

Homelessness Assistance Follow-Up



Objective

The objective of this special report was to follow up on the City’s actions to implement recommendations from the Homelessness Assistance and City Social Service Contracting Process audits.

Background

We conducted four audits of the City’s homelessness assistance efforts from 2017 to 2019, focusing on City policies, coordination of City efforts, allocation of resources, and outcomes of the City’s efforts. We issued 10 recommendations as part of these audits.

We also conducted an audit on the City’s social service contracting processes in 2019. Stakeholders were concerned that the City’s efforts to address homelessness through social service contracts were not resulting in desired outcomes. We issued three recommendations as part of this audit.

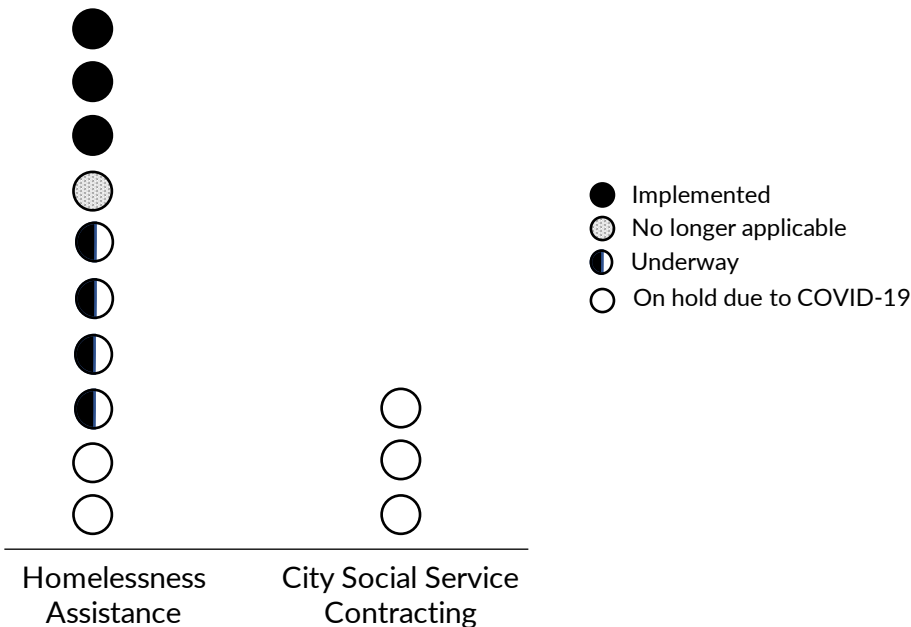
What We Learned

The City has taken many actions to address homelessness. The City amended policies that did not effectively connect people experiencing homelessness to services and hired a Homeless Strategy Officer.

The City is working to improve the quality of data collected about people experiencing homelessness in Austin, and the City is developing and implementing strategies to meet the current need for housing. The City is also working to improve contracts for homelessness assistance efforts.

However, the City can do more to address issues we found in our audits on homelessness assistance and social service contracting such as enhance homelessness prevention programs, improve coordination of case management services, and develop a social services procurement policy and funding strategy. The implementation of some of our recommendations is on hold due to COVID-19.

The City has made progress on eight of the recommendations in the Homelessness Assistance and City Social Service Contracting Process audits



Implementation Status of Recommendations

We issued 10 recommendations through the Homelessness Assistance audits. We verified that the City implemented three of these recommendations, and one is no longer applicable. Of the remaining recommendations, four are underway, and two are on hold.

We issued three recommendations through the City Social Service Contracting Process audit, and all three are on hold.

For all five recommendations on hold, Austin Public Health was assigned lead to coordinate cross-departmental response and implementation. These activities are on hold due to reassignment of key Austin Public Health staff to COVID-19 response efforts.

Audit	Recommendations	Implementation Status
Homelessness Assistance: City Policies Related to Homelessness	Recommendation 1: The City Attorney should reassess the City's camping, sit/lie, and panhandling ordinances to determine what legal risk they post to the City. Further, the City Attorney should report on the results of this review to City Council.	Implemented
Homelessness Assistance: City Policies Related to Homelessness	Recommendation 2: The City Manager should work with City Council to determine if the City's camping, sit/lie, and panhandling ordinances are still aligned with City Council's vision for addressing the issue of homelessness, or whether the ordinances should be revised or repealed.	Implemented
Homelessness Assistance: City Policies Related to Homelessness	Recommendation 3: If the ordinances are not repealed, the City Manager should identify and implement changes to make the enforcement of the City's camping, sit/lie, and panhandling ordinances more effective and efficient. Changes may include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding DACC case management resources and ensuring that all citations involving people experiencing homelessness are handled by DACC • Implementing strategies to encourage more people experiencing homelessness to accept case management services • Implementing strategies to reduce arrest warrants issued in response to people experiencing homelessness who fail to appear in court following citation • Implementing strategies to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in jail for violating these ordinances 	No longer applicable
Homelessness Assistance: Coordination of the City's Homelessness Assistance Efforts	Recommendation 1: The City Manager should designate a position within the City whose primary responsibility is coordinating the homelessness assistance efforts in Austin. This position should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategic plan to address homelessness • Coordinate City departments' efforts related to homelessness 	Implemented
Homelessness Assistance: Allocation of City Resources	Recommendation 1: 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. This may include, but should not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving identification of people experiencing homelessness • Improving the percentage of people experiencing homelessness who receive a coordinated assessment • Collecting and analyzing information about the short-term needs of people experiencing homelessness 	Underway

Audit	Recommendations	Implementation Status
Homelessness Assistance: Allocation of City Resources	Recommendation 2: The Director of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development should develop and implement strategies to meet current need for housing for those transitioning out of homelessness.	Underway
Homelessness Assistance: Outcomes of City Efforts	Recommendation 1: The Assistant City Manager responsible for coordinating the City's homelessness efforts should review how the City measures the long-term success of homelessness assistance efforts, to ensure all goals are measurable and include appropriate timeframes.	Underway
Homelessness Assistance: Outcomes of City Efforts	Recommendation 2: The Assistant City Manager responsible for coordinating the City's homelessness efforts should ensure each contract related to homelessness assistance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires vendors track and report long-term outcomes • Requires vendors collect, report, and incorporate client feedback • Establishes a method to prioritize clients for services • Sets realistic performance goals • Provides appropriate resources to achieve these efforts 	Underway
Homelessness Assistance: Outcomes of City Efforts	Recommendation 3: The Assistant City Manager responsible for coordinating the City's homelessness efforts should work with City departments to enhance the capacity of existing homeless prevention programs and develop new programs to prevent homelessness.	On hold due to COVID-19
Homelessness Assistance: Outcomes of City Efforts	Recommendation 4: The Assistant City Manager responsible for coordinating the City's homelessness efforts should work with stakeholders to design and implement changes to improve coordination and collaboration among all entities providing case management services in Austin.	On hold due to COVID-19
City Social Service Contracting Process	Recommendation 1: To strengthen the City's social service contracting and procurement process, the Director of Austin Public Health should work with the City Manager and other responsible departments to develop a Citywide social service procurement policy. The policy should clearly set out the standards and processes for the City's social services contracting activities. At the minimum, the policy should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defining the term "social services" and indicating eligible and ineligible services • Stating organizational and program requirements that service providers seeking to access the City social service funding should possess • Explaining the social service solicitation process • Defining the responsibilities of involved parties and the contract award process 	On hold due to COVID-19
City Social Service Contracting Process	Recommendation 2: To ensure the City has a clear plan for delivering social services now and in the future, the Director of Austin Public Health should work with the City Manager and other responsible parties to develop a funding strategy for social services. In developing the strategy, the approach should include, but not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing funding of community social services • Examining all possible funding mechanisms • Examining the funding processes of similar cities • Identifying possibilities for fostering coordination and partnerships 	On hold due to COVID-19
City Social Service Contracting Process	Recommendation 3: In order to provide a fair and equitable social service contracting process for selection among potential vendors, the City Manager should work with Council to determine whether the City's Anti-Lobbying Ordinance should apply to social service contracts.	On hold due to COVID-19