

# Clutter–Hoarding Scale®

## A Residential Observational Tool

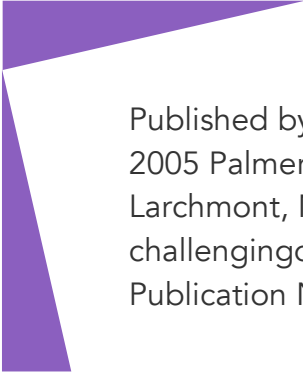
To Assess the Volume of Clutter and Environmental Risks

FIVE LEVELS | FIVE CATEGORIES



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Published by the Institute for Challenging Disorganization®  
2005 Palmer Avenue, #1068  
Larchmont, NY, U.S.A. 10538  
challengingdisorganization.org  
Publication Number 016

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Acknowledgments for the original version, 2003. The NSGCD Clutter & Hoarding Scale was written by Sheila Delson, CPO-CD®, Randi B. Lyman, CPO-CD®, Lynn Mino, CPO-CD®, and Heidi Schulz, CPO-CD®. It is based on the original NSGCD Clutter Hoarding Scale written by Sheila Delson, Cindy Glovinsky, Terry Prince, and Heidi Schulz.

ICD® gratefully acknowledges the writers of the 2011 revised edition: Sheila Delson, CPO-CD®, Randi B. Lyman, CPO-CD®, Lynn Mino, CPO-CD®, and Heidi Schulz, CPO-CD®; and the original writers, Sheila Delson, Cindy Glovinsky, Terry Prince, and Heidi Schulz.

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### **DEIB Statement**

As a global body providing education and resources, ICD® is committed to cultivating diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging (DEIB). Thank you for helping us make ICD® a place where everyone feels supported and valued.

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## SCOPE OF THE SCALE

### *For Use in Residential Observational Assessments*

The Institute for Challenging Disorganization® (ICD®) developed the Clutter–Hoarding Scale® (C–HS®) as an observational guideline tool for assessing solely the residential environments. The scale focuses exclusively on environmental severity and functional impact, independent of psychiatric diagnosis. It is designed to support both non-clinical and clinical professionals in assessing safety, sanitation, and usability in residential settings.

The C–HS® assesses various types of dwellings. It focuses on the condition of the interior space and its functionality. This tool is not meant for clinical diagnosis or to evaluate an individual's behavior or tendencies. The five scale levels measure different amounts of clutter, ranging from spaces with minimal clutter (Level I - green) to spaces with extreme clutter (Level V - red).

- The C–HS® was created specifically for use in the assessment of a home's interior, except where the outside structure affects the overall safety of the interior.
- Any kind of dwelling can be assessed with the C–HS®
- The C–HS® is not intended to assess outbuildings used for storage.
- The C–HS® is not for diagnostic purposes or psychological evaluations of individuals. The scale only assesses the volume of clutter and environmental risks.
- ICD® is not responsible for any work performed by an organizing professional, related professional, or any other person when using the C–HS®.
- The C–HS® helps to evaluate the degree of clutter in a dwelling, from Level I as the lowest, where the quantity of clutter is minimal, to Level V as the highest, where the clutter is extreme.

***For Use as a Guideline Tool by Organizing Professionals,  
Related Professionals, and Collaborating Team Members***

The C–HS® provides definitive assessment parameters regarding health and safety issues and presents a potential range of environments where organizing professionals, related professionals, and individuals might choose to work.

ICD® acknowledges and defines the following categories of support providers that the C–HS® may serve:

**Organizing Professionals**

Organizing professionals are those who receive remuneration for organizing services, maintain professional standards and ethics defined by association affiliations, and continually educate themselves in the organizing field and/or specialty areas.

**Related Professionals**

Related professionals are those whose professional relationships with individuals specifically target issues of challenging disorganization. Related professionals include, but are not limited to first responders, physical and mental health professionals, legal professionals, municipality disciplines, educators, researchers, and coaches.

**Collaborating Team Members**

Collaborating team members may include any combination of organizing professionals, related professionals, therapists, coaches, family members, friends and community service agencies. All those whose professional or personal relationships with an individual involve them in the process of creating and maintaining environmental change in the home are considered collaborating team members.



ICD® is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. ICD® mission is to provide education, research, and strategies to benefit people challenged by chronic disorganization and the professionals who work with them.



## PARAMETERS OF THE SCALE

### *Five Levels of ICD® C–HS®*

The C–HS® has five levels. Level I is the lowest on the scale, where the quantity of clutter is minimal; Level V is the highest, where the clutter is extreme. The C–HS® considers that Level III is the pivot point between a household that might be cluttered and a household assessment that may require deeper consideration when working in a hoarded environment.

