

Homelessness Assistance Audit Series: Allocation of City Resources



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine how the allocation of City resources assisted in the City's efforts to achieve desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Due to the complex nature of the topic, we are evaluating the City's homelessness assistance efforts in a series of audits. This report is the third in the series. The first report, presented in November 2017, analyzed how City ordinances align with the City's homelessness assistance efforts. The second, presented in December 2017, looked at how the City coordinates its efforts. A future report is planned to analyze the outcomes of the City's efforts.

Background

The City primarily relies on the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition to collect information about the homeless population.

The City's Homeless Task Force estimates the City will spend at least \$30 million on homelessness assistance in 2018. This does not include resources spent indirectly on the issue.

What We Found

The City does not have a complete understanding of how many people are experiencing homeless, or their needs, which limits its ability to effectively allocate resources.

Understanding the homeless population and their needs is necessary to ensure resources are used effectively and efficiently. The exhibit below describes the three methods for collecting this information and shows how the resulting data may overlap.

The **Point in Time** count identifies people living in shelters and outdoors on one night

The **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** tracks the use of services and programs associated with homelessness

The **Coordinated Assessment** evaluates a person's need for housing based on factors such as their health and interactions with the police



Various factors limit the City's ability to accurately know the number of people experiencing homelessness in Austin. Additionally, many people experiencing homelessness have not had a coordinated assessment. Lastly, the coordinated assessment is used to identify a person's need for housing, and does not identify their short-term needs. The City does have some limited efforts to identify the short-term needs of the homeless population.

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The City is not meeting the long-term needs of the homeless population and it is unclear if it is effectively meeting the short-term needs.

Limited resources for long-term housing needs

A variety of housing solutions are available to assist people experiencing homelessness. A 2014 Council resolution identified Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) as the primary solution to end chronic homelessness in the City. This resolution called for the creation of 400 PSH units by 2018. However, ECHO reported in 2017 that the City needed more than 700 PSH units. Additionally, it does not appear that the City will reach the goal of 400 units. Only 241 units have been funded at this time, and some of those are still under construction.

Difficulty assessing short-term needs

As noted earlier, there is limited information about the short-term needs of the homeless population. However the City does have some efforts underway to collect this information, and is piloting some programs to address short-term needs.

A mix of funding sources are often used for homelessness assistance efforts, which minimizes the impact of potential funding cuts. However, this may place an increased burden on homeless service providers.

What We Recommend

- The Assistant City Manager leading the City's Homelessness Task Force should work with ECHO and other partners to improve the quality and accuracy of data collected about the homeless population.
- The Director of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development should develop and implement strategies to meet the current housing needs of people transitioning out of homelessness.