



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

ACTION CALENDAR

July 29, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Jenny Wong, City Auditor *JW*

Subject: Homeless Response Team: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Procedures and Better Track Outcomes

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend City Council request that the City Manager report back during the audit follow-up period in Fall 2026, and annually thereafter, regarding the status of our audit recommendations until reported fully implemented by the Homelessness Response Team and the City Manager's Office. The audit includes six recommendations to improve coordination with service providers, strengthen data procedures, expand and standardize outcome reporting, enhance public transparency, and assess staffing resources needed to support these efforts. The City Manager's Office agreed to our findings and recommendations. Please see our report for their complete response.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Implementing the audit recommendations will help the City better measure the impact of the Homeless Response Team's work and enhance transparency around the use of public resources. Improving coordination with service providers, as recommended in the audit, may require continued staff time to maintain regular meetings and implement shared tools like the HMIS Outreach module. The HRT stated that limited administrative resources constrained their ability to support data and reporting efforts, and a 2024 staffing study recommended additional administrative support, though funding was not provided. Additional resources may be needed to sustain improvements to coordination, data sharing, and public reporting.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Homeless Response Team (HRT) is an interdepartmental team that conducts both outreach and enforcement at encampments in Berkeley. To help move encampment residents indoors, the HRT must navigate a complex regional system with limited shelter and housing resources, most of which are managed by the Alameda County Continuum of Care. According to the Point-In-Time Count and Berkeley shelter data from the audit period, there were more than twice as many people experiencing homelessness as there were shelter beds in Berkeley.

The HRT paused some coordination meetings with service providers for over a year, which one provider said resulted in clients being lost after encampment actions. Although the meetings have resumed, the team did not have written procedures for ongoing communication or formal coordination structures. The HRT also had limited access to shared information systems and could not conduct Coordinated Entry assessments – the entry point to access Alameda County shelter and resources – until September 2024, which hindered their ability to connect residents to services.

While the HRT tracked some outcomes related to its goals—such as shelter offers, encampment closures, and trash removal—it did not report on other meaningful outcomes like shelter enrollments or Coordinated Entry assessments until after the audit period. Reports were cumulative and not broken down by time period, which limited the ability to assess progress. Reports were also difficult to locate on the City’s website. HRT staff stated that limited administrative resources impacted their ability to analyze and report data.

BACKGROUND

The Berkeley City Council established the Homeless Response Team in 2021 to respond to encampments by conducting outreach and reducing health and safety threats without citation or arrest. Between 2022 and 2024, unsheltered homelessness in Berkeley decreased by 45 percent—the largest decrease among the five largest cities in Alameda County. During this time, the City expanded its shelter and housing programs through local funding and state grants. The HRT is responsible for coordinating with other departments and providers but has limited authority over most shelter and housing placements. The team’s work is further shaped by legal constraints, including recent litigation and federal rulings on encampment actions. Local lawsuits, administrative regulations, and the City’s September 2024 Encampment Policy Resolution also affect how the HRT plans and conducts encampment interventions.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with this report.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The audit identified opportunities for the HRT to improve coordination with service providers, develop stronger procedures for internal data collection and reporting, and improve public transparency. Implementing the recommendations will strengthen the City’s ability to track progress toward its goals of reducing unsheltered homelessness, mitigating hazardous encampments, and maintaining a clean city.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

- 1: Audit Report: Homeless Response Team: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Procedures and Better Track Outcomes

Audit Report
July 16, 2025

Homeless Response Team: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Procedures and Better Track Outcomes



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

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Homeless Response Team: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Procedures and Better Track Outcomes

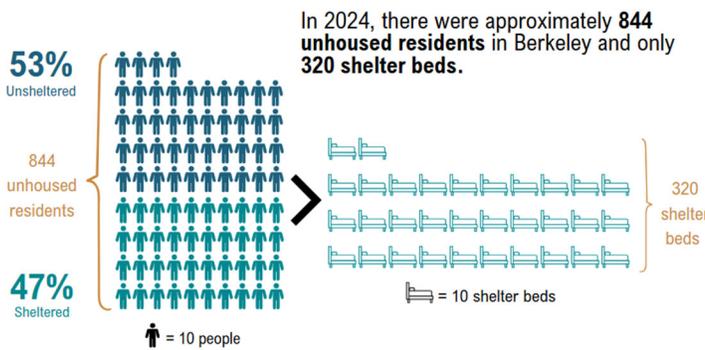
July 16, 2025

Report Highlights

Findings

1. The Homeless Response Team (HRT) acts in both outreach and enforcement roles and is impacted by resource constraints in the City as well as regionally. To help move encampment residents indoors, the HRT must navigate a complex regional system with limited shelter and housing resources.

The number of people experiencing homelessness far exceeded the number of shelter beds in Berkeley in 2024.



Source: Auditor analysis of Alameda County 2024 PIT count and Berkeley shelter data

2. The HRT paused some coordination meetings with service providers due to legal action which resulted in one provider losing track of clients after encampment actions. The HRT also had limited access to county information systems shared by other providers and did not have procedures for collecting encampment data.
3. The HRT tracked some outcomes related to their program goals during the audit period, but did not report on other meaningful outcomes, such as Coordinated Entry assessments or number of shelter enrollments. The team’s public reports were also difficult to access on the City’s website.

Recommendations

To improve coordination and address data inconsistencies, we recommend the HRT document procedures for coordination with service providers and data collection, as well as use a shared mapping tool to assist with coordination. To more effectively measure the HRT’s impact and enhance transparency, we recommend they expand on their reported outcomes, consider sharing public reports in a more accessible format and assess staffing resources needed to make these improvements.

Objectives

1. What role does the Homeless Response Team have in responding to encampments?
2. How does the Homeless Response Team coordinate with other organizations to respond to encampments?
3. How does the Homeless Response Team use data to measure progress toward goals, and how is this communicated to the public and decision makers?

Why This Audit Is Important

We initiated an audit of the HRT because it is an important touchpoint for encampment residents in Berkeley and a key component of the City’s approach to addressing unsheltered homelessness. The HRT works alongside organizations providing outreach and services to encampments, and effective coordination is important to meet the needs of encampment residents. The Berkeley community has committed to addressing this issue through multiple tax measures, and consistent reporting with more outcomes can better communicate progress toward the HRT’s goals.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

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<https://berkeleyca.gov/your-government/city-audits>

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Introduction

Homelessness is a major crisis in the Bay Area and throughout the United States. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) acknowledges that no local government alone has the ability or the resources to completely solve the problem of homelessness. Though the City of Berkeley cannot end homelessness by itself, meaningfully and sustainably addressing this crisis requires systems to work together, and for communities to acknowledge their role in contributing to and solving homelessness. In recent years, Berkeley residents have committed to addressing this issue through tax measures such as Measure P, Measure O, and Measure W, that allocate resources for purposes including new permanent housing and shelter. Berkeley's unsheltered population decreased by 45 percent between February 2022 and January 2024, the largest decrease among the five largest cities in Alameda County.

We identified the City's response to homeless encampments as an area for independent analysis due to community concerns over this issue. We focused on Berkeley's Homeless Response Team (HRT) because they are an important touchpoint for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Berkeley. While Alameda County manages and controls access to many homeless resources, the HRT is the interdepartmental city team that responds to homeless encampments in Berkeley. This audit focuses on the HRT's operations, data, and reporting; it does not make any recommendations regarding the City's encampment response policies.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to answer the following questions:

- 1) What role does the Homeless Response Team have in responding to encampments?
- 2) How does the Homeless Response Team coordinate with other organizations to respond to encampments?
- 3) How does the Homeless Response Team use data to measure progress toward goals and how is this communicated to the public and decision makers?

We evaluated the HRT's operations between July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2024 (fiscal years 2022 – 2024). We also reviewed the HRT's policies, data, outcomes, and public reporting. Additionally, we compared data and outcomes to best practices from research organizations and other jurisdictions. Lastly, we interviewed city and county officials, third-party outreach providers and homeless advocates to understand collaboration on encampment response efforts.

Background

The Berkeley City Council established the HRT in June 2021, and the City Manager's Office launched the team in September 2021. The HRT's initial stated purpose was to respond to homeless encampments in Berkeley by performing sustained outreach to move people indoors, simultaneously reducing the impact of encampments on the City with actions such as cleanings or closures that reduce health and safety threats while avoiding citation and arrest.

Unsheltered homelessness is the result of the nationwide affordable housing crisis that stems from a combination of increasing rates of deep poverty and a lack of affordable housing.¹ Berkeley uses the federally required point-in-time (PIT) counts to estimate the homeless population, which includes unsheltered and sheltered individuals.² Every two years, communities conduct counts of people experiencing homelessness to measure its prevalence locally. In the January 2024 PIT count in Berkeley, the primary reported causes of homelessness were related to housing loss (33 percent) and job loss (39 percent) among those surveyed (Figure 1).

¹ According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a person is considered to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness when they are living in a place not meant for human habitation, including in a tent or impermanent structure within an encampment.

² To measure the sheltered homeless population, Alameda County uses reported occupancy data to count the number of individuals in emergency shelter or transitional housing within Alameda County on the night of the PIT count.

Figure 1. Primary Causes of Homelessness Among Berkeley’s Homeless Population, 2024



Source: Alameda County 2024 PIT Count

Structural racism also contributes to homelessness, as Black/African American and Hispanic & Latino/e/a individuals are overrepresented among the homeless population nationwide. In Berkeley’s PIT count, Black/African American residents were 43.8 percent of the homeless population surveyed, compared to only 7.8 percent of Berkeley’s total population (Figure 2).

