

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.

2016

June

HOST

The Homelessness Outreach Street Team works with people experiencing homelessness to connect them to services

August

Veteran homelessness ends

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development certifies that veteran homelessness in Austin reached functional zero

2017

January

Pay for Success

A City Council resolution directs the City Manager to develop a Pay for Success action plan for Permanent Support Housing

January

2017 Point-in-Time Count

2,036 people experiencing homelessness identified

Awarded Grants

Austin receives a private grant to improve its response to homelessness and a federal grant to enhance its youth homelessness services

March

Homelessness Assistance Audit Series begins

April

Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint

City Council adopts a comprehensive plan to increase housing affordability, which includes permanent supportive housing goals

October

ARCH contract redesign

City Council passes a resolution to redesign the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless contract

October

AHAC

The Austin Homelessness Advisory Council, a committee of people with lived experience of homelessness, advises the City on homelessness policy

November

Homelessness Assistance I: Policies

December

Homelessness Assistance II: Coordination

2018

January

2018 Point-in-Time Count

2,147 people experiencing homelessness identified

March

Strategic Plan 2023

City Council adopts a plan that outlines a strategy for homelessness and includes suggested performance measures

April

ECHO's Action Plan to End Homelessness

City Council endorses ECHO's plan, which outlines various steps to address homelessness issues

May

Homelessness Assistance III: Resource Allocation

September

Panhandling Pilot

The City begins a program to offer paid work, in lieu of panhandling, to people experiencing homelessness

September

FY19 Budget

The fiscal year 2019 budget includes \$2.4 million in funding for new homelessness programs

November

Affordable Housing Bond

Austin voters approve a \$250 million bond to increase the amount of available affordable housing

2019

January

2019 Point-in-Time Count

2019 data was not available when this report was published

Homelessness Assistance IV: Outcomes

February

