

Special Report

Homelessness Assistance

February 2019



Over the past several years, Austin has made significant efforts to address the issue of homelessness, and the Office of the City Auditor began auditing these efforts in February 2017. Since homelessness is such a complex topic, we decided to conduct our work through a series of four audits. This series of audits addressed City policies related to homelessness, coordination of the City's efforts, allocation of City resources, and the overall outcomes of the City's efforts. This special report summarizes the findings of those reports, and represents the completion of the Homelessness Assistance Audit Series.

City Policies

November 2017

The objective of this audit was to determine if City ordinances aligned with City efforts to achieve desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

This report concluded that the enforcement of certain city ordinances may create issues for people attempting to exit homelessness. Additionally, it noted that enforcement of these ordinances did not appear to be an effective or efficient way to connect people experiencing homelessness to the services they needed. Lastly, this report indicated that other U.S. cities had faced lawsuits related to the enforcement of similar ordinances. In some of those cases, rulings against the cities were based on conditions that also appeared to exist in Austin.

Coordination

December 2017

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City coordinated homelessness assistance efforts to achieve desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

This report noted that while many City departments deal with homelessness in some way, the City had only recently started to coordinate its homelessness assistance efforts. It listed several U.S. cities which had created a position or agency to coordinate homelessness assistance efforts in their area. This report concluded that without a coordinated effort, the City may not effectively provide homelessness assistance services, efficiently allocate resources, or identify opportunities to aid people experiencing homelessness.

Resource Allocation

May 2018

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

This report found that because the City did not have a complete understanding of the size or needs of the homeless population it was unclear whether the City was effectively allocating resources for homelessness assistance. This report noted that the City was not meeting its goal for creating new units of Permanent Supportive Housing, which led to a greater need for short-term services. However, this report determined that the City collected limited information about the short-term needs of the homeless population.

Outcomes

February 2019

The objective of this audit was to evaluate the outcomes of the City's efforts to prevent homelessness and assist people experiencing homelessness.

This report concluded that although homelessness remains a significant problem for the City, Austin has actively engaged in addressing the issue. However, this report noted that homelessness service providers frequently did not meet contract performance goals, which limited the City's ability to assist the homeless population. This report also found that the City did not measure the long-term success of its homelessness assistance efforts, and resources to prevent people from experiencing homelessness were not sufficient or effectively targeted to those most-at-risk. Lastly, this report indicates that case management services could be improved in order to reduce inefficiencies and better connect people to services.