Encampments refer to individuals or households who are involuntarily unhoused and use temporary shelters, such as tents, or accumulate large objects on public or City property, according to the HRT’s working definition.³ People experiencing homelessness may choose to live in encampments for a variety of reasons, including limited shelter availability or barriers such as shelter rules or conditions that may not meet their needs. For example, some shelters may have strict entry or exit times, or sobriety requirements. Additionally, some individuals may have concerns about personal health and safety in shelters, or value the autonomy, privacy, and sense of community in encampments.⁴

However, life in encampments also presents significant risks, including hunger, disease, extreme weather, and violence. Many people living in encampments experience disabling conditions, such as mental or physical health conditions, or substance use disorders. Among those surveyed as part of Berkeley’s most recent PIT count, 43 percent of people reported having a serious mental illness and 26 percent reported having a substance use disorder (Figure 2).⁵

³ The definition for encampments varies by jurisdiction, as HUD does not have a standard definition for encampments.

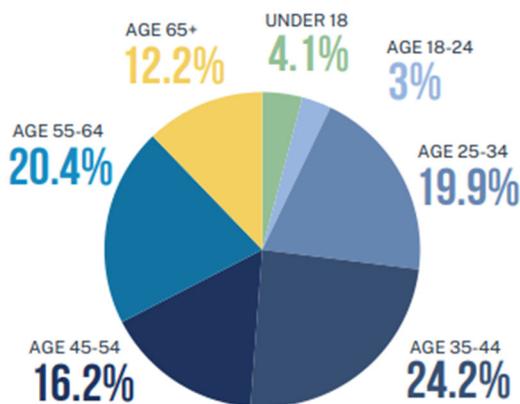
⁴ A February 2025 investigation by CalMatters found allegations of abuse and dangerous conditions in some California homeless shelters ([‘A volunteer jail’: Inside the scandals and abuse pushing California’s homeless out of shelters](#)).

⁵ While some homeless Berkeleyans live in encampments, others may live in other sheltered or unsheltered situations. Berkeley’s total encampment population is unknown.

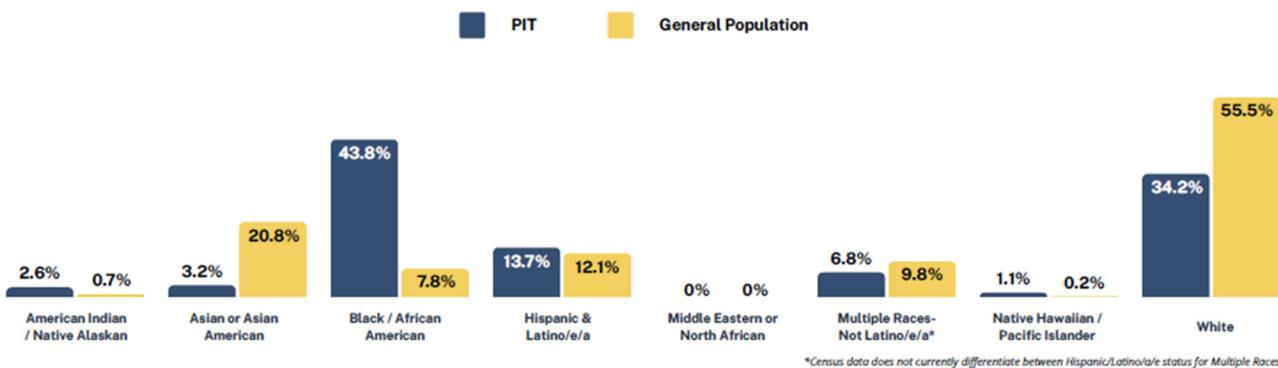
Figure 2. Characteristics of Berkeley’s Homeless Population, 2024



AGE RANGES



RACE IDENTITIES COMPARED TO GENERAL POPULATION



Source: Alameda County 2024 PIT Count

A 2023 statewide study of homelessness in California conducted by the University of California San Francisco acknowledges that for individuals, housing solves homelessness. Interview subjects experiencing homelessness expressed a high level of interest in obtaining permanent housing. As one participant explained:

I just want to get in a place. This pain that I’m feeling, emotional and physical pain, you know. If I can just get beyond that, most of it would be solved by getting in a place. I’d be so happy to be in my own place.

Participants in the study explained that permanent housing would provide the stability they need to find employment and address physical and behavioral health challenges.⁶ These findings highlight that access to affordable housing is crucial in reducing homelessness.

The HRT is a key component of the City’s approach to addressing unsheltered homelessness, though it is only one piece of a larger regional system. While the HRT’s role is to respond to encampments, encampments will continue to exist unless sufficient resources are available to prevent people from losing their housing and permanently house those already experiencing homelessness. Although homelessness prevention is not the focus of the HRT’s work, it is part of the City’s broader homelessness strategy. By focusing on encampments, the HRT addresses the visible symptoms of a problem that is much larger than Berkeley itself. The team does not have the resources to solve homelessness on its own.

Berkeley’s unsheltered population decreased by 45 percent between 2022 and 2024.

Unsheltered homelessness in Berkeley decreased by 45 percent from February 2022 to January 2024 according to the Alameda County PIT count, which was the largest decrease compared to the five largest cities in Alameda County (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Change in Number of Unsheltered Individuals in Alameda County’s Five Largest Cities, 2022 to 2024

City	2022	2024	Change in Number of Unsheltered Individuals	Percent Change
Berkeley	803	445	-358	-45%
Fremont	866	612	-254	-29%
San Leandro	312	228	-84	-27%
Hayward	267	278	+11	+4%
Oakland	3,337	3,659	+322	+10%

Source: Auditor analysis of Alameda County 2024 PIT Count

⁶ [Toward a New Understanding: The California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)

Berkeley’s reduction in the number of unsheltered individuals coincides with increased funding to address homelessness. As a result, Berkeley has been able to open new facilities providing shelter, transitional housing and permanent housing. The City has also used tax measure funding to apply for and receive state grants to address homelessness.

The recent reduction in unsheltered homelessness is significant, especially considering that the City does not exist in a vacuum—regional conditions affect the City’s ability to completely eradicate homelessness. For example, the needs of unsheltered residents in other Bay Area cities impact Berkeley, as many resources are shared regionally and predominantly allocated at the county level.

HRT Staff and Funding

The HRT operates within the Neighborhood Services Division of the City Manager’s Office and is overseen by an Assistant to the City Manager, who also manages the Animal Services, Code Enforcement, and Special Events units, and oversees homeless policy for the City. The HRT includes a Homeless Response Team Coordinator, two Social Services Specialists, and a Homeless Services Coordinator (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Homeless Response Team Organization Chart



Source: City Manager’s Office

The HRT also coordinates with other departments to respond to encampments, including Health, Housing and Community Services; Parks, Recreation and Waterfront; Public Works; Police; Fire; and the City Attorney’s Office.

According to HRT staff, they learn about encampments and related issues through multiple channels, including HRT outreach staff, referrals from other city departments, and public calls to 311. The number of cases assigned to the HRT from 311 increased from 880 cases in fiscal year 2022 to 1,090 cases in fiscal year 2024 (Figure 5).⁷ This audit did not explore why 311 calls increased while the number of unsheltered individuals in Berkeley decreased.

Figure 5. 311 Cases Assigned to the Homeless Response Team per Fiscal Year

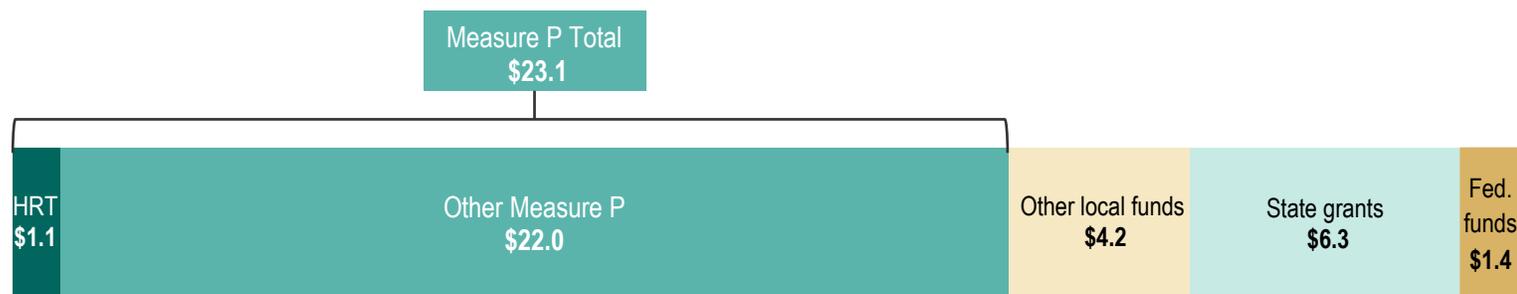


Source: Auditor analysis of 311 cases from Berkeley Department of Information Technology

⁷ These figures reflect only the cases reported through the 311 system, which does not capture the team’s entire workload. Additionally, some of these cases may represent multiple reports for the same issue.

According to the City Manager’s Office, the City spent \$35 million on homelessness-related activities in fiscal year 2024.⁸ This total included homelessness prevention, establishing new permanent housing, addressing street conditions and hygiene at encampments, and providing shelter. Measure P is the largest source of funding for homelessness programs, while other funding comes from federal, state or other local funds (Figure 6).⁹ The HRT had \$1.1 million in total budgeted Measure P expenses in 2024, based on the City’s adopted budget, and includes expenses in the City Manager’s Office as well as the Police, Public Works, and Parks departments.¹⁰ This made up just 3 percent of the \$35 million total.

