



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

NOVEMBER 26, 2019

Follow-up on Homeless Services Audit

The Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) has made notable progress working toward a regional homeless response system that promotes racial equity. Legislation is pending in Seattle and King County with the aim of setting up a King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) by mid-December. If approved, the KCRHA would likely increase efficiency and effectiveness among local service providers by streamlining access to government funds and unifying local priorities for reducing homelessness. Meanwhile, DCHS is working to make homeless housing more equitable by revising the formula it uses to prioritize access to limited housing resources. A recent study found that the earlier prioritization tool tended to give lower scores to people of color, reducing their opportunities to be stably housed. DCHS is looking for grant funding to stand up a permanent equity-based assessment tool.

DCHS is refining what data it collects and who it engages to strengthen continuous improvement. New data collection protocols related to coordinated entry, rapid rehousing, and eviction are underway. DCHS established an Access and Engagement Work Group and, as part of a separate initiative, is working to increase engagement of people living in vehicles. DCHS needs to increase outreach to communities of color who are underrepresented in the homeless service system. Going forward, we will monitor the roll-out of data collection efforts and outreach to underrepresented communities of color and how these strategies improve homeless services.

Of the 12 audit recommendations:

	2 DONE		10 PROGRESS		0 OPEN
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.	Partially implemented Auditor will continue to monitor.	Remain unresolved Auditor will continue to monitor.			

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.



Recommendation 1

DONE



The Department of Community and Human Services should work with All Home and local funders to develop a formalized and binding approach to coordinate funding decisions in a structured process, via a strengthened memorandum of understanding or other agreement.

STATUS UPDATE: The King County Executive and Seattle Mayor each sent legislation to their lawmaking bodies in September 2019 with the aim of establishing a King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) by mid-December. If authorized by local legislatures, the KCRHA would centrally coordinate funding decisions for homeless services currently funded separately through the county and the city.

IMPACT: If approved, the KCRHA would likely increase efficiency and effectiveness among local service providers by streamlining access to government funds and unifying local priorities for reducing homelessness.

Recommendation 2

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should work with the City of Seattle to develop a uniform requests for proposals and contract management process for homeless programs aligning funding, performance standards, and reporting requirements.

STATUS UPDATE: The status of this recommendation depends on whether local legislatures approve the KCRHA. If they approve the authority, we will close this recommendation. Otherwise, we will monitor progress toward a unified process between the county and the city.

WHAT REMAINS: Local legislatures need to make a determination on the KCRHA.

Recommendation 3

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should ensure that housing providers give reasons for denial that are specific enough to determine whether denials are justified.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS is working with its software vendor to remove ambiguous reasons for housing denial (like "other") from its system. In the interim, it has identified which reasons should be removed from the system and informed housing providers not to select these reasons.

WHAT REMAINS: The software vendor needs to complete its update to the list of eligible reasons for denial.

Recommendation 4

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should enhance data collection efforts to ensure that housing providers report why clients refuse housing referrals.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS started working with housing providers on entering denial reasons.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS needs to train housing providers on what kind of information they should record and where in instances when housing providers report housing denials due to client refusal.

Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should use data on client refusals to identify community need and work with All Home to devise, implement, and test a strategy to change the homeless system accordingly.

STATUS UPDATE: All Home, the Seattle/King County continuum of care, is analyzing relevant data and plans to roll out strategies targeting client refusals. All Home's Coordinated Entry Policy Advisory Committee is spearheading the effort.

WHAT REMAINS: All Home needs to complete data analysis and devise, implement, and test a strategy that responds to its findings.

Recommendation 6

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should devise, implement, and test a strategy to reduce the number and proportion of people with high vulnerability denied housing because they "did not show up or call."

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS is working to reduce the number of people denied housing due to no-shows by increasing housing navigation support. Housing navigators are people who work directly with people in the pool for homeless housing resources to help them stay on top of the paperwork and appointments necessary to enroll in housing programs.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS needs to test its strategy by reviewing outcomes to see if added navigation support reduces no-show denials among highly vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 7

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should improve data entry forms for unit vacancy to reduce the number and proportion of denials due to gaps in unit availability data.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS developed a new data entry form for service providers to use to post available housing units and has trained providers how to use the form.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS needs to show that changes to the data entry forms reduced the number and proportion of housing denials.

Recommendation 8

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should publicly report data on coordinated entry assessments by race and ethnicity.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS increased transparency by participating in a racial equity analysis of coordinated entry systems. C4 Innovations, the group that conducted the analysis, published the results of the study online in October 2019. DCHS plans to revise its public data dashboard to include data on coordinated entry assessments by race and ethnicity when it implements new data standards introduced by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS should update its public data dashboard with information on coordinated entry assessments disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

Recommendation 9

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should use data to develop, implement, and test a strategy to increase outreach to communities of color that are underrepresented in coordinated entry, as compared to the homeless population.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS established an Access and Engagement Work Group to use the Equity Impact Review process to increase access to coordinated entry. Separately, with the support of federal technical assistance, DCHS is working to increase engagement of people living in vehicles.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS should develop, implement, and test a strategy to increase outreach to communities of color who are underrepresented in coordinated entry and overrepresented in the homeless population. At the time of our audit, these communities consisted of people who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), Latinx, and multi-racial.

Recommendation 10

DONE



The Department of Community and Human Services should use coordinated entry data, including data on wait times and Coordinated Entry for All exits, to identify racial disparities in the homeless housing system and to develop, implement, and test a strategy to address them.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS implemented an interim prioritization process for people using coordinated entry to find homeless housing resources. This process revises previously used ranking formulas to reduce racial bias in determining housing priority. DCHS says this process will be in place until it can develop and implement a new equity-based assessment tool. The Seattle/King County continuum of care is seeking grant funding to develop such a tool.

IMPACT: DCHS is working to ensure that access to housing services is not determined by race.

Recommendation 11

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should work with All Home and other funders to develop a benchmark for rapid rehousing move-in rates and move-in times, and develop, implement, and test a strategy to address underperformance if it occurs.

STATUS UPDATE: In October 2018, All Home recommended the following benchmarks for rapid rehousing that rapid rehousing funders discuss monthly:

- move-in rate: target 80 percent, minimum standard 55 percent
- housing search time: target 30 days, minimum standard 90 days.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS should work with All Home and other funders to determine that performance is monitored against these benchmarks and identify strategies to address any underperformance.

Recommendation 12

PROGRESS



The Department of Community and Human Services should work with other funders and All Home to require that housing providers track client evictions at program entry and moves out of King County when housed. This information should be used to inform continued improvements to rapid rehousing services.

STATUS UPDATE: DCHS analyzed existing location data for rapid rehousing entries and exits and is developing a plan to add location and eviction fields to its data collection tools.

WHAT REMAINS: DCHS should add location and eviction fields to its data collection tools, require housing providers to track the data, and demonstrate how the data inform improvements to rapid rehousing services.

Senior Management Auditor Megan Ko, conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.