of the other recommendations could help to improve youth counting strategies.

A report comparing the nine Youth Count sites (Pergamit et al., 2012), indicates that youth counting strategies are varied, similar to the finding in the general PIT count by Schneider, Brisson, and Burns (2016). On strategy the report highlighted as particularly problematic was the identification of homeless youth by appearance, "In some sites, particularly where the youth count was integrated with the PIT count, counters were expected to determine which individuals were homeless based on appearance, and further, which homeless people were adults and which were unaccompanied youth." (Pergamit et al., 2013, p. 58). While the authors do recommend integrating youth counts with PIT counts to avoid duplication across the two counts, they also recommend surveying all youth encountered and asking about their housing rather than making visual judgments on age or housing status. Another troubling component was the training process of volunteers, which they find was minimal at some locations. As a result, a volunteer could be asked to make judgements about age and housing status without adequate training, which could result in extreme variability across observers and bias obscuring visual judgements. In locations where this is the methodology, a "count of homeless youth" would essentially be a "count of people who look homeless and look young."[1]

Evidence from examining the PIT and HIC data directly also reveals serious inconsistencies. For starters, CoCs vary a great deal as to how many homeless youth they are counting, from zero in a few CoCs up to 40 percent of the entire counted homeless population in others, and an overall average of 9 percent of the homeless population being youth. Programs are

1 Due to the major limitations of the PIT count, analyses in Chapter 3 that included PIT estimates have been included in Appendix A for reference. The omission amplifies the magnitude of the influence of the award amount, which was already high, and does not result in changes to any conclusions.

also inconsistent as to whether they report their program as being a youth program, with 24 percent of all youth projects that were ever designated as targeting youth having at least one year when they were indicated otherwise. It is unsurprising that these inconsistencies would occur, however, because HUD has changed both how homeless youth should be counted and how youth-targeted beds should be designated. In the PIT count methodology, HUD changed in 2015 to designating youth as being "unaccompanied" if they were not a member of a family and as "parenting youth" if they were the head of a household and young. In the HIC data, programs started by designating a "target population youth" in 2014 and 2015, the number of youth beds, and a "youth age group" of either under 18 or 18-24. Since 2016, youth bed counts are divided into youth bed counts for households with children and households without children, and beds for households with only children, and the "youth age group" designation was removed. The impact of these changes shows up in the form of error, with almost a quarter of programs changing designation at some point, as mentioned above, although it did not have a noticeable impact on the PIT count data.

While these data undoubtedly have limitations, as all data do, it could be argued that since similar methodologies within CoCs are used year to year, they should be able to accurately detect changes in the homeless population over time. While comparisons across CoCs are invalid due to differing methodologies, a CoC's comparisons with their own counts year to year should in theory be useful for tracking relative changes in homeless service utilization or changing demographics among the homeless population. Unfortunately, the data has weaknesses even when it comes to relative comparisons. Zaveri (2020) reported in the New York Times some apparent discrepancies in homeless trends between the PIT count and a report of homelessness

among children in schools released by the Department of Education (DoE). While the PIT count showed homelessness among children to be on a downward trend from 2015 to 2018, the DoE reported a steep 15 percent increase over the time period. While both counts would be expected to differ since they are measuring different things and using different definitions of homelessness (DoE numbers include "doubled up" families while HUD counts do not), the trend should be the same—is homelessness an improving or worsening problem in our society? How much attention and resources the problems receive depend on having data that decision-makers trust, and these kinds of inconsistencies undermine trust in the data.

In addition to problems with the PIT data, there were also inconsistencies in the funding data included in the HIC. While complete comparisons were not possible with the data available, it appears that variables estimating the number of programs receiving funding from RHYA funds is overestimated. It is confirmable that the number of programs reported as receiving CoC funds in the HIC data is greater than the number of funded projects in the CoC Awards data. While some of these inconsistencies could be due to consolidations of multiple programs' funding into a single award, or multiple years of funding being dispersed in a single year, creating inconsistencies between the counts. However, in the process of hand-matching the HIC and Award data for all youth-targeted programs, about 7 percent of the programs that were indicated as receiving an award did not have an award in the database and were instead confirmed to have received funding in the past, and an additional 7 percent were unable to be matched to an award at all. I hesitate to overstate the degree of inaccuracy present in these data because it would undermine my general determination that the data are accurate enough to justify conducting the analyses reported in Chapters 2 and 3. That said, there are at the very least inconsistencies in

these data and depending on how they are being used, could result in an overestimation of how many programs in the HIC are being funded.

Data Tracking Burden

A constant concern that nonprofits face is accountability. Service providing nonprofits serve a kind of redistributive function in society, whereby donors, funders, and government supply funds to nonprofit organizations to deliver services. Since those paying for the services differ from those receiving them, there exists a market inefficiency. Those paying for services seek accountability that those funds were spent efficiently, effectively, and according to plan. Tracking and reporting data is a primary avenue for providing this accountability, especially when accounting for government funds (Snibbe, 2006).

