# Annotated 2023 HMIS Release of Information

## Consumer's Informed Consent & Release of Information Authorization



Sacramento Steps Forward ("SSF") is a nonprofit organization that partners with local, state, and federal agencies to accomplish the shared goal of ending homelessness. By partnering with these various agencies, SSF focuses on strengthening the community's response to homelessness through the use of data and analytics to drive system-level changes, prioritize racial equality, and enhance access to services. SSF uses a local information technology system called the Homeless Management Information System ("HMIS") to collect Protected Personal Information ("PPI") from people experiencing homelessness. Though not limited to HMIS, local partnering agencies also use local database systems to collect PPI from people experiencing homelessness.

**THE PPI THAT IS COLLECTED MAY CONSIST OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Name
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Gender
- Ethnicity and Race
- Program Entry Date
- Program Exit Date
- Residence Prior to Project Entry
- Homeless History
- Zip Code of Last Permanent Address
- Family Composition
- Employment Status
- Veteran Status
- HIV/AIDS
- Domestic Violence
- Mental Health
- Disabling Condition
- Alcohol & Drug
- Legal history/information
- Contact Information
- Photo (If applicable)
- Income and Non-Cash Benefits information (sources and amounts of household income, employment information, work skills)
- Housing information (may include address, type of housing, homeless status, and reason for homelessness

Through the use of the HMIS and other local database systems, SSF and local partnering agencies are able to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided to the homeless to better understand homelessness and improve the delivery of services to the homeless. SSF and local partnering agencies protect the PPI that is collected and entered into the HMIS by limiting access to the database and by limiting with whom the PPI may be shared, in compliance with the standards set forth by federal, state, and local regulations governing the confidentiality of PPI. Only agencies that have entered into an HMIS Agency Participation Agreement ("Participating Agencies") have access to the HMIS and the local database systems. Every person employed or associated with a Participating Agency that is granted access to the PPI must sign an End-User Agreement to maintain the security and confidentiality of the PPI.

The PPI will be used to:

a. Produce a client profile at intake that will be shared by collaborating agencies.
b. Produce anonymous, aggregate-level reports regarding the use of services.
c. Track individual program-level outcomes.
d. Identify unfilled service needs and plan for the provision of new services.
e. Allocate resources among agencies engaged in the provision of services.

## BY SIGNING THIS AUTHORIZATION, I UNDERSTAND AND AUTHORIZE THAT

✓ The use or disclosure of PPIs are for activities described in the Privacy Statement.

✓ Use of my likeness in a photograph will be viewable by Participating Agencies and may be cropped or edited, as needed. I waive my right to approve or inspect the finished photograph.

✓ PPI concerning physical or mental health problems will <u>not</u> be shared with Participating Agencies in any way that identifies me.

- ✓ Participating Agencies have signed agreements to treat PPI in a professional and confidential manner. I have the right to view the list of Participating Agencies and their policies regarding the security and confidentiality of PPI.
- ✓ All employees of Participating Agencies who will have access to PPI have signed End User Agreements to maintain confidentiality regarding my PPI.
- ✓ Signing this Authorization is optional and does not guarantee that I will receive assistance, nor will I be denied assistance if I choose not to sign this Authorization.
- ✓ Federal, state, and local regulations govern the confidentiality of PPI. If I choose to not sign this Authorization, my PPI cannot be disclosed, unless otherwise provided for in the regulations.
- ✓ Auditors or funders who have legal rights to review the work of SSF, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development may see my PPI.
- ✓ Sacramento and Yolo Continuum of Cares (CoCs), local partnering agencies, and the HMIS Vendor may see my PPI.
- ✓ I may revoke this Authorization by signing a “Consumer Revocation of Informed Consent and Release of Information Authorization form.” If I revoke this Authorization, all PPI already in the HMIS will be privatized or anonymized and other data collected will be processed as described in the “Consumer Revocation of Informed Consent and Release of Information Authorization form” and will take into effect.
- ✓ I have had an opportunity to ask questions about this Authorization.
- ✓ I have the right to receive a verbal explanation of the contents of this Authorization.
- ✓ I have the right to an interpreter if English is not my primary language.
- ✓ I have the right to receive a copy of this Authorization.
- ✓ This release is valid for seven (7) years from the date of my signature below.

