

# Ohio Balance of State Continuum of Care VI-SPDAT Instructional Guide

## Background

The Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Prescreen Tool (VI-SPDAT) is an assessment tool that helps providers prioritize clients and points them to the most appropriate form of assistance.

The VI-SPDAT helps communities to determine the level of need of persons experiencing homelessness quickly and match them to the most appropriate, rather than the most intensive housing interventions available. In some cases, the VI-SPDAT may help make the case for Permanent Supportive Housing. In other cases, it may encourage practitioners to choose Rapid Rehousing or to not offer housing interventions when clients are statistically likely to resolve their homeless situation on their own. While the tool is rooted in exhaustive research, service providers should use the recommended intervention to inform housing intervention decisions.

## VI-SPDAT Guidance

### When the VI-SPDAT is Administered

After an individual or household has entered the emergency shelter/crisis response system, completion of an assessment helps determine the level of need of the persons experiencing homelessness and helps inform referral decisions to connect them to the most appropriate housing or service intervention to end homelessness quickly.

The Ohio BoSCoC Coordinated Entry Systems Standards (CESS) outline the process for VI-SPDAT administration as follows:

### **All emergency shelter/crisis response providers' complete the VI-SPDAT on all households in shelter as outlined below:**

- The VI-SPDAT should be completed no sooner than 5 days after shelter entry, and no later than 8 days after entry.
- Results of the VI-SPDAT should be recorded in HMIS, per the Ohio BoSCoC HMIS Policies and Procedures and Data Quality Standards.

### **Emergency shelter/crisis response providers complete the VI-SPDAT immediately, or take other action, in the following cases:**

- Any individual encountered during outreach that is living in an unsheltered location and must remain unsheltered (i.e. individual declines shelter or limited bed/hotel voucher availability) must be assessed immediately.
- If a resident seems to need assistance to exit shelter ASAP for their well being (e.g.

- exhibiting severe mental health needs/issues), assessment may be done immediately.
- Individuals/households with previous episodes of literal homelessness, including those identified as chronically homeless, must have their assessment done immediately at entry into the shelter.
    - Information about past episodes of literal homelessness must be collected during the intake process (and entered into HMIS for HMIS participating shelters). This data should be used to identify households needing immediate assessment.
  - Homeless veterans are immediately referred to the local SSVF provider. No assessment needs to be done by the shelter provider unless the veteran has declined SSVF assistance or is determined to be ineligible for VA assistance.
    - In this case, the emergency shelter/crisis response provider will follow the procedures outlined in Component 7: Determining and Making Referrals,
  - Individuals/households should be re-assessed under the following circumstances:
    - The nature of homelessness has changed significantly, i.e., someone has become seriously ill, a head of household change, or any situation that renders the individual or household eligible for greater or lesser intensity of services.

## **Using the VI-SPDAT**

### **Introducing the VI-SPDAT to Clients**

How the VI-SPDAT is introduced to clients can have significant implications. Therefore, it is important that every assessor utilize an introductory script during assessment so clients understand what the VI-SPDAT is, why it is being used, how the results will be used, and issues surrounding privacy.

The VI-SPDAT includes an opening script. While you do not have to use the VI-SPDAT Opening Script, everyone must utilize some introductory script when assessing clients. Every assessor in your region, regardless of organization completing the VI-SPDAT, should use the same introductory script. If the region decides to utilize a script other than the VI-SPDAT Opening Script, the script must highlight the following information:

- The name of the assessor and their affiliation (organization that employs them, volunteer as part of a Point in Time Count, etc.)
- The purpose of the VI-SPDAT being completed
- That it usually takes less than 7 minutes to complete
- That only “Yes,” “No,” or one-word answers are being sought
- That any question can be skipped or refused
- Where the information is going to be stored
- That if the participant does not understand a question that clarification can be provided
- The importance of relaying accurate information to the assessor and not feeling that there is a correct or preferred answer that they need to provide, nor information they need to conceal

## VI-SPDAT Tools

There are three tools in the VI-SPDAT series, which include the VI-SPDAT for Individuals, VI-SPDAT for families (F-VI-SPDAT) and the VI-SPDAT for Transition Age Youth (TAY-VI-SPDAT).

### VI-SPDAT 2.0 for Individuals

Use when the household is a single person that is 25 years of age and older.

### VI-SPDAT 2.0 for Families (F-VI-SPDAT)

Use when the household includes more than one person. The F-VI-SPDAT can be used on a household with or without children. If the household presents with no children, but identifies as wanting to live together, complete a F-VI-SPDAT. If they have flexibility and would consider living separately you can complete two VI-SPDAT for single adults.

### VI-SPDAT for Transition Age Youth (TAY-VI-SPDAT)

Use when the household is a single person that is 24 years of age and younger. If the TAY household includes more than one person (with or without children), use the F-VI-SPDAT.

