

# Homelessness Assistance Audit Series: Outcomes of City Efforts



## Objective

What are the outcomes of the City's efforts to prevent homelessness and assist people experiencing homelessness?

Due to the complex nature of the topic, we evaluated the City's homelessness assistance efforts in a series of audits. The first report analyzed how City ordinances align with the City's homelessness assistance efforts. The second report looked at coordination of homelessness efforts between City departments. The third report evaluated how the City allocates resources towards homelessness.

## Background

Addressing homelessness is one of the City's top priorities. In 2018, City Council endorsed a plan to end homelessness created by the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition.

The City works with many entities to provide a range of strategies to address the issue. This includes prevention programs, shelters and housing, and case management.

## What We Found

### **The City does not effectively ensure outcomes are met.**

- In a sample of nine contracts for homelessness services, only 54% of the performance goals were met.
- Some contracts were amended to reduce the goals in the original contracts.
- Service providers indicated that changes to programs or reductions in funding from other sources impacted their ability to meet performance goals.

### **The City does not effectively measure the long-term success of its efforts.**

- Some long-term goals related to housing do not establish how long a person must remain housed in order to be considered a success.
- Other long-term goals rely on data that may not be accurate or complete.

### **Prevention efforts may not effectively serve people with the highest risk of experiencing homelessness.**

- A federal study indicates that a family of four in Austin has a high risk of experiencing homelessness if they earn less than \$13,000 a year.
- In 2017, less than half of the participants in City programs designed to prevent eviction would be considered high-risk for experiencing homelessness.
- Other City programs do address certain populations with a high risk for experiencing homelessness, such as youth in foster care.

### **Case management services may not be efficient or adequate.**

- Case management is offered by a number of service providers and City departments. Various systems are used to document this work, which does not allow case managers to coordinate services.
- Many service providers report they do not have the capacity to provide case management to everyone who wants it.

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## What We Found

**The City has made significant efforts to address homelessness, and these efforts can be enhanced.**

- The City's efforts include participating in national efforts, securing grants and awards, and building upon ideas from peer cities.
- Reducing or eliminating barriers to service is one area where there may be additional opportunities for the City to enhance its efforts to assist people experiencing homelessness.

## What We Recommend

The Assistant City Manager responsible for coordinating the City's homelessness efforts should:

- ensure all contracts align with the City's homelessness assistance efforts and include realistic performance goals,
- ensure all long-term goals are measurable and include appropriate timelines,
- enhance the City's ability to more effectively prevent people from experiencing homelessness, and
- work with stakeholders to design and implement changes to improve collaboration and coordination of case management for people experiencing homelessness.