Figure 6. Fiscal Year 2024 Spending by Dedicated Homeless Service Funding Source in the City of Berkeley, in Millions



Note: The \$1.1 million HRT total refers to the HRT’s total Measure P expenditures for fiscal year 2024. This figure does not include HRT salaries not paid through Measure P.

Source: City Manager’s Office

The City of Berkeley also receives funding from the State. For example, Berkeley was awarded \$5.4 million in Encampment Resolution Funding in October 2024. Berkeley received three rounds of this funding between 2022 and 2024, totaling approximately \$15 million. Outside of Berkeley’s funding sources, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has provided funding for homeless services that flows through local Continuums of Care (CoCs). Berkeley belongs to the Alameda County Continuum of Care.¹¹

⁸ Most HRT salaries were paid through the General Fund and are not included in \$35 million total. We did not assess the extent to which there are additional homelessness-related costs outside of this total.

⁹ The 2018 ballot Measure P increased the City’s tax on high-value real property transfers from 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent in order to fund general municipal services including shelters, navigation centers, physical and mental health supports, rehousing, and other services for people experiencing homelessness. In 2024, Measure W made the tax permanent and introduced tiered rates to ensure future funding for homeless services.

¹⁰ Measure P is a general tax, meaning it was approved by a simple majority of voters and its revenues can be used on any programs or services. In the City’s 2024 budget, Measure P revenues were included in the General Fund revenue projections but are removed from the General Fund baseline to reflect their policy-directed use. Although Measure P revenues were part of the City’s overall General Fund, they were tracked separately for policy purposes.

¹¹ A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body required by HUD to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing. CoC refers to the system for coordinating programs that address and prevent homelessness within a geographical region.

The legal landscape shapes the City’s encampment actions.

The HRT’s work is also informed by laws, legal precedents, and court orders, along with City ordinances and policies (Figure 7). The legal landscape that the City operates under includes:

Figure 7. Legal Landscape for Encampment Actions

 <p>Laws, Legal Precedents, and Court Orders</p>	 <p>City Ordinances and Policies</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Constitution and statutes • California Constitution and statutes • <i>Martin v. Boise</i> (overruled by <i>Grants Pass</i>) • <i>City of Grants Pass v. Gloria Johnson et al.</i> • Lawsuits against the City: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2019 - <i>Sullivan v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2021 - <i>Dominguez v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2022 - <i>Galtney v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2023 - <i>Prado v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2023 - <i>Parnell v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2024 - <i>Dennison v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2024 - <i>Fisher v. City of Berkeley</i> ○ 2025 - <i>Berkeley Homeless Union v. City of Berkeley (Harrison Corridor)</i> ○ 2025 - <i>Berkeley Homeless Union v. City of Berkeley (Ohlone Park)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkeley Homeless Response Team’s internal policy • Berkeley City Council Encampment Policy Resolution • Berkeley Administrative Regulations 10.1 and 10.2 • Berkeley Municipal Code

Source: Auditor analysis of relevant laws, legal precedents, court orders, city ordinances and policies; information on lawsuits provided by the City Attorney’s Office

The HRT’s internal policy guiding their efforts emphasizes eliminating the worst health and safety impacts with non-criminal interventions. This policy was developed within the framework of the Ninth Circuit *Martin v. Boise* decision (2018), which required jurisdictions to offer shelter to residents before closing encampments.¹²

¹² This policy also referenced the USICH guidance available at the time, which provides strategies for addressing encampments; updated federal guidance has since been released.

In June 2024, the Supreme Court altered the legal landscape with its ruling in *City of Grants Pass v. Gloria Johnson et al.*, which upheld a city’s ability to enforce public camping bans without providing shelter. Following this decision, the Berkeley City Council adopted an Encampment Policy Resolution in September 2024. This policy affirmed Berkeley’s continued commitment to offer interim shelter when closing an encampment, but allowed for exceptions in six specific situations, such as environmental, fire or safety hazards.

All encampment actions must still adhere to federal and state constitutional protections. This includes the Fourth Amendment, which guards against unreasonable searches and seizures, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which ensures due process before the government may deprive any person of life, liberty or property. Encampment actions must also comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Local legal challenges have also affected the City’s encampment operations. The City has been sued multiple times over their encampment actions. In some of those cases, Temporary Restraining Orders were filed against the City, which delayed the HRT’s planned encampment actions.

City policies and ordinances also impact how the HRT responds to encampments. For example, Administrative Regulation 10.1 requires city staff to store property for at least 14 days, with a longer retention period of 45 days for shelter-related items such as tents and sleeping bags. The regulation also requires city staff to provide at least 24 hours’ notice before removing unattended property. Administrative Regulation 10.2 provides guidance around objects placed on sidewalks or parklets. Berkeley Municipal Code ordinances additionally impact the HRT’s work in encampments (see page 14).

Together, these policies and legal cases influence how the HRT plans and carries out encampment actions.

The Homeless Response Team conducts outreach and enforcement with limited city and county resources.

The HRT works in partnership with other city departments and divisions to respond to encampments, operating in both an outreach and enforcement role. The HRT works within a complex regional system, with limited control over shelter and housing referrals managed by the Alameda County CoC. Their efforts are impacted by resource limitations at both the county and city levels.

The Homeless Response Team acts in both outreach and enforcement roles.

The HRT carries out a range of actions to respond to encampments, operating in both an outreach and enforcement role (Figure 8). The HRT works with other departments and divisions across the City to address encampments.

Figure 8. Homeless Response Team Encampment Interventions

Intervention		Description
Outreach	Shelter Referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer individuals to shelter based on availability Perform Coordinated Entry assessments
	Health and Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide dumpsters and voluntary trash removal, toilets and wash stations, mobile showers and laundry
Enforcement	Public Noticing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Berkeley Municipal Code notices Encourage individuals to voluntarily relocate or comply with rules
	Deep Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove excess debris, trash and/or hazardous materials Provide pest control treatments Perform street sweeping Pressure wash sidewalks Provide belongings storage
	Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove debris, tents, and/or other items Require relocation of individuals and their possessions Provide belongings storage

Note: The HRT works in partnership with other departments and divisions to perform this work, including the Environmental Health Division, Fire Department, Police Department, Public Works Department, and others.

Source: Homeless Response Team, City Policy

According to the HRT's internal policy, the HRT evaluates encampments and categorizes their encampment interventions into low, medium, and high priority levels. The policy does not specify the types of interventions – such as health and hygiene interventions, public noticing, deep cleanings or closures – used for each priority level. The highest priority encampments for intervention contain severe hazards such as fire risks or raw sewage, according to the policy. The HRT has stated that limited staff resources across partner departments affect the number of operations they can conduct.

Per HRT staff, the team provides outreach to encampments by visiting encampment sites and trying to connect people to services, sometimes coordinating with other service providers to do this work. The team can also refer people to available shelter beds or provide other support such as transportation assistance.

The team follows Berkeley Municipal Code for enforcement actions, according to the HRT. These ordinances specify that residents cannot be in city parks after a certain hour or have a large structure in a park without a city permit. Other ordinances ban residents from camping on a roadway median, or obstructing sidewalks with belongings or other items.¹³

Given the scope of the HRT's work, they face challenges balancing the interests of the Berkeley community, as their outreach efforts may conflict with their role as an enforcement team. For example, people who work with the unsheltered population have stated that closing encampments can be destabilizing for encampment residents and interrupt their care. As one health professional stated:

Displacement is a huge barrier in continuity of care. It's traumatic to move people around a lot. To get people into housing when they match [with an available housing spot], you need to be able to find them.

At the same time, other groups in Berkeley have advocated for encampment closures due to concerns including health and safety hazards or business impacts. The tension between these different public interests has played out in multiple court filings. In 2023, the City of Berkeley was sued over an encampment on Harrison Street, where the plaintiffs made several allegations against the City including that the City's attempt to close the encampment violated their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (*Prado v. City of Berkeley*). That same encampment was also the subject of a separate lawsuit in 2024 filed by a group of businesses and property owners, claiming the City failed to address nuisances at the encampment and close it in a timely manner (*Dennison et al v. City of Berkeley*).¹⁴