Visit [COHHIO's Coordinated Entry page](#) to access the tools. Both the print and fillable versions are available.

**Note:** All BoSCoC providers must use the VI-SPDAT for individuals and families. The TAY-VI-SPDAT will be implemented incrementally at the regional level. No region should be using the TAY-VI-SPDAT unless you have gone through the Ohio BoSCoC TAY-VI-SPDAT training process.

## Common Challenges

As Ohio BoSCoC providers have administered the tool, common challenges have been raised. This section provides further explanation or proposed solutions for how best to address these concerns.

### Yes or No Responses

Some providers have expressed concern about questions being overly personal, but requiring a yes or no response. VI-SPDAT questions are designed to elicit “yes” or “no” answers. This way if a client is asked about having engaged in a (list of) risky behaviors and the particular behavior they engaged in is not on the list, then the phrase, “anything like that” should elicit a “yes” or “no” response. In addition, assessors do not want to know which behavior was engaged in, just whether or not there was risky behavior.

While we recognize the tool is designed to elicit these responses, we encourage providers to take a person-centered approach when administering the tool, and suggest that assessors provide time after the assessment for clients to discuss any sensitive topics that may have been covered.

## Trusting the VI-SPDAT and the Resulting Score

Some providers have expressed concern that the score the VI-SPDAT generates as a result of the assessment does not accurately reflect their client's true need for services. There are at least two important points to keep in mind here:

- The VI-SPDAT is a scientifically developed instrument employing research-based practice. Experience using the tool has shown providers that they can trust the results; in addition:
- In the BoSCoC we encourage providers to utilize the VI-SPDAT score to inform housing referrals. If there are instances that the score appears to not adequately capture the level of need, staff may advocate for their clients using information at their disposal (i.e. information shared during case management) that is not reflected in the score.
- Note: the VI-SPDAT Online Training mentions "housing encouragement" as a score level. This is the same as "no housing intervention," which is how it is listed on the VI-SPDAT tool.

## Clarifying Questions for Informational Purposes

Some providers have expressed concern over clients not understanding terms used in VI-SPDAT questions. As referenced above in the opening script, if a participant or assessor does not understand a question, clarification can be provided. In order to not alter the question in a way that could impact scoring, focus on providing clarity on terms within the question rather than reframing the question.

## VI-SPDAT Training

Ohio BoSCoC VI-SPDAT Training includes the following:

- VI-SPDAT Instructional Guide (REQUIRED): providers must review this document in its entirety.
- VI-SPDAT Online Training (REQUIRED): providers must complete the training in its entirety. The training features guidance from OrgCode on the VI-SPDAT as well as instruction on how to administer the tool. The training is in a quiz format and each provider must score a 31 out of 38 to pass. You will receive three chances to pass the quiz.
  - [Click to access the VI-SPDAT Online Training Quiz](#)
  - **Note: OrgCode is a Canadian organization so there are TWO instances where the correct answer in this training will differ from what we deem the correct answer in the Ohio BoSCoC. Since OrgCode requires us to administer the training as it presents on their website, we could not change the answer to these questions. The following circumstances are when the correct response on the quiz differs from the proper way to do things in our system:**
    - "Couch Surfing" or "Doubled Up" as Literally Homeless: in Canada, this is considered literally homeless, but in the United States couch surfing/doubled up situations ARE NOT considered literally homeless.

- Medical Training Requirement: in Canada there is a medical training requirement to complete Section D of the VI-SPDAT. That is not the case here. You DO NOT need to receive additional training to complete the VI-SPDAT.
- HMIS Training (REQUIRED): providers must familiarize themselves with the HMIS workflows and view the HMIS VI-SPDAT training video available at: [VI-SPDAT Training Video](#). After reviewing the workflows and training video, each provider must take the HMIS VI-SPDAT quiz and score a 5 out of 6 to pass. You will receive three chances to pass the quiz.
  - [Click to access the HMIS VI-SPDAT Quiz](#)
  - HMIS workflows (2.8 Coordinated Entry Workflow and 2.7 Unsheltered Clients-Outreach) can be found here: [Workflows](#)

**Note: If you don't pass the quiz after three attempts and are locked out of the system, please contact the HMIS team at [hmis@cohhio.org](mailto:hmis@cohhio.org) to have your account reset.**

VI-SPDAT Mock Interviews and Shadowing (Recommended): new users may conduct mock interviews or shadow users who have experience administering the VI-SPDAT. To protect client confidentiality, any user that shadows staff assessing a client must be a HMIS end user unless the staff member shadowing works in the same organization and has signed consent from the client. Coordinated Entry staff is available to shadow VI-SPDAT assessments and provide additional guidance upon request.

**For more information and assistance, contact CE Staff at [ohioboscoc@cohhio.org](mailto:ohioboscoc@cohhio.org)**