With increased technology available to gather, store, and report data, there have been increasing demands on nonprofits to do so. In their article examining nonprofit data tracking, Benjamin, Voida, and Bopp (2018) summarize prior literature on data use in human services as being primarily driven by funder requirements and made challenging by being disconnected from client needs or designed in a way that is a poor fit for how services are delivered. They then highlight case studies from two human services agencies and the accountability data management work they undertake. In comparing practices and experiences at an HIV/AIDS service organization with a homeless services organization, they find that much greater staff time, workarounds, and time are spent in the HIV/AIDS service organization than the homeless services. One major difference between the two was that the HIV organization was operating under a contract in which all services and client information needed to be documented for billing, whereas the homeless service organization was operating under a grant. While the homeless

provider did collect paper data for HMIS and eventually upload it to the system, it was neither as prioritized nor as accurate as that collected and reported in the HIV organization. The homeless organization had an understanding that they needed to "do HMIS" as a condition of their grant, but they were not closely tracked or monitored in the frequency or accuracy with which their HMIS got "done." The authors did report at the end of their data collection period, however, that the organization had received communication to work on improving their HMIS participation. The authors acknowledge that this organization is not representative of the larger homeless services field. Having been on the data-inputting end of an HMIS system in the past as an RHY provider in a rural/suburban county, I would agree that the process was neither urgent nor subject to extensive oversight at the time. Nevertheless, I experienced it to be frustrating, complicated, and burdensome, especially as a youth provider inputting data into a form and structure designed for adults—a poor fit for the circumstances faced by the young people with whom I was working.

Prior research indicates that my frustrations were not atypical of the broader human services sector. Parton (2008) reports that social workers spend an increasing amount of time on administrative functions rather than on direct client care. He argues that these changes constitute a shift in the form of social work knowledge. Gillingham (2013) found that complex data systems ended up removing social worker discretion in the child welfare field, with workers feeling that their decisions were being undermined and that the systems did not allow for all relevant information to be taken into account. Worker frustration with data tracking systems is also reflected in the concern workers have that what they measure can bear little resemblance to

the kind of work that matters in their organizations (Benjamin, 2012; Charnochan, Samples, Meyers, & Austin., 2014).

To try to examine the extent to which these trends play out in CoCs, I conducted a secondary data analysis of a multiple comparative case study featuring 145 qualitative interviews across a diverse sample of 18 CoCs. The CoCs recruited were selected based on their responses to a national survey of CoCs to represent large and small, urban and rural CoCs. Although the interview questions posed to participants were about leadership, network goals, collaboration and communication, there were 12 interviewees across 6 CoCs who discussed the use of data in their interviews. For each CoC a network leader and several members from network organizations were interviewed. Given the large amount of data reporting to HUD for which CoCs are responsible, I would have expected leaders to speak more about data than network members, but the opposite was true. Only one of the twelve interviewees who mentioned data was a network leader. This suggests that not all providers share the somewhat indifferent attitude toward HMIS data found in the homeless service organization studied by Benjamin, Voida, and Bopp (2018). While the data collection process was not designed around these research questions, these unprompted remarks about how participants think about data in their CoCs shed some light on the role data plays in CoC functioning.

Three main themes emerged from these passages: value, nuance, and burden. Of the participants who discussed data, several interviewees, including the one network leader, either directly expressed or implied that they value using data in CoC decision-making. They talked about the benefits of objectivity over purely anecdotal evidence, and the potential for problem-solving and continuous improvement. One participant said, “So we have lots of constant

evaluation of our work, so I think it's important for us as an organization not just to respond to all the stuff but to be active and problem solving and trying to make the system work."

While participants expressed value for data and data-driven decision-making, many also identified lack of nuance as a drawback. Another common theme across respondents was the desire to look more closely at service quality rather than simple outputs. One discussed discomfort with the underlying assumptions about the different types of programs—specifically mentioning the potentially unwarranted de-prioritization of transitional housing. Another was concerned about measuring fidelity to a housing first approach, beyond a simple "check box" that a program claims to be doing it. One respondent also talked about technical assistance and helping programs with how to make improvements, saying, "I guess I'd like to see the COC do some real hands-on evaluation of projects. ... So it's not just evaluating and saying here's your score, but we're going to provide some technical assistance to help you get where you need to be and to bring programs along."

This argument aligns well with literature demonstrating that the promotion of truly quality programming requires more nuanced measures that simple program outputs. For example, Benjamin (2012) argues that in human services, any performance measures may miss the essential elements of human relationships that comprise frontline work. As a result, attention to processes and client experiences should be centered in our understanding service quality.

The failure to provide adequate technical assistance, particularly given the large amount of data that is required of providers, leads into the third theme I identified: burden. A few respondents mentioned or implied that the data tracking expectations are burdensome for providers and CoC staff. Two respondents specifically mention how much effort and energy goes

into trying to make sure that HMIS data are accurate. Another respondent observed from the provider perspective that, “I think we have to spend way too much time on reporting. I think there should be some very simplistic, and I know that HUD drives that, but I'm not so sure that all the information is necessary.” This dynamic results in double burdens—that providers get properly trained to comply with data reporting requirements, and on the CoC’s part to provide the training and monitor compliance.

