



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE





DECEMBER 1, 2021

## Follow-up on Homeless Services

**The Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) and the newly formed King County Regional Homelessness Authority (RHA) have made notable progress on data collection and transparency.** An interlocal agreement between King County and the City of Seattle created the RHA in December 2019; however, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed staffing of the agency until April 2021. The RHA is preparing to take over administration of \$140 million in homeless services contracts starting in January 2022. Meanwhile, the County Executive is expected to submit a report with recommendations on the roles and responsibilities of King County and the RHA in June 2022, suggesting division of labor between the two entities remains in flux.

In this transitional period, both DCHS and the RHA are working together to ensure that they have the right people, data, and solutions to urgently address the needs of the 20,000 people who use the homeless services system each year. According to the chief executive of the RHA, the number of people living unhoused is much greater than the system's existing capacity of about 6,000 shelter beds, indicating a need for significant reconfiguration. In this follow-up report, we provide progress updates on our 2018 recommendations made to DCHS and All Home, the former continuum of care agency for the region. Responsibility for implementing our recommendations will now be split between DCHS and the RHA.

Of the 12 audit recommendations:

	6 <b>DONE</b>		4 <b>PROGRESS</b>		0 <b>OPEN</b>		2 <b>CLOSED</b>
<b>Fully implemented</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.	<b>Partially implemented</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	<b>Remain unresolved</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	<b>No longer applicable</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.				

Please see below for details on the implementation status of these recommendations.



### Recommendation 1

On November 26, 2019

DONE



### Recommendation 2

CLOSED



**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 King County Council and Seattle City Council passed legislation creating the King County RHA in December 2019. This body centrally coordinates funding decisions for homeless services; therefore, this recommendation is no longer applicable.

### Recommendation 3

DONE



**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 worked with its software vendor to remove "other" from its list of approved denial reasons and updated its training to inform providers of the change.

IMPACT: Increasing transparency in this area will help ensure that denials are justified.

### Recommendation 4

DONE



**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: In 2019, data showed that some clients refused housing because of where it was located, while others said it did not meet their needs, for example, for living alone or with their partner. Since September 2020, system updates have required housing providers to report why clients refuse housing referrals.

IMPACT: Increasing transparency in this area will highlight programmatic changes needed to increase clients' uptake of homeless housing programs.

### 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: DCHS briefs housing providers on this information at its weekly standing meetings with contract monitors. Going forward, the RHA plans to staff an Ombuds section to take the lead in this area.

WHAT REMAINS: The RHA needs to staff its Ombuds section to understand why some clients are unsatisfied with the homeless services system and what changes are necessary to increase their satisfaction.

### 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: The RHA plans to take the lead in this area with a focus on data at the program level.

WHAT REMAINS: The RHA needs to develop and implement a plan to ensure that it has the staff and IT resources to pinpoint where clients are losing contact with the system and develop ways to keep clients engaged.

### Recommendation 7

DONE



**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: Since our audit was released in 2018, the proportion of referrals that clients deny has fallen from 50 percent to 35 percent. DCHS attributes this change to various process improvements made during the period, rather than one specific change.

IMPACT: Reducing denials increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the homeless services system.

### Recommendation 8

DONE



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

STATUS UPDATE: Data dashboards available on the RHA’s website now breakdown data on coordinated entry assessments, prioritization, and enrollments by race and ethnicity.

IMPACT: Increasing transparency in this area will help meet King County’s goal of reducing racial disparities.

### 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: The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in prioritizing access to the homeless services system that increased outreach to communities of color. Going forward, the RHA will take over this work and is uncertain how policy developments may impact their success.

WHAT REMAINS: The RHA should develop, implement, and test a strategy to increase outreach to underrepresented communities of color. At the time of our audit, these communities consisted of people who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Latinx, and multi-racial.

## Recommendation 10

On November 26, 2019

DONE



## 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: Data dashboards available on the RHA's website now show move-in rates and average move-in time in days for the rapid rehousing program. As of the second quarter of 2021, both metrics were performing below their minimum standards of 55 percent and 90 days, respectively. The recently formed RHA is currently working to establish new performance measures for housing permanence and system experience.

WHAT REMAINS: The RHA should establish new performance measures and develop, implement, and test a strategy to meet them.

## Recommendation 12

CLOSED



**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: In 2019, DCHS completed analysis of where people entered the homeless services system and where they found permanent housing. Among 363 rapid rehousing clients tracked from July 2018 to May 2019, DCHS reported that 15 entered the program outside of King County, compared to 28 who found a rapid rehousing placement outside King County. Its conclusion was that most households both enter and exit a rapid rehousing program within King County. Regarding evictions, DCHS said that limitations to the federally mandated homeless management information system prevent it from collecting evictions data.

---

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](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.