SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Housing for Health
PARTNERSHIP

WHY SANTA CRUZ HOUSING FOR HEALTH IS MOVING AWAY FROM THE VI-SPDAT

What is the VI-SPDAT and why did Santa Cruz County choose it?

- The VI-SPDAT is a tool used by coordinated entry systems to assess the vulnerability of individuals experiencing homelessness. It contains a set of questions about a person or household's experiences and characteristics which generate a numeric score. That score is typically used to place people on a ranked list to allocate housing and support resources.
- In addition to giving each person a score, the VI-SPDAT scoring rubric includes recommendations for the type of intervention each household should be offered based on their score.
- The VI-SPDAT was created in 2013 by Community Solutions[1] and OrgCode Consulting[2] by merging two prior tools developed for different reasons - the Vulnerability Index (VI) for determining who is most likely to die on the streets, and the Service Planning and Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) which was a case management planning tool.
- As part of its mandate for communities to implement coordinated entry, HUD required communities to use "one or more standardized assessment tools."[3] The VI-SPDAT came standard in many HMIS systems, was readily available for free, and fulfilled HUD's requirement.[4]
- Many communities, including Santa Cruz County, adopted it.

Criticisms of the VI-SPDAT

- Some of the questions in the VI-SPDAT are considered deeply personal (such as questions about personal unsafe practices and substance use) and assessors and participants have reported it is uncomfortable to ask or be asked these questions, especially upon a first meeting.
- In 2019, it was widely reported that the VI-SPDAT produced higher vulnerability scores for White individuals as compared to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) despite their historic and ongoing over-representation among individuals experiencing homelessness.[5] Additional research since that time has corroborated these findings.
- The VI-SPDAT questions are generally set up as yes/no questions with each question valued at one point. It cannot measure acuity or be weighted to reflect different priorities.
- The VI-SPDAT is deficit-oriented and does not help to identify where participants have strengths or resources that can assist them.

Discontinuation by developer

- In December 2020, in the wake of the findings related to racial disparities, Orgcode Consulting announced they were phasing out the VI-SPDAT and in 2022 they will cease all support for the tool.[6]

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[1] https://community.solutions/
[2] https://www.orgcode.com/
[3] https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5340/coordinated-entry-core-elements/
[4] https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/578.7
[5] https://c4innovates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CES_Racial_Equity-Analysis_Oct112019.pdf
[6] https://www.orgcode.com/blog/the-time-seems-right-lets-begin-the-end-of-the-vi-spdat