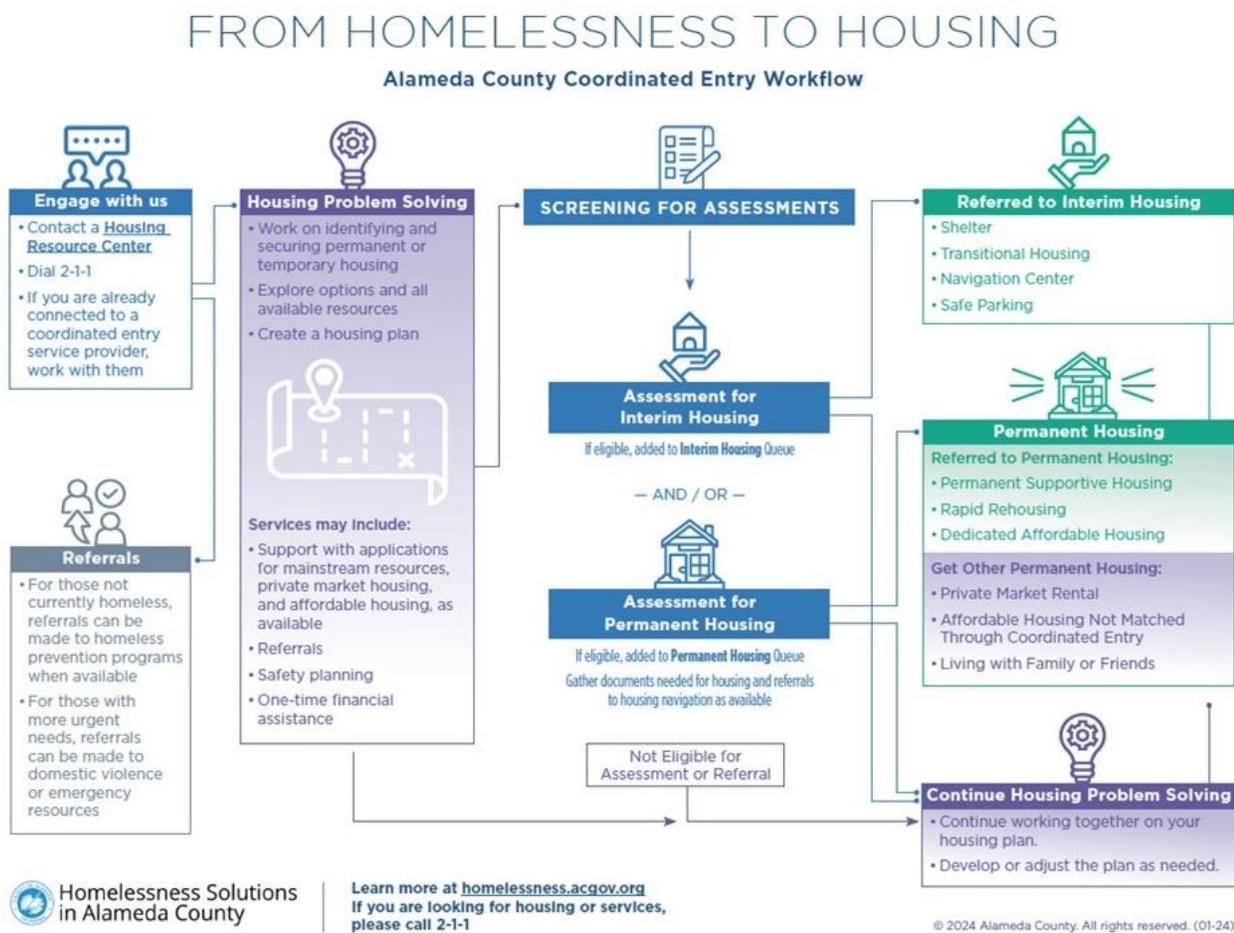
¹³ The Berkeley Municipal Code ordinances guiding the HRT's encampment enforcement are BMC 6.32.030 (Park Rules), BMC 14.32.040 (Medians), BMC 14.48.020 (Sidewalks), and BMC 14.48.120 (Objects).

¹⁴ For a complete list of lawsuits affecting the City's encampment actions, see Figure 7 on page 11.

To access most shelter and housing resources, the HRT must navigate a complex regional system with limited resources.

Despite the significant responsibility the HRT has over city encampments, they have limited control over referrals for shelter and housing resources, most of which are overseen by the Alameda County Continuum of Care (CoC). The process to access shelter or resources through the CoC is complex: to access resources, individuals must undergo a Coordinated Entry assessment through one of the CoC-designated access points (Figure 9). These assessments evaluate factors like age, homeless status, and health to develop an assessment score and prioritize services and resources. Individuals who meet a certain threshold score can be placed in either the interim housing queue for emergency shelters or transitional housing, or the permanent housing queue. Individuals who do not meet the threshold score may be referred to other resources such as affordable housing waitlists or funds for move-in costs. This scoring system attempts to allocate limited resources equitably in the CoC.

Figure 9. Alameda County Coordinated Entry Workflow



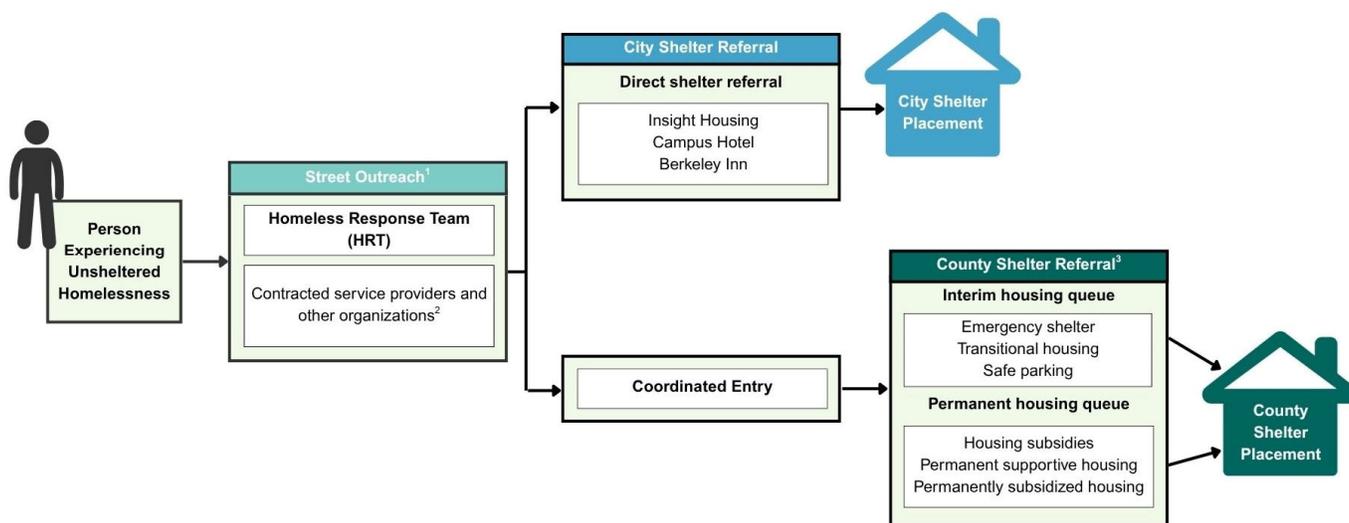
Source: Alameda County Continuum of Care website

However, a 2022 report by the Alameda County CoC noted that limited shelter and housing caused long wait times and made it harder for people to get connected to the help they need through Coordinated Entry. A consultant report for the City of Berkeley reported that people referred to a permanent housing program in the north Alameda County region, which includes Berkeley, spent an average of nine months in the permanent housing queue between July 2022 and March 2024. Only 22 percent were housed after one year in the queue. Interim housing in Alameda County, including shelters, has an estimated average wait time of 70 days according to the CoC’s analysis. The lack of resources can be a frustrating experience, as one unhoused person explained in an evaluation of Alameda County CoC:

There’s no resources out here...And what about the people who have already gone through all the resources and don’t qualify? ...I am at the end of my rope. I don’t know what to do anymore.

The City of Berkeley’s homeless encampment response extends beyond the HRT and other departments and divisions supporting their work. The HRT works alongside other organizations providing outreach and services to encampments, including contracted service providers and additional organizations providing services to encampments that are not funded by the City of Berkeley or the Alameda County CoC (Figure 10).

Figure 10. City of Berkeley Street Outreach and Shelter Referral System

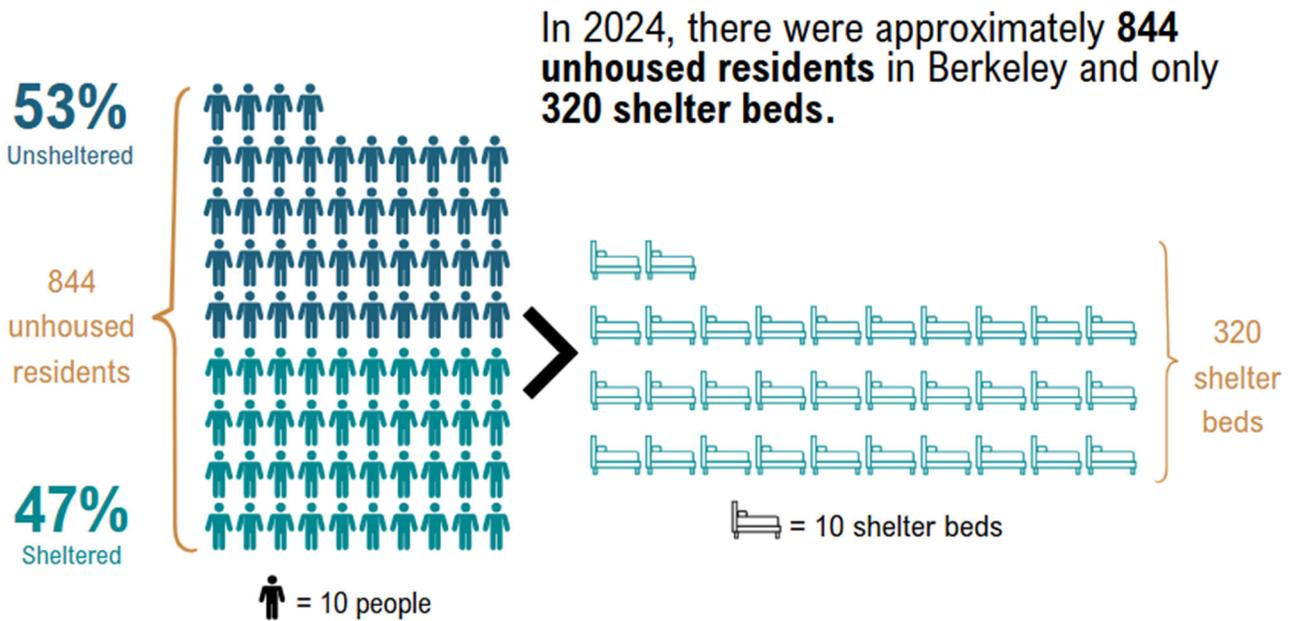


1. Street outreach is one method of reaching unsheltered individuals. Outreach workers can provide services and/or connect individuals to shelter resources.
2. Along with the HRT, Berkeley contracts with other organizations that provide services to encampments, including Bay Area Community Services (BACS) and Options Recovery Services. These organizations receive full or partial funding from the City. There are other organizations providing street outreach in Berkeley that are not affiliated with the City.
3. Once entered into Coordinated Entry, eligible participants are placed into the Interim Housing Queue and/or the Permanent Housing Queue. Alameda County CoC uses these queues to refer people to available resources.