Survey data from the first phase of this CoC project also show that many CoCs are operating with limited staffing. While very few reported having absolutely no director, direct, or indirect employees (6 percent, or 17 out of 287 CoC respondents), on the other side, only about a quarter reported having at least a full-time director and direct employees (27 percent, or 77 out of 287 CoC respondents). All others fell somewhere in between, including only indirect employees or a part-time director with indirect employees, which together make up over a third of CoCs (36 percent, or 103 out of 287 CoC respondents). This means that in most CoCs, those responsible are working within a limited number of hours and often with other responsibilities to attend to as well, as shown in this quote: “So I wish we as a COC had more money to put into our lead agency which could take away some of us trying to do it in our spare time in terms of coming up with all these policies and what we see measuring and what not and all of that. Cause we all work full time jobs, and our COC board is a volunteer board.” This issue is identified by someone who is working with a CoC that has a full-time director and several staff members, so one can imagine the burden that CoCs running on only part-time employees must feel like.

This brief set of qualitative analyses is by no means comprehensive, but it does offer some insight into the perspectives of folks in the homeless services sector about working in a

data-driven field. Overall, they expressed a generally high regard for the real and potential benefits of using data to drive decision-making, while at the same time looking for a more nuanced and supportive approach to evaluating programs and perhaps a reprieve from the heavy burden that falls on both CoCs and providers as they manage and report so much data.

Unfairly Mismatched Performance Measures

I have provided evidence thus far that the HUD data is both inaccurate and burdensome in terms of the effort that goes into collecting it. However, one of the major promises of data-driven decision-making is to bring objectivity into the funding application process. While this may be of value in principle, it does not necessarily play out that way in practice because it can actually offer advantages to well-connected and well-resourced providers and disadvantages to smaller organizations or new entrants into the field. In Chapter 4, I showed that both size and incumbency (as measured by history of CoC funding) are significant predictors of whether a youth program will receive HUD CoC funds, which immediately calls the ideal of objectivity into question.

This section goes beyond indicating that the system fails to live up to its promises to argue that it is also undermining one of its purposes. By applying standardized HUD-defined performance metrics across programs that service populations whose goals may differ from those metrics, HUD is creating a system that prioritizing the appearance of fairness over the pursuit of effectiveness. In the case of youth-targeted programs, the use of these standardized can actually mischaracterize the effectiveness of a program to address youth homelessness. This argument relies on the performance management literature to first describe why externally imposed performance metrics designed for a general population are unlikely to serve the needs of a

specialized population like youth experiencing homelessness. To illustrate how that mismatch appears in the data, I also offer some evidence indicating that providing more youth services can also have a negative impact on HUD-defined performance measures.

As described in Chapter 1, one reason why programs that target homeless youth may have a more difficult time competing for funding is that their outcomes do not align well with the HUD-defined system performance measures. There are six system performance measures that HUD requires CoCs to report on in their Annual Performance Report, including length of stay, returns to homelessness in 6 months, 12 months, and 24 months, the total number of people utilizing homeless services, increased income, the number people experiencing homelessness for the first time, and positive exits from homelessness into permanent housing. While these measures may all appear to be unarguably positive for people experiencing homelessness, they are a poor fit for the realities young people experiencing homelessness face, and to the kinds of services they receive, based on what we know about homeless youth and their service utilization in the literature.

There are three SPMs particularly ill-suited to homeless youth performance measurement. First, literature suggests that youth with longer stays in housing programs are also likely to have better outcomes (Prock & Kennedy, 2020). Because short lengths of stay are currently prioritized, those with participants remaining longer and completing the program could end up appearing to have worse outcomes than a program that struggles to retain program participants. Secondly, youth express a high value for programs that offer flexibility because they sometimes make impulsive choices, which is a simple product of their developmental stage. Youth may be more likely to require multiple tries in a program before staying long term and

finding success. If a young person felt comfortable enough in a program to want to come back to seek services after an exit, that is a programmatic strength. Programs that youth leave and never seek to return may have better "return for service" rates at 6, 12, and 24 months, when in actually those programs so alienated youth that they choose to avoid help-seeking behavior (Bender et al., 2018). Finally, increased income in the short term could be delayed for youth who pursue educational goals that could lead to greater earnings in the long term and therefore more stable housing in the future. Furthermore, programs working with homeless young people are likely to have numerous other goals in mind for the young people with whom they work, including addressing trauma and mental health and developing a supportive network of adult mentors and role models, both of which could take away time from income-earning work. However, these are also the kind of relational goals homeless young people often want to work towards, as opposed to the more transactional nature of the adult homeless service system.

A true believer in performance management could argue that there is no reason why a program could not seek to achieve both sets of goals, but the performance management literature indicates that rarely happens. A meta-analysis of performance management systems in the areas of accounting, operations, and strategy completed by Franco-Santos, Lucianetti, and Bourne (2012) concludes that performance measurement systems overall do contribute to improved organizational performance. However, they also find that the ability for performance measurement systems to impact performance depends on how the systems are designed, developed, and used; in other words, how it is managed. Key elements to this component include having measures that are well-aligned with organizational strategy and priorities, clear in terms of cause and effect, and empowering to those who use it. Finally, systems need to be iterative

and updated with changing organizational goals. This is synthesized into a concept of goal and performance measurement and management "fit" by Melnyk, Bititci, Platts, Tobias, and Andersen (2014). They argue that ensuring fit in highly volatile modern organizational fields is a challenge that requires further integration in the literature.