**By signing below, I hereby authorize that any PPI entered into HMIS for myself and/or my dependents (under the age of 18 years old) can be shared with HMIS Participating Agencies described in this Authorization, as is allowed by local, state, and federal laws.**

Client’s name must be legibly printed.
**Consumer’s Name (Print)**

Client’s must sign and date the document in pen. | Date Required
**Consumer’s Signature** | **Date**

Staff’s name must be legibly printed.
**Agency Personnel Name (Print)**

Staff must sign and date the document in pen. | Date Required
**Agency Personnel Signature** | **Date**

*NOTE: The ROI start date must match the date the client signed the document, or it will be invalid.*

# Explaining ROI Consent to Clients

The Release of Information (ROI) is a vital part of serving all homeless clients in Sacramento and Yolo County. All staff who are working directly with the homeless population must have a clear understanding of this document so they can properly explain it to their clients. We highly recommend that all HMIS users read through this document and understand it. Here is a summary:

**THE HMIS ROI…**

- … explains that the HMIS system is a shared database for local organizations that provide services to homeless clients.
- … informs clients exactly what kinds of information is going to be put in HMIS – specifically their Protected Personal Information (PPI) and what that information will be used for.
- … provides the clients with a list of their rights and explains the limitations of this agreement.
- … is valid for seven years from the date it is signed.

**BY SIGNING THE HMIS ROI, THE CLIENT IS…**

- … giving permission to have their PPI shared only with people and organizations that have access to the HMIS system. The HMIS system is very secure. Everyone who has access to HMIS has passed a background check and has signed an agreement that prohibits the use of the client's PPI for any purpose other than serving the homeless community.
- … allowing the agency to send referrals, coordinate services, and help the clients get what they need as quickly and easily as possible.
- … giving the organization specific permission to complete shelter and housing referrals for the client, giving them greater access to both temporary and permanent housing opportunities.

**BY SIGNING THE HMIS ROI, THE CLIENT IS NOT…**

- … giving permission to have their PPI shared with law enforcement, creditors, or the public.
- … giving permission for the client's physical or mental health information to be shared in any way that would identify them.

The client has the right to take back their permission (aka revoke the authorization) at any time. To do so, the client just needs to sign the Consumer Revocation of Informed Consent and Release of Information Authorization form and then it needs to be sent to the HMIS Department.

# When a Client Refuses to Share their PPI

Sometimes clients will agree to having their information shared with one staff member and then refuse the next day with someone else. There are a lot of things that can impact a client's ability to understand the ROI including physical and mental health issues, substance use, and the environment they are in. When a client refuses to provide consent to have their information shared, please take the following steps to make sure they understand their choice.

1. **Talk to the client.** Ask them what their concerns are and see if you can provide them with some additional information. If they are concerned about identity theft, explain that everyone who has access to HMIS has completed background checks and all activity in HMIS is closely monitored. If they are concerned about legal issues, reassure them that the information in the system is restricted to organizations and agencies who are serving the homeless. The police, sheriff, and courts do not have access to HMIS.

2. **Check to see if the client is already in HMIS.** Have they provided consent in the past?Do they have a current ROI? Explain that this is the same permission that they previously agreed to when they were being served by another agency.

3. **Ask the client about their goals.** Are they looking for housing? Referrals to mental health or substance abuse programs? Rental assistance? Explain how providing permission to have their PPI shared between agencies will allow you to help them get access to the resources they need to meet their goals.

***NOTE: Please make sure the client is sober and coherent when you ask them to sign the ROI.***

# Client Consent Scenarios

It's easy when a client consents to having their information in HMIS. Either the client signs the ROI electronically or a scan of their signed paper ROI is uploaded into their client profile.

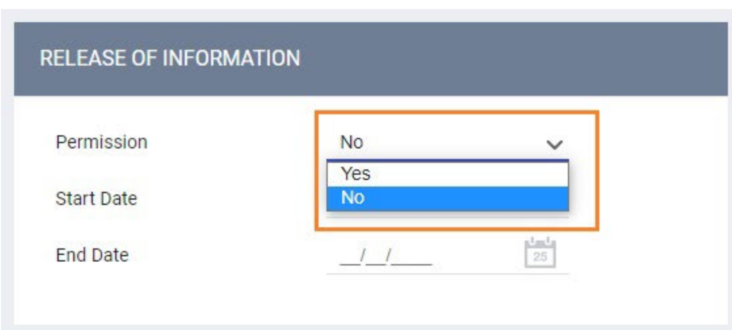
However, if a client doesn't want their information shared in HMIS, the HMIS user will need to do a little more work to figure out how best to honor their decision. First, we need to check HMIS for this client. The next steps we take will depend on whether the client is already in HMIS and what, if any, agencies they have worked with in the past.

## The Client Has Never Been in HMIS and Never Signed an ROI

First, we need to confirm that the client is definitely not in HMIS. To make sure we aren't simply missing them, we need to make sure that we search HMIS thoroughly by searching for following:

- First 3 letters of the client's first and last name (Santa Claus would be "San Cla")
- The last four digits of the client's social security number
- The client's date of birth
- Any alternative spelling of the client's name (Shawn vs. Sean or Jenny vs. Jenni)
- Any of the other members of the client's household (if applicable)

When we have confirmed that the client is not in HMIS, we can begin creating a new client profile for the client. We will need to add information about the client's ROI status before we can save the client profile. The Release of Information box is on the top right of the enrollment screen.



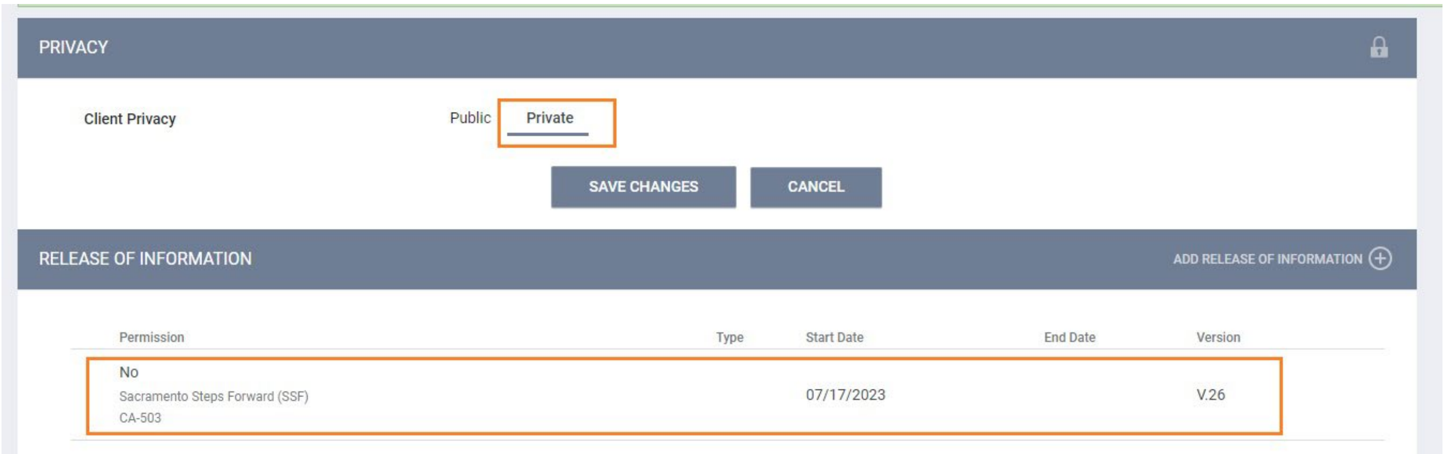


Choose "No" for permission and put today's date. There is no need to add an end date. Once we have filled this in, we will be able to save the client's new profile. When we have finished creating the profile, we need to make the privatize the client's profile.

## MAKING THE CLIENT'S PROFILE PRIVATE

What does it mean to make a client's profile private? When a client's profile is private, they are only visible to HMIS users in one agency (like Sacramento Steps Forward). If a user is logged in from any other agency and searches for this client, they will not be able to find the profile at all.

To make the client's profile private, we need to click on the privacy shield on the top right of the client's profile page. This brings us to the page with the client's privacy settings and all of their release(s) of information (ROIs).




The top section of the page shows the Client Privacy option. All clients default to a client privacy setting of "Public". To change the client's profile from "Public" to "Private", we simply click on the word "Private" and hit the "Save Changes" button. In the image above, we can see this client's proficle is set to private because that word is underlined in grey. We can also see that the client's profile is private because there is an image of a lock on the top right side of the screen. That lock will also show up on the top right side of the first title box on many of the client's pages, including the client profile, to indicate that this client account is private. This client account is now correctly configured for someone who does not want to share their data in HMIS.

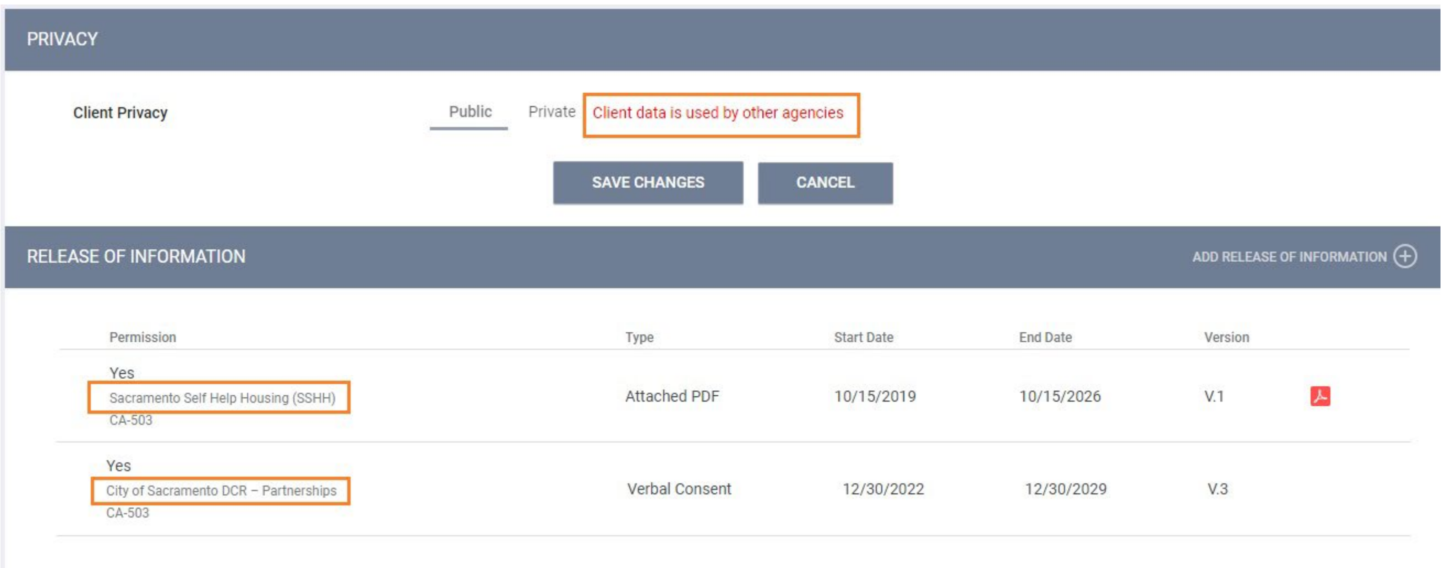
## The Client is in HMIS But Has Never Worked With Any Other Agency

Perhaps the client is already in HMIS but has never worked with any other agencies. While they may have never been enrolled in another agency's program, they may still have been referred to others or had assessments completed by people outside of our agency. To check, we simply click on the client privacy shield to try and privatize the client's profile (as explained above). If the client's information has not been shared with any other agencies, we will be able to privatize the profile. But if there is red text that says, "Client data is being used by other agencies," we will not be able to privatize the profile.

## The Client is in HMIS and Has Worked With Other Agencies

What do we do when we find out that a client who is refusing to have their PPI shared is already in HMIS and has already worked with other agencies? By being in HMIS already, this client has previously consented to having their PII shared. How can we help them revoke that consent?

In the example below the client already has two ROIs in the system. They have worked with staff from both Sacramento Self Help Housing and a program under the City of Sacramento DCR – Partnerships agency. Regardless of whether these ROIs are still active or expired, the client has previously given consent to have their information shared.




If the client is certain that now they do not want their information shared in HMIS, we will need to anonymize this client. Here are the steps you will take and the actions the HMIS staff will take to honor this client's request.

1. The client will need to sign the Consumer Revocation of Informed Consent and Release of Information Authorization form, which officially notifies us that they no longer want their information to be shared in the system. Once this document has been signed and dated (by hand and in ink), please send this document to the HMIS Department.

2. When we receive the document, the HMIS department will be anonymizing the client's profile. This includes removing all identifiable data from the client's record, including their name, social security number, and birthdate. We will remove all files and documents from the client's record and save them on our secure server. We will also anonymize all dependents connected to this client and remove any members of their household who are 18 or over and are still willing to have their information shared in HMIS. Please read more about how this process in our Anonymize a Client job aid.

3. Once the HMIS Department has fully anonymized the client's records, we will contact all agencies who have previously worked with the client to provide them with the information they will need to locate the client in HMIS. The client's HMIS UID will remain the same and will be listed as their first name. All anonymized clients will have the last name of "Anonymous," which will help us manage these profiles in our reports. Please email HMIS with the client's unique identifier if you need copies of their documentation.

4. Once they are anonymized, you can enroll them into your program as you would any other client. Document your work with the client as you normally would, but keep in mind that you should refrain from using the client's name or any other information that may reveal their identity to an HMIS user in another agency.

## Additional ROI Resources

We hope that this document is helpful for understanding the HMIS ROI and learning how to share that information with clients. Below we have listed a few other ROI job aids that can provide you more information about the different ROI categories, the complexity of documenting ROIs for minors, and the custom reports we have created to help our community partners manage their ROI related data quality. If you need any assistance with ROIs in general, we highly recommend that you review one or all of these job aids.

- ROI Categories
- Adding ROIs for a Household
- Running the ROI Error Reports