Source: Auditor analysis of City of Berkeley and Alameda County resources

Both the CoC and the HRT make shelter referrals based on the availability of shelter beds. According to the PIT count, there were 844 people experiencing homelessness in Berkeley on one night in January 2024, and 445 of those people were unsheltered. In August 2024, there were only 320 shelter beds in Berkeley, meaning there were more than two times as many people experiencing homelessness on any one night as there were shelter beds in Berkeley (Figure 11). These limited resources impact the HRT’s ability to help get unsheltered residents inside.

Figure 11. The Number of People Experiencing Homelessness Far Exceeded the Number of Shelter Beds in Berkeley in 2024.

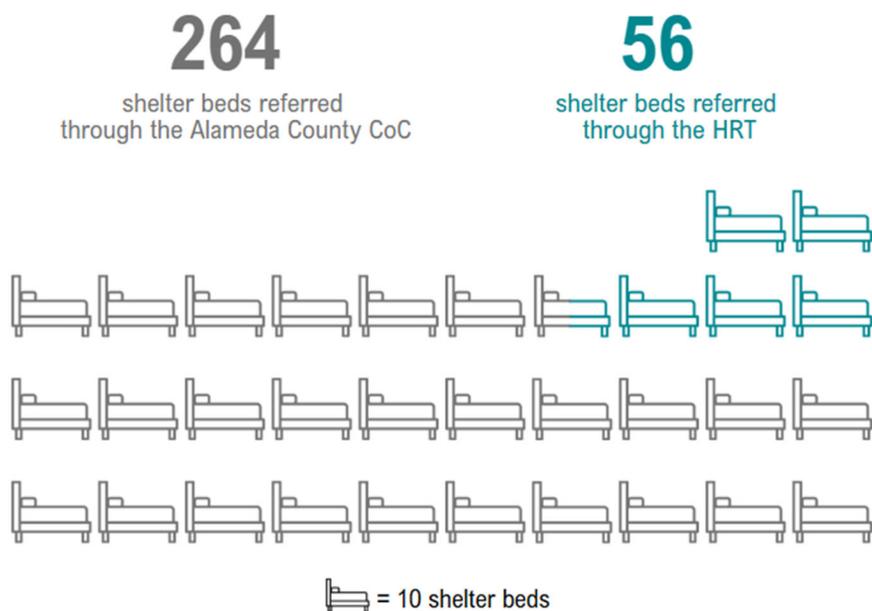


Note: The number of people experiencing homelessness comes from the PIT count and is a snapshot in time from a single night. It does not reflect the total number of people experiencing homelessness throughout the year. These bed numbers provided by the HRT are from August 2024 and do not include the City’s 40 inclement weather shelter beds. We did not assess shelter utilization rates, which can change daily as residents move in and out of shelters. A consultant report for the City of Berkeley indicated that Berkeley shelters operated at an average capacity of 82% between January and February 2024.

Source: Auditor analysis of Alameda County 2024 PIT count and Berkeley shelter data

As of August 2024, of the 320 shelter beds in Berkeley, the HRT had direct referral authority for 56 beds managed by the City, funded by a combination of state Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) grants and Measure P funds. Berkeley also shares access to 264 shelter beds managed by the Alameda County CoC, but referrals for those beds are outside the HRT’s direct control (Figure 12).

Figure 12. The Alameda County CoC controls referrals for most shelter beds in Berkeley.



Note: These numbers provided by the HRT are from August 2024 and do not include the City’s 40 inclement weather shelter beds.

Source: Berkeley shelter data

Berkeley has made strides in increasing the amount of available shelter. According to the 2024 consultant report, the City more than tripled the supply of non-congregate (private) shelter beds since 2021. The same report noted the City increased its permanent housing supply by nearly one hundred beds between 2022 and 2023.

Still, due to system-wide limited bed availability and the HRT’s lack of control over most shelter and permanent housing referrals, the HRT must rely heavily on the CoC’s prioritization policies for housing and shelter resources. According to the HRT, these do not always align with Berkeley’s local needs. In a memo to Alameda County, the HRT requested the CoC prioritize housing resources for some residents of an encampment the HRT flagged as posing health and safety risks, but the CoC denied that request. This example shows that the HRT has limited flexibility in targeting housing resources to specific encampments in Berkeley.

Limited city resources and legal issues also impact the HRT’s work in encampments.

In addition to the CoC’s limitations in connecting unsheltered Berkeley residents to shelter and housing resources, resource constraints within the City also impact the HRT’s ability to address encampments.

The HRT works with other departments and divisions in the City to respond to encampments and the availability of resources like staff and equipment can impact the HRT's ability to conduct encampment interventions. Berkeley does not have staff dedicated to addressing encampments in every department, and staff in other departments and divisions balance encampment work with their regular workloads and other priority operations within the City. According to the Public Works Department, staff help with clearing, picking up and removing waste at encampments and use large equipment, like trucks, street sweepers, and backhoes to do this work. Since equipment is used to address various operational and service needs throughout the City, the availability of equipment – like a backhoe being used for street repair or vector truck being used for sewer line cleaning – can impact encampment operations.

The rise in encampment-related lawsuits also affects staff time, based on estimates provided in May 2025. The HRT states that staff spend an estimated 10-15 percent of the work week responding to legal issues, which impacts their ability to conduct work in encampments. This also impacts staff outside of the HRT. According to the City Attorney's Office, their staff spend an average of 10 to 40 hours a week per attorney responding to encampment-related legal matters.

The HRT paused some coordination meetings and had limited access to shared information systems.

During the audit period, the HRT paused some coordination meetings with service providers due to legal action over one encampment. The meetings were paused for over a year and have since resumed. According to one provider, without these meetings, they lost track of clients after encampment actions. Further, the full team had delayed access to countywide information systems which hindered their ability to connect encampment residents to shelter and resulted in challenges sharing information with other providers. The HRT also lacked internal procedures on encampment data collection. There are opportunities to improve coordination through use of a shared encampment mapping tool with service providers.

The HRT paused some coordination meetings with service providers for one year during the audit period and did not have written procedures for ongoing communication.

The HRT paused weekly case conference meetings with service providers for over a year, from October 2023 to September 2024. The HRT claimed the meetings were tied to a location-specific encampment closure, and that encampment closure was suspended when a lawsuit was filed against the City in 2023. However, data shows that encampment interventions took place at other sites during that time. These weekly case conference meetings included medical providers, behavioral health providers, homeless advocates, shelter staff, and other homeless service organizations. According to one medical provider, these meetings were helpful to coordinate care across multiple agencies for encampment residents around the City.

According to the HRT, there were opportunities to coordinate care through other departments such as HHCS. However, during the pause in these case conference meetings, one provider reported not receiving enough information about the City's planned encampment actions. According to this provider, there were instances where they lost track of their clients after the City's encampment actions. When there are pauses in coordination, important information about residents' needs can be missed. Providers such as street medicine teams and harm-reduction workers often have key insights that can improve service connections.

These case conference meetings have since resumed, though the HRT does not have written procedures that could ensure continued communication with service providers. There is no standardized process for this communication or any formal coordination structure defining roles and responsibilities. This conflicts with guidance from USICH, which recommends having protocols and establishing clear communication strategies when multiple agencies are involved. USICH highlights specific strategies for coordination, which include:

- Empowering outreach teams and health providers to lead efforts and including a broad range of outreach and provider teams in planning and decisions.
- Identifying the key organizations and decision makers to convene and communicate with regularly.

Restarting regular case conference meetings with service providers is one step the HRT has taken that aligns with recommended strategies. However, given the number of organizations working to support unhoused residents in Berkeley, stronger coordination could help ensure no providers are left out of planning and that services are better aligned with residents' needs.

While outside the scope of our audit, data-sharing limitations are a broader issue within the region's homelessness response. Though federal HIPAA laws allow providers to share some information about clients to help coordinate care, California state law has more restrictions on that information. California state law prohibits exchanging information about clients' substance use or mental health issues without a signed release and can therefore be a barrier to providing appropriate services. In 2017, California law AB 210 passed which allows counties to establish multidisciplinary teams to share client-level data under privacy obligations. Establishing a memorandum of understanding for information sharing would allow providers involved in different stages of the homeless response system to develop a specific treatment plan for unhoused individuals and connect them with the right services and housing. San Mateo and Sonoma Counties have both implemented a protocol along these lines that could serve as useful models for Alameda County. Since Berkeley operates its own health department independently from the County, the City has advocated amending state law to let cities, in addition to counties, adopt similar memorandums.

The HRT had limited access to information systems through the County, hindering their ability to effectively coordinate services.

During the audit period, the HRT had limited access to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is critical for securely sharing information across organizations.¹⁵ Organizations connected to the Alameda CoC use HMIS as mandated by HUD, which oversees CoCs across the country. Providers with the ability to conduct Coordinated Entry assessments for clients input these assessments into HMIS, which is the data system used for all Coordinated Entry activities in Alameda County. However, the HRT stated the team did not gain entry to HMIS until December 2022. Before then, HRT staff stated they could not access key client data, such as Coordinated Entry assessments, past program enrollments, and notes from care providers. According to the HRT, not having access to HMIS made it difficult for staff to connect clients to the appropriate resources.