LEVEL	COLOR	LEVEL OF CLUTTER–HOARDING
I	GREEN	LOW
II	BLUE	GUARDED
III	YELLOW	ELEVATED
IV	ORANGE	HIGH
V	RED	SEVERE

## **Five Assessment Categories**

Within each level are five specific categories that describe the degree of clutter impacting the household functionality.

### **1. Structure and Zoning**

Assessment of access to entrances and exits; function of plumbing, electrical, HVAC (any aspect of heating, ventilation, or air conditioning) systems and appliances; and structural integrity

### **2. Animals**

#### **Wildlife, Pets, and Pests**

Assessment of animal care and pet control; compliance with local animal regulations; assessment for evidence of infestations of pests (rodents, insects, or other vermin)

### **3. Household Functions**

Assessment of safety, functionality, and accessibility of rooms for intended purposes.

### **4. Health and Safety**

Assessment of sanitation levels in the household, air quality and odors, and household management of any kind of medication

### **5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Recommendations for PPE (face masks, gloves, eye shields, or clothing that protects the wearer from environmental health and safety hazards), additional supplies as appropriate to the observational level

# Clutter–Hoarding Scale® > Level I

LEVEL I

GREEN

LOW

Household environment is considered standard with little or no clutter. Special knowledge is always required when working with individuals affected by chronic disorganization and organizing challenges.

<b>Structure and Zoning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All doors, stairways, and windows are accessible</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All plumbing, electrical, and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems are fully functional</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors installed and functional</li> </ul>
<b>Animals Wildlife, Pets, and Pests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate animal control (behavior and sanitation)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Number of animals in compliance with zoning regulations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No evidence of non-pet rodents or insects</li> </ul>
<b>Household Functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No excessive clutter</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All rooms are used for intended purposes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All household appliances are fully functional</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consistent routine housekeeping and maintenance</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Safe and maintained sanitation conditions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Good air quality; no odors, animal or food waste, or natural propane/gas</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medication: appropriately stored, current dates, and childproof lids as indicated</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> PPE Optional</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight, and insect repellent</li> </ul>

# Clutter–Hoarding Scale® > Level II

LEVEL II

BLUE

GUARDED

Household environment with evidence of clutter. Specific knowledge is always required when working with individuals affected by chronic disorganization and organizing challenges.

<b>Structure and Zoning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One major exit blocked</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some plumbing or electrical systems are not fully functional</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors</li> </ul>
<b>Animals Wildlife, Pets and Pests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of inappropriate animal control (behavior and sanitation)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visible or odorous pet waste</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visible pet fur/hair/feathers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects</li> </ul>
<b>Household Functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clutter obstructing some functions of key living areas</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways, and stairs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some household appliances are not fully functional</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent routine housekeeping and maintenance</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate air quality, odors related to dirty dishes, food preparation surfaces, laundry, toilets, sewers, or natural/propane gas.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mildew in the bathroom or kitchen</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medication accessible to others and pets; presence of some expired medication</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Light PPE: as needed and suggested</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Caps (such as baseball caps) or disposable bouffant caps</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Disposable shoe covers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight, and insect repellent</li> </ul>

LEVEL III

YELLOW

ELEVATED

ICD® considers Level III to be the pivot point between a household environment that can be assessed as cluttered and a household assessment that may require the deeper considerations of working in a hoarded environment. Organizing professionals, related professionals, or other individuals who are working with Level III household environments should have advanced knowledge in chronic disorganization and have developed a network of resources, especially mental health professionals.

<p><b>Structure and Zoning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visible outdoor clutter, minimal garden/backyard maintenance, overflow of recycling materials, furniture, building materials, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> HVAC devices not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sections of the home with light structural damage (having occurred in the preceding six months)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Animals Wildlife, Pets, and Pests</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Animal population exceeds local legal regulations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of inappropriate animal control</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate sanitation (fish tank stagnant, reptile aquarium not well maintained, animal odor and waste, bird droppings)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Audible evidence of pests; medium level of spiderwebs in the house</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Light insect infestation (bedbugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Household Functions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clutter obstructing functions of key living areas</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clutter exists around exits, entrances, hallways, and stairs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> At least one room is not being used for its intended purpose, e.g., items stored in the shower, limited bed access or space</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Several appliances are not fully functional.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate usage of electric appliances and extension cords</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Substandard housekeeping and maintenance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One or two obvious hazardous materials in small quantities, such as chemical spills, broken glass, etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health and Safety</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions (food preparation surfaces heavily soiled, dirty dishes, dirty toilets, visible mildew in bathroom or kitchen)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unhealthy air quality, odors obvious and irritating. Possible natural/propane gas leakage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Garbage cans not in use, full, or overflowing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Presence of accumulated dust, dirt, and debris</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dirty laundry scattered throughout the house</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medication easily accessible to others and pets; presence of expired medication</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medium PPE</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Face masks: surgical mask or particulate respirator mask</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Eye protection and gloves: eyeglasses, safety goggles, medical/industrial grade latex/nitrile gloves</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Disposable coveralls, bouffant caps, work shoes/boots</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight, and insect repellent</li> </ul>