Iterative reassessment of fit between performance measures and organizational goals may be good advice for business managers, but because performance measures are identified by HUD it means that nonprofits are having their goals set by an outside administrative body whose entire purpose is standardization across CoCs and the organizations operating within them. They are not specific to the organization nor adaptive to organizational goals. Because the concepts of input and fit are so important to the ability of performance measures to impact performance outcomes, providers that focus on their own set of goals rather than HUDs could suffer from deficits in performance outcomes.

While I do not have the program-level data that would be necessary to determine whether individual youth-targeted programs have experienced such deficits, I do have data on system performance measures at the CoC level. In comparing system performance levels with the number of youth beds in youth programs a CoC has, I have identified weak but significant correlations between higher number of youth beds and higher proportions of re-entry into homelessness at the 6-month, 12-month, and 24-month marks. When controlling for the size of the CoC and being an urban CoC, a small but significant increase in all three return-rates remains.[2] An important caveat is the very small effect size of the relationships, with a 1 youth program bed increase being associated with a .005 percentage point increase in the proportion of

2 Regression tables are included in Appendix B.

homeless people returning to homelessness within 6 months, but given that homeless youth beds in youth programs comprise less than three percent of all beds on average across CoCs, that any effect is detectable and statistically significant is cause for concern. This evidence indicates that youth programs would be less likely to perform as well on 6, 12, and 24-month return rates as their non-youth-serving peer programs, putting them at a disadvantage in terms of seeking new or renewal CoC funding.

Overall, the data presented in this chapter highlight a few of the underlying problems with the way the HUD CoC data regime is currently operating: it is inaccurate data that is burdensome to collect and unfair to programs that prioritize their own goals. These are just a few of the reasons why some youth programs may decide to opt-out of participating with HUD CoCs altogether, regardless of the funding that might be available by participating (Holtschneider, personal communication). Homeless youth providers and others that serve special populations should be drawn in and incentivized to participate with the CoC to ensure that HUD funds get distributed not just to mainstream players but also to those serving harder-to-reach populations. Recommendations to further these goals will be included in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

In this chapter, I will review my main research questions and findings, integrate findings across analyses, and discuss the implications and limitations of this research. In the preceding chapters, I have presented analysis of trends and correlates of funding for youth homelessness programs to assess how well HUD's data-driven competitive CoC funding systems works for these programs. My overall conclusion is that important progress has been made in public funding to address youth homelessness with addition of the YHDP. That said, programs to address youth homelessness should be funded by HUD CoC funds at higher rates and should be delivered by service providers with expertise in youth services more often. In addition, policy changes should be made to evaluate youth programs on criteria that make sense for their population and to ease barriers to access that may prevent youth service providers from seeking or being successful in securing funding through the HUD CoC program.

HUD is certainly not the only provider of federal funding for youth experiencing homelessness, with the relatively smaller RHY and Chaffee federal programs mentioned previously, and an unknown extent of state, local, and private funding contributing to solving this social problem. HUD has also not developed the most effective way of distributing funds, with processes that pit providers, locations, and populations against one another based on data and metrics that are problematic. However, HUD is in the best position right now to make meaningful and equitable investments in addressing youth homelessness across the country. The CoC system has the ability to reach all parts of the country, rural and urban areas in blue states and red states. It is CoCs' collective mission to meet the homeless service needs in their communities, and the evidence presented in this dissertation indicates that they have room to improve the extent to which they are meeting that mission when it comes to youth homelessness.

Research Questions and Results

In Chapter 1, I described 5 specific research questions that would be addressed in this dissertation, and I will now present the findings for each question.

> Q1: How invested are CoCs in addressing youth homelessness? Specifically, across all CoCs, what proportion of HUD CoC funding goes towards youth-targeted programming, and what proportion of programs with youth-targeted homeless beds receive HUD CoC funding? How has the introduction of the YHDP impacted levels of investment?

Overall, CoCs have increased investment in youth-targeted programs in total, and when YHDP funding is included, investment in youth homelessness represents significant increase in the proportion of total HUD funding during the study time period, going from 3.5 percent of all HUD CoC funding in 2014 to 5.8 percent in 2018. The YHDP brought the proportion of total funding that goes to youth programs up to 5.8 percent in 2018. The 5.8 percent level is comparable to the proportion of youth in the homeless population at 5.9 percent, according to HUD's PIT count data. While this investment is important, it is concentrated among a small proportion of all providers of service for homeless youth. Furthermore, due to validity issues with the PIT count data, the proportion of funding is likely still not comparable to the true proportion of the overall homeless population, which is unknown.

While over 75 percent of all CoCs have at least one youth-targeted program, only 40 percent of CoCs fund at least one youth program. In addition, about a quarter of all youth-targeted programs receive HUD CoC funds, compared to about a third of non-youth programs. Therefore, while the YHDP has increased HUD's overall investment in youth homelessness, this increase is concentrated among a minority of CoCs, and most CoCs (60 percent) do not invest HUD CoC funds in programs to address youth homelessness at all.

Q2: What CoC characteristics are associated with variation in HUD CoC investment in youth homelessness across CoCs? Specifically, how does a CoC's size, population of youth experiencing homelessness, poverty rate, and urbanity impact a CoC's investment in youth homelessness and changes in their investment over time?