Instead, the HRT stored most of their data in Excel sheets, which were not readily accessible to other providers. We observed some gaps in the HRT's internal data, including the number of tents and structures in encampments, the number of people in encampments, and the number of Coordinated Entry referrals. The HRT has transitioned most of its client-level data into HMIS and has developed procedures for how staff should track interactions with encampment residents. However, we did not review any procedures that detail what information the HRT will collect on encampments, or how they will maintain data accuracy. Internal procedures on what data should be collected could help guide the HRT's efforts in coordinating with providers.

Even after gaining access to HMIS, the system lacked a reliable tool to track or map encampments. According to the HRT, a new tool – the Outreach module – was still in testing and unreliable during the audit period. The Outreach module is a map-based program that allows providers to record and view location information about individuals and encampments in HMIS. The module allows providers to add location and encampment data to client profiles. San Mateo County reported that using the Outreach module allows them to keep track of the number of people at each encampment as well as their willingness to work with outreach teams. While the Alameda County CoC does not use the Outreach module widely, San Mateo County has successfully configured it to track encampment-level information. Berkeley has access to the Outreach module and started using it for some encampments in 2022 according to the HRT.

¹⁵ The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families at risk of and experiencing homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards.

Without a shared mapping tool for providers, it may have been difficult for providers to locate encampments and provide targeted outreach. According to one contracted outreach provider, it was sometimes difficult to locate clients after a referral from the HRT. The provider indicated a map system would be helpful to identify people for services. Clear standards can also help ensure client data is reliable with many different providers using HMIS and the Outreach module across the CoC. USICH best practices recommend setting standards across outreach teams for the kind of data that needs to be collected, as well as using mapping tools to identify outreach coverage and gaps.¹⁶ While the transient nature of the population means there can be difficulties locating people, a mapping tool and shared protocols can mitigate some of these effects.

Alameda County also did not grant the HRT or other teams the ability to conduct Coordinated Entry assessments – the entry point into Alameda County services and shelters – until September 2024 (Figure 13).¹⁷ This meant they had to contact another organization with Coordinated Entry access to do these assessments. As a result, the HRT could not take the first step needed to connect individuals to CoC services, including the 264 county-run shelter beds located in Berkeley.

Figure 13. Data Access Timeline



Note: Though HRT gained access to HMIS in December 2022 and could view clients’ Coordinated Entry assessments, they could not perform these assessments themselves until September 2024.

Source: City Manager’s Office

The lack of a centralized information system resulted in limited coordination among providers. The additional step of having HRT coordinate with a separate provider to get clients into the Coordinated Entry system may have increased wait times to access resources. According to one HRT staff member, before they had Coordinated Entry access, they had to refer a client to another provider 50 percent of the time because that client did not have an updated assessment.

¹⁶ USICH also recommends convening outreach teams with people experiencing homelessness and data experts to decide what data needs to be collected.

¹⁷ Alameda County granted multiple teams - such as mental health clinics, schools, hospitals or outreach teams - access to Coordinated Entry in September 2024 as part of their first Limited Access Point cohort.

According to Alameda County officials, the delay in granting HRT access to Coordinated Entry was due to the County's limited capacity to ensure proper training for a large number of users. However, best practices recommend ensuring all outreach teams are integrated within the larger homelessness system of care and Coordinated Entry process. According to the HRT, their persistent advocacy to Alameda County convinced the County to grant the HRT access to data systems, aligning with best practices.

Recommendations

To avoid future lapses in communication with service providers, the HRT should:

- 2.1** Document the coordination structure for encampment-related meetings. Continue to meet regularly with key participants as identified by the City for all encampment outreach and interventions.

To address inconsistencies in data collection, the HRT should:

- 2.2** Develop and document internal procedures for collecting data on HRT activities and encampments. Include plans for regular review for data accuracy.

To address gaps in data sharing with service providers, the HRT should:

- 2.3** Fully transition to the Outreach module and work with HHCS to consider including the module in contracts with city-funded outreach teams who work with encampment residents. As part of this recommendation, consider developing shared procedures for how HRT and city-funded outreach teams can use the data to inform delivery of services.

The HRT can strengthen its approach to using outcomes for measuring progress toward goals and keeping the public informed.

The three goals guiding the HRT's work in encampments were to reduce unsheltered homelessness, mitigate dangerous encampments, and maintain a clean City. The HRT tracked some outcomes related to these program goals during the audit period but reported information cumulatively which made it difficult to identify trends over time. They also did not report on other outcomes that could connect to their goal of reducing unsheltered homelessness, though they expanded on reported outcomes in a May 2025 report to Council. Going forward, it will be important for the HRT to consistently report on these outcomes related to their goals. Additionally, the HRT could improve the accessibility of their public reporting. Limited administrative staffing may constrain the HRT's ability to collect, measure and report data, though it is important to fill gaps where possible.

Reporting on more outcomes with consistency could help connect the HRT's work with their goals, but additional resources may be needed.

The HRT tracked some outcomes related to their program goals during the audit period. The three goals guiding their work in encampments were: our residents are sheltered, dangerous encampments are not inevitable, and our City is clean. To assess progress towards those goals, the HRT tracked the outcomes listed in the table below (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Homeless Response Team Goals and Outcomes

Goals	Outcomes	Reported Results
Our residents are sheltered	Percentage of people connected to shelter	655 offered shelter and 303 accepted shelter (46% acceptance rate), measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.
	Percentage of people matched to housing resources	20% of HRT clients exit to permanent housing situations, measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.
Dangerous encampments are not inevitable	Number of notices given	1405 notices, measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.
	Number of encampment closures	59 closures, measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.
Our City is clean	Pounds of trash and debris removed	1 million pounds, measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.
	Number of storage notices given	35 storage notices, measured cumulatively over the duration of the program.

Note: ‘Over the duration of the program’ refers to the time period between September 2021 and June 2024, the date of the HRT’s final presentation to Council during the audit period.

Source: Homeless Response Team quarterly reports to City Council

Reporting information by standardized reporting periods rather than cumulatively can make it easier to assess HRT’s progress toward its goals. During the audit period, the HRT reported on outcomes in their quarterly reports to Council as cumulative numbers, for example, 59 encampments closures or 655 shelter offers between 2021 and 2024 (Figure 14). Reporting this information as a total over the duration of the program, rather than by standard reporting periods such as per quarter, made it difficult to evaluate progress toward the HRT’s goals or identify trends over time.

While the HRT reported on the outcomes above during the audit period, they did not report on other outcomes that could be useful to connect to the goal reducing unsheltered homelessness. For example, USICH recommends reporting on outreach outcomes like number of Coordinated Entry assessments or number of outreach encounters, which can shed light on the starting point of the process to get people connected to services and sheltered. Additionally, while the HRT reported the number of shelter offers and acceptances, they did not report on the number of actual shelter enrollments. This information is important because according to a sample of internal HRT data, people who accept shelter may not end up enrolling in shelter. Reporting on enrollment could help provide insight into challenges unhoused residents face to getting into shelter. Another city that reports shelter enrollment information is Seattle, which reports not only the number of shelter offers made and the number of accepted offers, but also reports the number of people who enrolled in shelter.

Additionally, the HRT did not report on the reasons why people declined shelter offers during the audit period. Reporting on reasons that people decline shelter offers can better demonstrate success or reveal barriers in connecting encampment residents to shelter. People decline shelter enrollment for many reasons. As an example, the HRT has stated they generally see a higher shelter acceptance rate with non-congregate beds instead of congregate beds. Although there are challenges to systematically collecting this data, even limited or anecdotal data on why people decline shelter offers could provide additional insight into barriers to getting people sheltered. Additionally, the City requires Bay Area Community Services (BACS) – one of its contracted service providers – to collect data on why the people they engaged with declined shelter offers.

The HRT added new outcomes to its reports to Council in May 2025. Though outside the scope of our audit, an off-agenda memo the HRT sent to Council on May 12, 2025 reported several additional outcomes including the number of people who enrolled in shelter and the number of Coordinated Entry assessments. The memo states that these additional outcomes were intended to provide valuable information to assess progress towards the first goal to resolve unsheltered homelessness. Going forward, it will be important for the HRT to consistently report on these outcomes to provide more information on the process of initial outreach to ultimately being sheltered. This information can help the public and City decision-makers to see trends over time, understand the connection between the City’s activities and goal of getting people sheltered, and reveal barriers or gaps that the City should address.

Other useful information to report consistently in all reports to City Council going forward is demographic data such as race, gender, and health conditions for encampment residents.

Continuing to report on demographics where possible, such as race, gender and disability status, can help identify barriers to providing and care. For instance, disability status may affect someone’s ability to accept a shelter offer if it is not ADA-compliant. Similarly, someone may hesitate to accept an offer of shelter for fear of experiencing gender-based violence. Advocates who work with the unsheltered population in Berkeley have explained that understanding the characteristics and needs of this population provides important context when planning encampment actions.¹⁸ As one advocate stated:

For people with physical or mental disabilities – these shortcomings become overwhelming. It doesn’t take much to make a mistake that can jettison the efforts an individual has put forth. Many people in encampments, older folks, a lot of people are out there with serious handicaps, and we don’t really approach that... I’ve been running into people in their 60s and 70s, and they are not going to be gainfully employed. We need to take these things into consideration.

¹⁸ Some of the points raised by advocates may be subject to litigation and this audit did not independently investigate all their claims.

