




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager 

DATE: November 20, 2023

SUBJECT: **Creation of Stand-alone Homeless Strategy Office**

As you are aware, I initiated a homeless strategy special assignment in June 2023 to focus on the broad spectrum of programs, policies, and funding the City utilizes in support of addressing homelessness in our community. A presentation of the findings from this assessment will be shared with the Public Health Committee on December 13, 2023.

One significant finding is that the City's current organizational structure does not effectively respond to this critical priority in our community. While the Homeless Strategy Division was embedded within one department, the initiatives to address homelessness span multiple departments and require focused coordination. Consequently, I am establishing a stand-alone Homeless Strategy Office (HSO) to serve as a focal point for addressing homelessness comprehensively, strategically, and compassionately. The reorganization will be effective December 4, 2023. David Gray will lead the Office as the Homeless Strategy Officer, promoting him from the Interim role he has held since September. He will continue reporting to Assistant City Manager Stephanie Hayden-Howard.

Staff transitioning to the HSO include Austin Public Health's Homeless Strategy Division as well as City personnel whose roles and responsibilities primarily relate to homelessness, such as the Homeless Outreach Street Team.

The HSO's primary responsibilities will include:

- Procuring, managing, and monitoring homelessness-related contracts between the City and third-party vendors, per the City of Austin's purchasing policies and procedures.
- Overseeing operations at City-run and City-owned homeless shelters.
- Collaborating with City agencies and community organizations in efforts to expand the availability of housing across the continuum of need (e.g., emergency shelters, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing).
- Overseeing and approving plans for public space management, including outreach, clean-up, and compassionate encampment closures.

- Working with the Communications and Public Information Office to help manage communications regarding the City’s approach to assisting individuals with resolving their homelessness.
- Working with the Intergovernmental Relations Office to manage relationships between the City and local, state, and federal agencies and officials.
- Collaborating with Austin/Travis County's Homelessness Response System partners to uphold best practices, policies, and procedures for organizations that serve unhoused people in our community.
- Engaging with local businesses and philanthropic entities to broaden the funding base for homeless response services.

Establishing a stand-alone HSO is designed to provide the following outcomes:

- Helping unhoused individuals ensure their homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring by working with local partners to timely identify and deliver housing opportunities.
- Improving quality of life standards for unhoused neighbors and the community through improved coordination of public space management, including homeless encampment cleanups and compassionate closures.
- Collaborating with local service providers to expand access to crucial services for people experiencing homelessness (e.g., mental health services, job training).
- Greater returns-on-investments for City funding by enhanced tracking of homelessness-related expenditures and more agile resource deployment.
- Increased accuracy of data collection and data-driven decision-making to identify trends, target resources where they are most needed, and track progress.
- Implementing proactive communication strategies that humanize homelessness and increases public awareness of City efforts.
- Greater investments in solutions to help resolve people’s homelessness through partnerships with local private and philanthropic funders.

Additionally, the HSO will help facilitate the joint independent assessment that will soon be underway to review not only the homeless services provided by the City, but also those provided by our partners in this endeavor, including Central Health, Integral Care, Travis County, and the Dell Medical School at the University of Texas in Austin.

If you have additional questions, please contact me.

cc: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager
 CMO Executive Team
 Department Directors