As expected, CoC award size, the size of the homeless youth population, and time are all significant predictors of both funding any youth homelessness programs and spending a larger proportion of funds on programs to address youth homelessness, according to both single year and longitudinal analyses on these dependent variables. While no CoC-level predictors were significant in the longitudinal analyses, estimates for a single year found that urban CoCs were more likely to fund youth homelessness programs and to spend a greater proportion of funds on youth homelessness programs, while poverty rate was associated with a lower likelihood of funding and a lower proportion of funds being spent on youth programs. Definitive results from these models are unclear, but further research is warranted to explore how poverty and urbanity impact a CoCs investment in youth homelessness services.

Q3: What kinds of organizations provide and receive funding to provide services that target youth homelessness? Specifically, are youth-related organizations more or less likely to receive funding to provide a youth-targeted homelessness program than programs categorized at homelessness-specific?

Programs to address youth homelessness are provided by a diverse range of organizations, with about 29 percent of all providers being identified as homeless organizations, 27 percent being identified as youth-specific organizations, 18 percent multi-service organizations, 12 percent health and mental health organizations, 6 percent government agencies, and 7 percent other. While health and mental health and homeless organizations were funded at slightly higher rates

than youth and other types of organizations, differences in the proportions receiving funding did not vary significantly by organization type in bivariate analyses with a mean organization funding rate of 32 percent.[1]

Q4: How are incumbency and credibility related to funding of youth-targeted homeless services? Specifically, how do prior history of CoC funding (incumbency) and the organization type through which a program is being delivered (credibility) impact receipt of HUD funding?

When multiple variables were included, the organization's size was a predictor of a higher likelihood of receiving funding, and an organization's history of funding, conceptualized as incumbency, was also a strong predictor of an organization receiving funding for a youth program. Results on the role of credibility were less clear, with results showing lower rates of funding for youth and other kinds of providers compared to homelessness organizations only when incumbency characteristics were excluded from the model. Overall, the evidence indicates that incumbency and size are better predictors of receiving funding than credibility based on target population expertise.

Q5: How well does the data-driven performance management system described here serve the needs of homeless service providers and users, specifically for youth experiencing homelessness and the providers that serve them?

In this conceptual analysis, I provided evidence that data used in data-driven decision-making suffer from validity issues, data tracked are under-utilized in terms of being used to

1 This rate of funding is at the organization rather than program level, which is why it differs from the program-funding rate described in Q1. Organization funding rates were not calculable for non-youth programs.

improve program and system performance, especially for the amount of work that goes into maintaining them, and finally that mismatches between HUD-defined performance measures and positive outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness are at odds with one another which could result in misdiagnosing the programs least likely to be effective as the most effective. As a result, I find that this system fails to serve the needs of youth experiencing homelessness as well as it could or should.

Discussion

Integrating these findings across analyses, I conclude that there is room for improvement in the level of CoC funding to support youth homelessness programs and in the basis on which funding is awarded. As to the level of funding, it is concerning that fewer than half of CoCs are funding any youth-targeted programs. While most CoCs have programs to address youth homelessness, only one in four of these programs receives CoC funding. At the organizational level, we also see that smaller organizations and those that do not have a history of CoC funding are less likely to receive HUD CoC funds for a youth homelessness program.

Lack of access to these funds puts these programs in a state of increased vulnerability to funding loss that could occur from other sources such as private donors and local government funding, both of which are prone to reduction during times of economic downturn such as the recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There may be fewer funding resources available while the demand for services increases. Federal funding is less prone to these external shocks, and in fact can be an avenue for increased funding availability to address economic crises, such as those made available through the CARES Act. These funds are currently being distributed through existing funding mechanisms including CoC and RHYA processes. These analyses indicate that organizations already receiving funds, the incumbents in the system, are likely to

receive additional funds. Therefore, receiving CoC funds can be a pathway to increased stability during economic downturns and access to additional funds to meet increasing demand for services. Future research will be required to determine the impact of CARES Act funding on youth homelessness providers, but the data analyzed here suggest that it is likely to strengthen funding for existing grantees, perhaps leaving smaller organizations without a history of CoC funding, out in the cold.

In Chapters 1 and 5, I made the argument that given what we know about the effectiveness of programs to address youth homelessness, programs that are smaller, youth-specific, and less formalized are more likely to engage youth experiencing homelessness and produce outcomes that youth value: housing stability of course, but also valuable relationships, a sense of community, and time and space to heal from traumas that led to homelessness and resulted from homelessness. While data analyzed here do not include details on the exact program models being implemented by these organizations, we can see that the organizations that are most likely to receive CoC funds are larger organizations and those with a history of CoC funding, which may tend to be homeless-service focused rather than youth-focused. We also know from the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 that organizations most likely to have the requisite expertise and staffing to generate competitive applications for CoC funding and keep up with demands once funded are more likely to be larger and more formalized organizations. As a result, the systems in place for awarding funds and monitoring performance may be inadvertently prioritizing programs that are less likely to be successful in serving youth experiencing homelessness than others.

Implications for Policy and Practice

There are several actions that policy-makers and practitioners can take to address the problems identified in this research. I will begin with what HUD and CoCs as implementers of HUD policy can do, and then turn to what programs that address youth homelessness and advocates for youth experiencing homelessness can do in practice.