# Clutter–Hoarding Scale® > Level IV

**LEVEL IV**

**ORANGE**

**HIGH**

Household environment requires a coordinated collaborative team of service providers because health, financial, legal, and social issues are frequently involved. Providers might include organizing professionals, health professionals, social workers, legal and financial professionals, pest and animal control officers, biohazard cleaners, licensed contractors. Advanced knowledge in hoarding behavior and coexisting conditions is required.

<b>Structure and Zoning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Excessive outdoor clutter, random broken items, an unattended garden/backyard, piled recycling materials, large pieces of building materials, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> HVAC devices not working for longer than one year</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Structural damage to the home existing for longer than six months</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Water-damaged floors, damaged walls and foundations, broken windows, doors, or plumbing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Odor or evidence of sewer backup</li> </ul>
<b>Animals Wildlife, Pets, and Pests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Animal population exceeds local ordinances</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of poor animal sanitation; destructive behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Excessive spiders and webs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bats, squirrels, rodents in the attic or basement (audible and visible)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medium insect infestation (bedbugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Household Functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Diminished use of and accessibility to key living areas</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Several rooms were cluttered, preventing intended purposes, e.g., items stored in the shower, limited bed access or space</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clutter inhibits access to exits, entrances, hallways, and stairs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate storage of hazardous/combustible materials, e.g., gasoline, leaking paint, or chemicals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Appliances used inappropriately, e.g., fridge being used for storing non-food items</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Improper use of electric space heaters, fans, or extension cords</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rotting food, organic contamination</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Expired, leaking, or buckling cans and/or jars</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dishes and utensils unusable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No linens on beds; sleeping on mattress, chair, or floor; infestation of bedding and/or furniture</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very unhealthy air quality. Obvious mold/mildew; visible moisture or standing water</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medication inappropriately stored and scattered in different places, easily accessible to others and pets; presence of expired medication</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Full PPE</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Face masks: particulate respirator mask, or respirator with organic filter(s)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Safety goggles; medical/industrial grade latex/nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Disposable coveralls, caps, and shoe covers; work shoes/boots</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit, hand sanitizer, headlamp/flashlight, and insect repellent</li> </ul>

# Clutter–Hoarding Scale® > Level V

**LEVEL V**

**RED**

**SEVERE**

Household environment will require intervention, and formal written agreements among the parties should be in place before proceeding. The individual living in Level V conditions might be involved in legal proceedings, such as a conservatorship, guardianship, divorce, custody, eviction, or condemnation proceedings. Health, financial, legal, and complex social issues are common. The team of related professionals needs to be assembled to create and implement clearly defined goals and negotiated timetables. Providers might include organizing professionals, health professionals, social workers, legal and financial professionals, pest and animal control officers, biohazard cleaners, licensed contractors, building management, zoning, fire, and/or safety agencies. The most advanced knowledge and access to resources for hoarding behavior and coexisting conditions are required.

<b>Structure and Zoning</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery; a large quantity of recycling materials, large pieces of furniture, building materials, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate or nonexistent ventilation; HVAC systems not working <input type="checkbox"/> Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors <input type="checkbox"/> Water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors, or plumbing <input type="checkbox"/> Unreliable electricity, no running water, broken sewer/septic systems, and sewer backup <input type="checkbox"/> Irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure
<b>Animals Wildlife, Pets, and Pests</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior, health, and numbers <input type="checkbox"/> Pervasive spiders, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc., depending on the region. <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy insect infestation (bedbugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)
<b>Household Functions</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Key living spaces not usable <input type="checkbox"/> All rooms not used for intended purposes <input type="checkbox"/> Exits, entrances, hallways, and stairs blocked <input type="checkbox"/> Toilets, sinks, and tubs not functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Hazardous conditions obscured by clutter <input type="checkbox"/> Appliances unusable <input type="checkbox"/> Hazardous and primitive use of kerosene, lanterns, candles, and fireplaces/woodstoves as primary sources of heat and/or light
<b>Health and Safety</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Human urine and excrement present <input type="checkbox"/> Rotting food; organic contamination; expired, leaking, or buckled cans and/or jars <input type="checkbox"/> Dishes and utensils buried or non-existent <input type="checkbox"/> Beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation <input type="checkbox"/> Pervasive mold/mildew; moisture or standing water <input type="checkbox"/> Hazardous air quality, intolerable odors <input type="checkbox"/> Medication: current and expired medication commingled; haphazard storage; pills not in containers
<b>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Full PPE required <input type="checkbox"/> Face masks: particulate respirator mask or respirator with organic filter(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Safety goggles; medical/industrial-grade latex/nitrile gloves; heavy-duty work gloves <input type="checkbox"/> Disposable coveralls, caps, and shoe covers; work shoes/boots <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit, hand sanitizer, headlamp/flashlight, and insect repellent



## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

### *Animal Hoarding*

Dr. Gary Patronek, founder of The Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC) (Public Health, 1999), defines animal hoarding as:

HARC's seminal 2006 manual, *Animal Hoarding: Structuring Interdisciplinary Responses to Help People, Animals, and Communities at Risk*,

- *"Having more than the typical number of companion animals*
- *Failing to provide minimal standards of sanitation, space, nutrition, and veterinary care for the animals, failing to provide even minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter, and veterinary care, with this neglect often resulting in illness and death from starvation, spread of infectious disease, and untreated injury or medical condition*
- *Denial of the inability to provide this minimum care and the impact of that failure on the animals, the household, and human occupants of the dwelling*
- *Persistence, despite this failure, in accumulating and controlling animals."*

The costs of animal hoarding intervention can be significant due to requirements for veterinary services, animal housing, litigation, and/or clean-up or demolition. Euthanasia is often the only option for many animals due to ill health, contagious diseases, and the large number of animals being hoarded. The significant and permanent deterioration of a home's sanitary condition can result in building condemnation.

Intervention of animal hoarding falls within multiple jurisdictions, including any of the following state and local government agencies: mental health, public health, aging, child welfare, zoning, building safety, animal control, sanitation, and fish and wildlife. Organizing professionals are cautioned that working with animal hoarding cases will likely involve exposure to complicated and hazardous work environments and require advanced training with a team approach intervention.

## *Severe Domestic Squalor*

Severe domestic squalor (SDS) is a term used to describe homes whose interior conditions have become unsanitary to the point of being a threat to the health and safety of those who live or work in them. Assessment of severe domestic squalor may include the following:

- Accumulated filth and dirt (potentially including animal or human feces)
- Rotting food
- Infestations of rodents and insects
- Months or years of accumulated trash
- Decaying wood
- A few signs of repair efforts
- Broken or non-functioning facilities inside or outside the home

The natural decomposition process of squalid environmental conditions contributes to the dangerous development of surface and airborne molds or other bacteria-laden sludge-like substances in the home.

SDS can occur in various housing situations, including upscale homes and neighborhoods. While SDS often involves hoarding, hoarding does not always lead to squalor. It poses dangers that can be life-threatening. Additionally, SDS is frequently linked to a lack of social contact and mental or physical incapacity.

The client living with Severe Domestic Squalor might be involved in legal proceedings, such as conservatorship, guardianship, divorce, custody, eviction, or condemnation proceedings. In addition to organizing professionals, clients living with SDS require the help of other professionals or community agencies. Reporting concerns to appropriate community agencies is highly recommended for organizing professionals and is legally mandated for many related professions.

## *Disposal of Prescription Drugs*

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends the following:

- Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet or drain unless specifically instructed to do so by the label or attached information sheet. Improperly flushed medications have been found to contribute to excessive groundwater contamination.
- Safe disposal of prescription drugs may be accomplished through community drug take-back programs or household hazardous waste collection.
- If a drug take-back program is not available, the FDA recommends the following:
  1. Take your prescription drugs out of their original containers.
  2. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance, such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
  3. Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid, such as an empty margarine tub, or into a sealable bag.
  4. Conceal or remove any personal information, including Rx number, on the empty containers by covering it with a black permanent marker, duct tape, or by scratching it off.
  5. Place the sealed container with the mixture and the empty drug containers in the trash.

(Partial excerpts from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, October 2009)

**Always consult relevant and up-to-date regulations regarding drugs and medicines in your state, province, or country.**



## ADDITIONAL ICD® RESOURCES

The ICD® website offers additional resources on topics related to the C–HS® and challenges associated with disorganization.

Please visit [challengingdisorganization.org](http://challengingdisorganization.org) for more information.

### Resources

- **CLASSES**
  - On hoarding tendencies and chronic disorganization for related professionals.
- **FACT SHEETS**
  - Topics include hoarding, aging, time management, ADHD, mental health issues, medical health issues, family dynamics, grief, goal setting, and more.
- **FIND A PROFESSIONAL**
  - Online directory to help you locate ICD®-educated organizing professionals