Consistent reporting on this information is especially important given that the May 2025 memo pointed out that HRT participants are far more vulnerable than Alameda County's homeless population overall. For example, the memo stated that a larger proportion of HRT participants reported physical disabilities, mental health disorders, or substance use disorders compared to the overall homeless population in Alameda County. Reporting on this information can also help track HRT's progress in serving these residents and inform allocation of resources to effectively provide services.

There are some challenges to consistently collecting data and reporting on outcomes. The HRT stated that their reporting is an evolving and imperfect practice because there are few industry tools for measuring encampment outcomes and they have adapted their reporting over time based on what has worked for them. Additionally, some data may be difficult to systematically track and measure. For example, HMIS does not have a data field for reasons why people decline shelter, making this metric difficult to quantify.

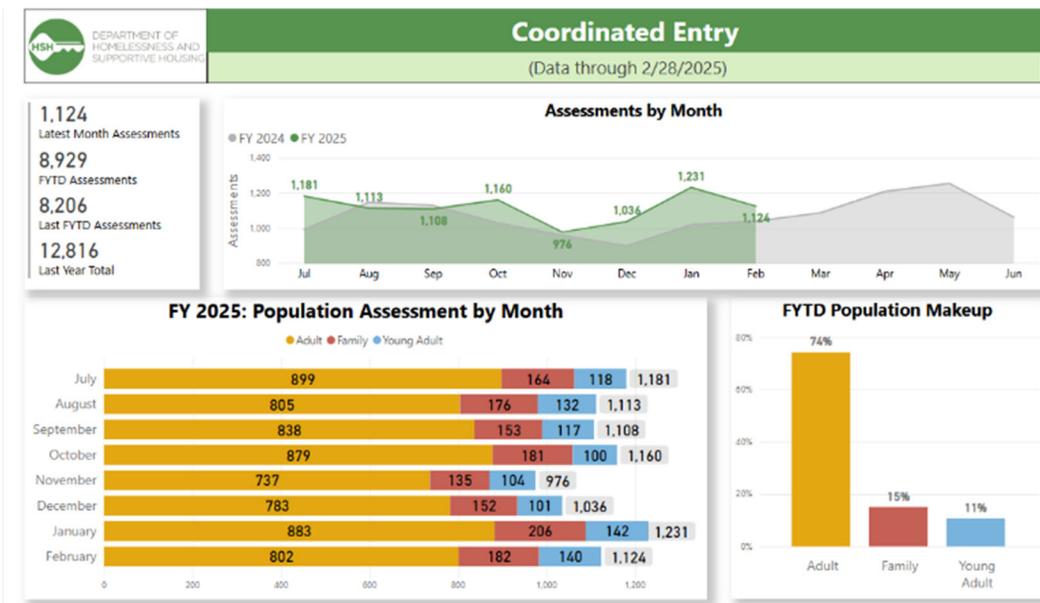
Additional resources may be needed to consistently measure and report on outcomes. HRT staff explained they had limited budget and administrative support for data analysis and reporting. A 2024 staffing study of the Neighborhood Services Division found that some staff felt overburdened by administrative responsibilities. Although the study recommended hiring an additional administrative support staff position, the division did not receive funding for it. Without robust data collection, analysis, and reporting, it may be difficult to identify outreach gaps, track results, or for City leadership to make strategic decisions and allocate resources effectively.

The HRT's reports were difficult to access on the City's website.

Over the audit period, the HRT's public reports were not easily accessible. The HRT's reports were published in two different places on the City's website without a central landing page, which made it difficult to access information about the HRT's work in encampments. As a comparison, other jurisdictions provide the public with more accessible information on their efforts to assist encampment residents. We did not assess staff resources in benchmark jurisdictions compared to Berkeley; these are examples of public reporting methods that may be useful for Berkeley to consider, keeping in mind resource constraints.

The City and County of San Francisco makes information about coordinated entry accessible to the public (Figure 15).

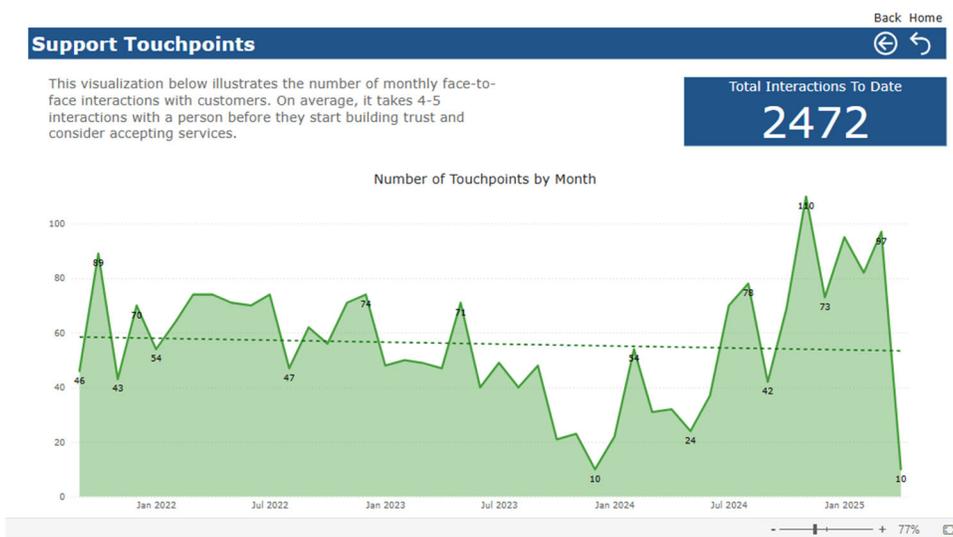
Figure 15. The City and County of San Francisco’s Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing provides data on coordinated entry assessments.



Source: City and County of San Francisco webpage

Additionally, a few jurisdictions we reviewed also provided information related to outreach efforts on their online dashboard (Figures 16-17). For example, the City of Issaquah reports on the number of monthly face-to-face interactions with clients. The City of Portland shows the number helped into shelter and the number given housing referrals, among other outcomes.

Figure 16. The City of Issaquah’s Homeless Outreach and Behavioral Health Dashboard shows monthly interactions with people experiencing homelessness.



Source: City of Issaquah webpage

Figure 17. The City of Portland’s Navigation Team Outcomes webpage shows a range of outcomes by site, including number of individuals engaged.

Location	Date Range	# engaged	# assessed for supportive housing	# helped into shelter	# helped to receive ID's	# helped to receive birth certificates	# signed up for the Oregon Health Plan	# helped to receive glasses	# helped into substance abuse treatment	# given housing referrals
SE Morrison Bridge	01/30/2019-02/15/2019	21	4	4 individuals	1	0	0	0	0	0
Peninsula Crossing Trail	02/26/2019-04/15/2019	57	11	3 individuals, 4 couples	21	13	13	1	1	0
I-405 & Sunset Hwy	04/15/2019-05/07/2019	31	3	2 individuals, 2 couples	14	7	12	0	2	14
SE Johnson Creek	05/16/2019-07/10/2019	68	24	4 individuals	35	10	15	3	0	3
I-205 & SE Division	07/22/2019-08/13/2019	132	93	3 couples	61	10	27	3	8	0

Source: City of Portland webpage

Comprehensive and accessible public reporting aligns with best practices. For example, USICH recommends developing a public-facing dashboard to show progress on reducing unsheltered homelessness and encampment resolution strategies. In 2022, the HRT worked on a dashboard that included data such as shelter enrollments, program exits and exit destinations. However, the team put the project on hold, though they stated they are interested in producing a dashboard in the future.

Not being able to easily access HRT data on a website or dashboard means that Council and members of the public may not understand the extent to which the HRT has been successful in achieving program goals of reducing unsheltered homelessness. It also becomes difficult for oversight bodies, such as the Homeless Services Panel of Experts, to provide adequate oversight over the HRT’s activities if they are not able to access information.¹⁹

Recommendations

To more effectively measure the impact of their work and enhance transparency, the HRT should:

- 3.1** Expand reported outcomes that align with the HRT’s goals and define how they will be measured. Public reporting could include key information such as outreach efforts and shelter enrollments, along with demographic breakdowns and reasons people decline shelter, where possible. Report on the same outcomes over time using a consistent timeframe to support comparisons.

¹⁹ The Homeless Services Panel of Experts (HSPE) was established with Measure P in 2018 to make recommendations on the City’s funding for programs to end or prevent homelessness in Berkeley and provide humane services and support.

To improve the accessibility of public reporting, the HRT should:

- 3.2** Consider sharing public data in a more accessible format, such as on a single landing page on the City's website or through a dashboard.

To ensure there is adequate staffing to focus on reporting and the measurement of impact, the City Manager's Office should:

- 3.3** Assess staffing resources needed to support data and reporting efforts without impacting HRT's operational duties.

Recommendations and Management Response

We provided a draft of this report to the HRT and city management for review and comment. City management agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendations. We generally expect the City to implement audit recommendations within two years of report issuance. The department provided the implementation dates and corrective action plan below. We will be conducting our standard recommendation follow-up process after the audit is issued. We have not yet confirmed to what extent the recommendations have been implemented prior to the audit release date.

2.1 Document the coordination structure for encampment-related meetings. Continue to meet regularly with key participants as identified by the City for all encampment outreach and interventions.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: September 1, 2025

Corrective Action Plan: We are in the process of formalizing the coordination structure for encampment-related meetings. Specifically, we will:

- Document the relevant parties to be included in the HRT’s regular Case Conference meetings, including city staff, housing/shelter providers, and relevant outreach partners.
- Codify the group’s purpose, which will include the coordination of encampment supportive services response, case conferencing around vulnerable clients, and collaborative use of the HMIS Outreach module.
- Establish written procedures to guide participation, information sharing, and alignment with citywide outreach protocols.