First, HUD and CoCs need to encourage greater funding of programs to address youth homelessness. Since most CoCs already have programs that serve this population, HUD can incentivize CoCs to grant funding to these specialized programs, using existing mechanisms that provide scoring incentives built into the annual funding competition process. The purpose of the YHDP is as a pilot program to expand knowledge and understanding about the best ways to address youth homelessness. This program has now been active for five years and funding has expanded but continued to be targeted to a limited number of CoCs. While continued investment in the development of best practices and rigorous research on the most effective programs to address youth homelessness is appropriate, all CoCs should have greater access to funds specifically for youth programs. While there has been an increase in the number of youth programs and spending on youth programs over time, youth programs are unlikely to win new funding as long as they are competing against existing incumbents in the field, and funding for youth programs in non-YHDP CoCs has stagnated. HUD has the policy tools and incentives to be able to create more significant expansion in this area, beyond the YHDP program, and they should use those tools to increase the overall proportion of CoCs that fund youth homelessness programs.

Second, CoCs should utilize alternative criteria for assessing and ranking the performance of youth homelessness programs. HUD can facilitate this change by making

changes to the project ranking tool, but CoCs already have the discretion to come up with their own ranking system. Therefore, even absent a HUD change, they should implement their own specialized criteria for specialized populations. Specifically, youth programs should not be assessed on length of stay. Short lengths of stay are as likely to indicate that a program is undesirable to youth as it is to indicate that the program is successfully transitioning youth out of homelessness more quickly. If the length of stay measure is used at all, it should be reversed to privilege longer lengths of stay. The second criteria, exits to permanent housing, should serve as a check on the first such that undesirable programs may have a shorter length of stay but this would be balanced out by having fewer exits to permanent housing. However, this check and balance does not work for youth-targeted programs because all youth are less likely to have exists to permanent housing than adults due to their developmental stage and the decreased likelihood that youth will qualify for permanent supportive housing. As a result, youth homelessness programs should not be penalized for poor performance on this measure. Instead, given that youth are likely to make mistakes and leave programming without adequate plans in place, returning to seek assistance again should be positively valued so that youth can continue the progress they have made. Under the current system, youth returns to a homeless assistance program are negatively evaluated because they are deemed to have returned to homelessness shortly after program exit. By assuming that youth are more prone to premature departure from programming, returning to programming indicates that a young person sees the potential of programming to be of assistance, and we should be encouraging youth to continue to try to work towards their goals through participation in youth homeless services. By de-prioritizing data on exits to permanent housing and positively evaluating length of stay and returns to services, performance measures can more fairly assess the performance of youth targeted programs.

It also makes sense to develop and use a completely different set of criteria to evaluate the success of youth homelessness programs, including reduction in victimization such as financial and sexual exploitation, educational attainment, participation in mental health services, and the development of positive relationships with adults. These kinds of criteria may more accurately represent the goals of youth participating in homelessness programs and the goals providers see as essential for producing positive outcomes for these vulnerable youth in the long term. However, current data systems like HMIS are not already designed to evaluate these measures, and the above recommendation can move a step towards a fairer representation of youth needs while still utilizing data collection structures currently in place.

CoCs can also make practice changes to improve access to CoC funds for programs addressing youth homelessness by providing technical assistance to youth homeless providers seeking to enter or improve their chances of obtaining funds from the competitive CoC process. They can also use their HMIS data to further investigate the relative performance of existing programs to address youth homelessness to identify inequities in the ways the programs are evaluated. They can also assess differences by other program types to determine whether other kinds of niche providers such as programs for families, veterans, or people fleeing domestic violence would benefit from adjustments in how programs are evaluated against one another. Overall, CoCs can make better use of the large amounts of data that they collect from homeless service providers to go beyond HUD reporting and application preparation to find their own ways of determining program success and areas for program and overall system improvement.

Providers of youth homelessness programs and advocates for youth experiencing homelessness can also utilize findings from this research to advocate for fairer systems and increased access to HUD CoC funds. Some providers may not even see HUD CoC funds as an

option available to them, and they can make the case to their own CoCs that they should be doing more to address youth homelessness in their jurisdictions. In addition, they can use these findings to advocate that their own program models and credibility as youth providers should carry weight in being seen as an important priority for CoC funding applications, regardless of scoring on existing rankings tools. Providers can also seek to collaborate and partner with larger homeless service providing organizations in an effort to gain expertise and capacity for meeting HUD requirements and putting forth strong applications for funding while also maintaining their youth focus, flexibility, and informality.

Lastly, providers and advocates should be more involved in helping to ensure that homeless youth are adequately represented in PIT homeless counts. Currently it appears that youth homelessness is on a downward trend according to PIT counts, though this is contrary to findings by the Department of Education. In addition, estimates of youth homeless nationally suggest that current PIT counts are underrepresenting the number of youth who experience homelessness. Ensuring that all youth experiencing homelessness are counted can help ensure that investing in youth homelessness is a justifiable need for a CoC to prioritize investment in. An even further step to help ensure that all vulnerable and homeless youth are counted and represented would be to expand the HUD definition of homelessness to include those who are unstably housed like "couch surfers." Current exclusions create barriers to access for youth to receive services.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, as explored more thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 5, there are inaccuracies in the data examined in this dissertation. These data have been aggregated from CoCs across the country over a span of five years resulting from the input and

interpretation of hundreds if not thousands of humans inevitably leading to random error. In the process of integrating these data, there was also a significant amount of hand-matching undertaken by myself that has introduced an additional layer of random human error. One of my central arguments in Chapter 5 is that these data are inconsistent which poses a problem for data-driven decision making. That said, these data do provide a basis upon which HUD funding decisions are made, so there is some logic to using the same data flawed data to understand trends in funding results.

Another data issue is that there are an unknown number of programs that exist to address youth homelessness without providing any "beds" to be counted in the HIC data. Even those that do provide beds may not have been included if they are not engaged in information-sharing relationships with their local CoC. Much of the literature about valuing small, specialized, and informal services comes not only from the literature on transitional living, emergency shelter, and rapid rehousing programs—those with beds—but also from literature on case management programs, drop-in centers, and outreach services which are not included in these analyses. Their exclusion makes sense given that such programs are not eligible for HUD CoC funds, but they are also an important part of the sector that should not be overlooked. This dissertation does thoroughly describe HUD's investment in addressing youth homelessness, but it should not be interpreted as indicative of an overall "government" or "public" response to youth homelessness which is much wider in scope, including the RHYA, Chaffee funds, and investment from state and local governments across the country.

Inaccuracies may also be introduced by using NTEE codes as the source of information on organization type. Organizations continually change and adapt to changing social conditions and funding opportunities, but NTEE codes are attached the main purpose of the organization

when it first sought out nonprofit status. In addition, as I recommended to youth homelessness providers in the previous section, CoC project funding applications are not only collaborative by combining all project within a CoC into a single application to HUD, they are also collaborative by project, with multiple organizations collaborating and sharing funds under a single award listing. It may be that smaller organizations are partnering with larger and more established homeless services providers and serving as the primary listing for the award even though funds may be passed through to smaller, more informal providers. Therefore, analysis of the kinds of organizations that are providing youth homelessness programs could be biased to over-represent homeless service providers, larger organizations, and incumbents and obscure collaborative or sub-contracted relationships.

In addition to issues with the data themselves, there is a larger critique to be made about my arguments regarding HUD performance measures and youth homelessness. I make the case in this dissertation that HUD performance measure are a poor fit for assessing the performance of youth homelessness based on the youth homelessness literature. What I did not analyze was the utility of this system for adult or family homelessness. Measures that emphasize short program stays, increased income, and not returning to homelessness may be just as poor a measure of success for any homeless person as they are for youth. I take it at face value that such a system "sounds good" to policy-makers, but I do not want to leave the impression that I believe these measures to be appropriate for adults, families, or any other special population experiencing homelessness. Assessing the overall fitness of these measures with the realities of a more general homeless population is outside the scope of this research, but further exploration and critique of these measures for the homelessness system overall seems justified.

A final limitation is the inherent challenge of doing large scale research with administrative data: lack of nuance and lack of context. These kinds of data have an advantage of a large number of observations but a limited number of variables for each. While I do believe that I was able to collect a good range of important descriptors at the CoC, organization, and project level, these data lack the perspective and perceptions of relevant actors at these various levels. To some extent, this is a strength in that these data are not subject to the biases of individual perception. But this is also a weakness in that they cannot reveal the circumstances that surround the results. For example, we do not know whether the low rate of youth programs receiving CoC funds is because they have applied for funds they did not receive, if they have determined that it is not worthwhile to apply for funds, or if they are not aware that CoC funding could be awarded to youth homelessness programs. We also do not know if the reason for lower levels of funding is because a major community foundation or local government has taken up the cause by providing generous funding to these programs, freeing up space for other programs to secure CoC funds. The relatively blunt instrument of administrative data leaves all the "why" and "how" questions unanswered.

Future Research

The overall conclusions of this dissertation point to a few potential directions for future research. First, the role of RHYA funding within this population of providers, and how RHYA and CoC funds may complement or replace one another has not been explored in this data. In order to have a more complete picture of the federal government's response to addressing youth homelessness, the tensions and synergies between these two funding streams should be analyzed. It would be helpful to compare the organizational characteristics in terms of size and emphasis on either youth, homelessness, or something else among organizations that receive RHYA

funding, CoC funding, both or neither. This would also provide an interesting contrast in terms of the differing accountability mechanisms and application processes for each funding stream.

Building on those findings, another potential line of inquiry would be to dig deeper into the financial health of youth homeless services providers. I made the assumption in this discussion section that receiving HUD CoC funding could provide organizations with increased financial stability during lean economic times. Future analysis could examine more detailed financial metrics over time, including operating margins and debt to asset ratios, including looking at how this group of organizations will weather the pandemic recession. Differences in financial health among organizations that have received CoC or RHYA funding or neither could be examined to determine the benefits or burdens of receiving these funds.

Finally, additional quantitative and qualitative research is required to determine the optimal program models, goals, and settings for producing long term positive outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness. Few longitudinal studies have looked at long term outcomes, few studied have compared various program models such as transitional and rapid rehousing, and overall much more is known about the vulnerabilities the population faces than the best interventions to treat and prevent the hardships these youth experience. Increasing knowledge in these areas overall is one of the stated goals of the YHDP, and time will tell what findings and policy innovations will result. It is my sincere hope that HUD continues to make data publicly available so that researchers can endeavor to understand the impacts of HUD policies and grantmaking.

In conclusion, the evidence presented in this dissertation indicates that while many youth homelessness programs are being funded through the HUD CoC program, some—perhaps the

very programs most likely to achieve successful outcomes with this vulnerable population—continue to be left out in the cold. If HUD and CoCs follow the policy and practice recommendations to more fairly assess the performance of youth homelessness programs, we may be able to strengthen our response to youth homelessness and better address this important social problem.

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Appendix A

There are major concerns with the validity of PIT counts of homeless youth, as explored thoroughly in Chapter 5. This presents a challenge for the analyses conducted in Chapter 3 that include estimates of each CoC's homeless youth counts in the models. To omit the PIT count of youth altogether might appear to bias the model due to the omission of a key variable. Although the limitations of the PIT count are acknowledged in Chapters 2 and 3, I decided to use the PIT count of homeless youth for two reasons. First, while it may not be as accurate as one would hope, it is nevertheless the only estimate we have that is broken down to the CoC level. Second, despite its limitations, HUD uses the PIT estimates of homelessness in their formula to determine CoC's level of need (PPRN). If the estimate is going to be used by HUD, it seems intuitive that a model to predict HUD's behavior in terms of funding levels should include the numbers upon which they rely to make their determinations.

Tables 9 and 10 compare results of the four models presented in Chapter 3 with four new models that omit the PIT count from the model. The tables indicate that when the count of homeless youth in removed, it generally increases the effect size of organizational size. Pseudo r-squared values are only slightly less, indicating that the inclusion or exclusion does not make an important difference between models.

Table 9. Regression Results for Models Predicting Whether there is CoC Investment in Youth Programming, with and without PIT count

	CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program In 2016			CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program In 2016			CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program 2014-2018			CoC Funds At Least One Youth Program 2014-2018		
Independent Variables	OR	SE	p	OR	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
CoC-Year Variables												
CoC Award	2.1	.37	.00	2.8	.42	.00	30	16	.00	52	29	.00
Homeless Youth Count	1.6	.29	.01	OMITTED			2.1	.23	.00	OMITTED		
Year	n/a			n/a			1.3	.11	.00	1.2	.10	.01
CoC-Level Variables												
Poverty Rate	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	.02	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a
Urban CoC	2.8	.97	.00	2.4	.80	.01	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a
	N=290 Pseudo R2=.27			N=290 Pseudo R2=.25			N=1446 observations N=290 CoCs			N=1446 observations N=290 CoCs		

NOTE—all variables include YHDP funding; All models are significant at p<.001

Table 10. Regression Results for Models Predicting Proportion of CoC Investment in Youth Programming, with and without PIT count

	Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs In 2016			Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs In 2016			Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs 2014-2018			Percent of CoC Funds to Youth Programs 2014-2018		
Independent Variables	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
CoC-Year Variables												
CoC Award	-.05	.04	.13	.14	.03	.00	.50	.10	.00	.62	.10	.00
Homeless Youth Count	.29	.04	.00	OMITTED			.33	.06	.00	OMITTED		
Year		n/a			n/a		.08	.01	.00	.05	.01	.00
CoC-Level Variables												
Poverty Rate	-4.9	.83	.00	-3.9	.79	.00	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a
Urban CoC	.64	.08	.00	.56	.07	.00	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a
	N=290 CoCs Pseudo R2=.07			N=290 CoCs Pseudo R2=.05			N=1426 observations N=290 CoCs			N=1426 observations N=290 CoCs		

NOTE—all variables include YHDP funding; All models are significant at p<.001

Appendix B

This section includes details of the regression model of the System Performance Measures at the CoC level described at the end of Chapter 5. Details on the source of data on System Performance Measures is included in Chapter 2; these data were also made publicly available via an excel spreadsheet posted to the HUD Resource Exchange, and they contain data from 2015 to 2018 at the CoC level. These regressions followed a similar approach to that used in other analyses in this dissertation with a multi-level model controlling for year with all variables mean-centered. Table 11 shows regression outputs for each of the three outcome variables, including return to homelessness rates at the 6, 12, and 24 month mark of program exit. These variables are predicted by the number of youth beds in youth programs in the CoC, also log-transformed and mean-centered. Adding either the poverty rate or the number of homeless youth in the CoC did not contribute significantly to the model.

Table 11. Regression Results for Models Predicting System Performance Measures

	Six Month Return to Homelessness Rate 2015-2018			One Year Return to Homelessness Rate 2015-2018			Two Year Return to Homelessness Rate 2015-2018		
Independent Variables	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
CoC-Year Variables									
Youth Beds in Youth Programs	.005	.001	.00	.006	.00	.00	.007	.002	.00
CoC Award	.00	.00	.99	.00	.00	.85	.00	.00	.23
Year	.00	.00	.66	.00	.00	.75	.00	.00	.26
CoC-Level Variables									
Urban CoC	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a	>0	>0	n/a
	N=1167 observations N=298 CoCs			N=1167 observations N=298 CoCs			N=1167 observations N=298 CoCs		

NOTE—all variables include YHDP funding; All models are significant at p<.01