These meetings already occur weekly (city staffing permitting) and will continue on a regular basis, serving as the central forum for coordinated encampment outreach and intervention efforts.

2.2 Develop and document internal procedures for collecting data on HRT activities and encampments. Include plans for regular review for data accuracy.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: September 1, 2025

Corrective Action Plan: This recommendation is addressed through several recent improvements already underway:

- The revamped HRT performance report (May 2025) includes clearly defined data points, consistent timeframes, and demographic tracking tied to team activities and encampment engagement.
- The HRT Case Conference group will serve as the anchor for data coordination, with documented procedures being developed to guide use of the HMIS Outreach module.
- We will formalize internal workflows for collecting, reviewing, and verifying data related to outreach contacts, shelter offers, and encampment activity.

Regular data accuracy reviews will be built into the case conferencing process and integrated into our ongoing refinement of performance reporting. Data collection and accuracy review protocols resulting from these plans will be codified in an internal HRT policy memo.

- 2.3** Fully transition to the Outreach module and work with HHCS to consider including the module in contracts with city-funded outreach teams who work with encampment residents. As part of this recommendation, consider developing shared procedures for how HRT and city-funded outreach teams can use the data to inform delivery of services.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: Phase 1: September 1, 2025; Phase 2: August 1, 2028

Corrective Action Plan: We agree with the value of utilizing the HMIS Outreach module to improve coordination, data consistency, and service delivery across outreach teams. However, incorporating this requirement into city-funded outreach contracts will require additional time due to the structure of current service agreements. These contracts are renewed on a four-year cycle and were most recently executed in 2024, meaning the next regular opportunity for revision will be in 2028. Given the recent retirement of the Homeless Program Manager position in HHCS, and the subsequent freezing of that vacancy to address the city’s general fund budget deficit, we seek to minimize off-cycle contract amendments, as these impose significant administrative burden that would impact service delivery.

Moreover, including the City’s expectations for full participation in the HMIS Outreach module in the next Community Agency Funding RFP will create more transparency and an equitable opportunity for all agencies to position themselves for this funding. We anticipate that this can be completed with the completion of new Community Agency contracts for the next funding cycle, likely by August 1, 2028.

In the interim, we will:

- Begin regularly using the HMIS Outreach module as part of the HRT case conference process, allowing for structured and coordinated use of this tool within our team and city partners.
- Encourage voluntary use of the module by non-HRT outreach partners, including those funded through county, federal, or other sources.
- Develop shared policies and procedures based on lessons learned during our pilot of the Outreach module, to guide consistent and effective use.
- Incorporate in the policies and procedures, standards for entering client level data and set goals for client engagement tracked within the module.

These interim steps can be taken and completed by September 1, 2025. While full implementation will require future contract updates, we are proactively laying the groundwork for alignment across outreach providers and are committed to making progress in advance of formal contract changes.

- 3.1** Expand reported outcomes that align with the HRT’s goals and define how they will be measured. Public reporting could include key information such as outreach efforts and shelter enrollments, along with demographic breakdowns and reasons people decline shelter, where possible. Report on the same outcomes over time using a consistent timeframe to support comparisons.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: August 1, 2025

Corrective Action Plan: Since the time of the audit, the HRT has taken significant steps to improve transparency, clarity, and alignment in our outcome reporting. In May 2025, we released a revamped public report titled New Homeless Response Team Mission and Performance Data Report, which directly addressed many of the Auditor’s findings and recommendations.

The updated report includes:

- Clearly defined goals and a revised mission statement for the HRT.
- Quantitative outcomes such as outreach contacts, shelter enrollments, and service referrals.
- Demographic breakdowns of clients served, when available.
- Analysis of shelter enrollment rates based on shelter type.

This report format was developed to be consistent in content and updated regularly, allowing for year-over-year comparisons and community accountability. We anticipate publishing the next quarterly report, using this same format and covering the 2nd quarter of calendar year 2025, in August 2025, which will support comparative trend analysis over time. We believe this work reflects the intent and substance of the auditor’s recommendation.

3.2 Consider sharing public data in a more accessible format, such as on a single landing page on the City’s website or through a dashboard.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: August 1, 2025

Corrective Action Plan: We agree with the importance of making HRT data more accessible to the public. Our team is fully supportive of this recommendation. Moving forward, and beginning with the August 2025 memo referenced above, we will begin publishing all quarterly performance data reports on the Reporting Safety Concerns at an Encampment page:

<https://berkeleyca.gov/safety-health/homeless-services/reporting-safety-concerns-encampment>

3.3 Assess staffing resources needed to support data and reporting efforts without impacting HRT’s operational duties.

Management Response: Agree

Implementation Date: Completed

Corrective Action Plan: In January 2024, Neighborhood Services engaged VIVA Consulting to perform a staffing analysis of the division, including the Homeless Response Team; the final report was issued in May 2024. Pertinent to the Homeless Response Team, the report found the following:

- Neighborhood Services needed more division-wide analytical support; in response, in November 2024 (midway through the Audit period), Neighborhood Services was assigned one FTE Administrative Assistant. This has helped the division handle the large volume of administrative work in the division.
- In terms of operational duties, the City of Oakland has a similar encampment response approach to Berkeley, but at the time of the staffing analysis, had 7 dedicated FTE in the City Administrator’s Office to handle the workload, including two dedicated analysts. Of importance, and at the time of the staffing analysis, Oakland’s Encampment Management Team also included dedicated staff from several other departments including Public Works (10), Police (2), Fire (1 inspector), Human Services (1 analyst and 2 case managers), among others, all of whom worked exclusively on encampment operations and the various data reporting associated with it.

Neighborhood Services has 3 dedicated FTE (one Community Services Specialist III, the unit lead and supervisor, and two Social Services Specialists). It also receives analytical support from 1 FTE Homeless Services Coordinator, but this classification also supports data analysis and budget strategy work for the entire homeless system. With the adoption of the FY2026 Mid-biennial budget, the City Council added a third Social Services Specialist FTE to the team, bringing the total FTE to 4.

Therefore, right-sizing the Berkeley Homeless Response Team to better meet the intensive demands of the work and the administrative, legal, and analytical work it engenders would require more dedicated staff both in Neighborhood Services and its various partner departments, and a blueprint for doing so has already been provided by this third-party consultant report. However, adding more authorized positions to the City's budget during a time of ongoing structural deficit would require tradeoffs without new dedicated revenues, opportunities for which have not been identified given the State's budget deficit and the Federal administration's ongoing efforts to drastically downsize, not increase, the public sector's workforce.

Methodology and Statement of Compliance

We audited the Homeless Response Team's (HRT) operations for fiscal years (FY) 2022 through 2024. We performed a risk assessment of the HRT's practices and procedures to identify potential internal control weaknesses, including fraud risks, within the context of our audit objectives. This included a review of selected policies and procedures, as well as interviews with internal staff.

To gain an understanding of the HRT's operations and internal controls and to achieve our audit objectives, we used the following methodology:

- We reviewed internal policies and procedures, meeting notes, email communications, and other documentation related to HRT operations, interagency coordination, and encampment response efforts.
- We analyzed HRT data related to encampment activities, service connections, and outreach outcomes. We evaluated the quality and consistency of data collection practices and assessed how the HRT used data to measure progress toward its goals. We also reviewed how outcomes were reported to the public, including through City Council materials, performance reports, and public communications. We evaluated the clarity, completeness, and accessibility of HRT's public reporting against best practices in transparency and accountability. While we were unable to verify the accuracy of the HRT's internal data, we analyzed their data reporting in our audit in order to understand how they communicate information to the public and make recommendations for improvement.
- We compared HRT practices against published best practices and guidance from organizations such as the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), as well as models used in other jurisdictions with similar encampment response challenges.
- We reviewed documents and sources that shaped the operating context for the HRT, including:
 - Biennial city budgets to understand HRT funding and staffing resources.
 - Berkeley Municipal Code and Administrative Regulations related to encampments, homelessness response, and interdepartmental coordination.
 - Local and federal court cases that influenced encampment policy, including *Prado v. City of Berkeley*, *Johnson v. Grants Pass*, and *Martin v. Boise*.
 - City Council materials and reports that documented policy decisions and legal considerations relevant to HRT operations.

- We interviewed a wide range of stakeholders to understand how the HRT coordinates with others and uses data in its work. This included HRT staff and staff from other city departments involved in homelessness response, Alameda County officials, and contracted outreach and service providers. We also spoke with members of the Homeless Services Panel of Experts, city leadership, and homeless advocates. These interviews provided insight into coordination challenges, service delivery gaps, and differing perspectives on the City's approach to encampments.
- We attended community meetings held by city leadership regarding homeless encampment response to better understand how information was shared with the public and how community concerns and feedback were addressed. These meetings provided additional context for assessing the City's communication practices and stakeholder engagement.

Data Reliability

We assessed the reliability of encampment data by interviewing data system managers and owners and examining the data for completeness, consistency, and appropriateness. We determined that the data are sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our audit.

Though we found the encampment data to be inconsistent and incomplete, we used encampment data to understand the type of data HRT collects and the data they present to the public, and therefore any inconsistencies in the data did not affect our audit findings. When cross-checking the data to additional sources, we could not independently verify certain data fields including the number offered and accepted shelter, the number of tents or structures, and the number of notices given. Therefore, we did not use the data for analysis or measurement. Our audit includes recommendations for improving management of encampment data to increase data system reliability.

Statement of Compliance

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Mission Statement

Promoting transparency and accountability in Berkeley government.

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BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR