*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Chris Magee. I’m the data analytics manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Homelessness Initiatives in New Orleans.”

The purpose of this audit was to provide information on funding and services for homelessness initiatives, evaluate overall coordination of the initiatives, and identify processes that could be improved.

We found that between January 2019 and June 2024, the City of New Orleans and UNITY of Greater New Orleans – or UNITY – spent $216.3 million dollars on homelessness initiatives, primarily from federal funds.

Of that, $122.4 million dollars was spent on permanent supportive housing programs, which provide long-term rent subsidies and supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness who also have a disability.

We found that while the City, the Louisiana Housing Corporation – or LHC – and UNITY have processes to monitor providers, most fiscal and programmatic compliance monitoring was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, we found the New Orleans Continuum of Care needs increased collaboration among the City, UNITY, and providers to develop and implement a cohesive strategic plan to address homelessness in New Orleans.

Neither New Orleans nor UNITY has a current strategic plan to address homelessness; however, the City is developing such a plan.

We found as well that 275 individuals have been housed through targeted encampment decommissioning, according to UNITY and the Office of Homeless Services and Strategy – or OHSS. Overall, OHSS’s process for decommissioning encampments generally followed city ordinances and best practices.

Additionally, we found the City is not providing adequate oversight of shelters to ensure they follow minimum health and safety standards.

While the City has a process to conduct fiscal and programmatic monitoring of the shelters it funds, it does not regularly inspect these shelters to ensure they meet U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – or HUD – habitability standards.

We found, too, that family coordinated entry for shelters is not always accessible for families in need because it is not always easy for them to contact UNITY. In addition, UNITY did not always conduct annual evaluations and surveys of coordinated entry as required by HUD and UNITY’s policy.

Providers we surveyed indicated that the City and UNITY need to improve communication, including providing better availability and responsiveness to providers, clarity about policies and procedures, and more timely reimbursements.In addition, information about available resources is difficult to find and may be out of date.

New Orleans faces multiple challenges to effectively address homelessness. Lack of affordable housing, as well as the need for living wage employment opportunities, is a primary driver of homelessness.Other challenges include behavioral health and substance use needs, transportation, funding, and staffing levels.

As a result of our report, we developed two matters for legislative consideration and 19 recommendations.

We suggested the Legislature consider urging the Louisiana Interagency Council on Homelessness to work with the City and UNITY to ensure the upcoming statewide plan and the New Orleans long-term plan are consistent in their goals to end homelessness.

We also suggested the Legislature consider adopting regulations to govern emergency shelter facilities and operations.

We recommended the Office of Housing Policy and Community Development – or OCD – and LHC and UNITY conduct all compliance monitoring reviews required by their policies and procedures

We also recommended that OHSS and UNITY work more collaboratively to develop a long-term strategic plan with measurable goals.

We recommended as well that OHSS continue to develop a long-term strategic plan to address homelessness and that UNITY conduct annual gap analyses and create annual plans.

In addition, UNITY should facilitate increased data sharing among key partners.

Three more recommendations focused on the homeless encampment decommissioning process, such as OHSS developing formal policies. Three other recommendations suggested changes related to OCD’s shelter policies, including ensuring shelters meet HUD standards.

We made two recommendations to UNITY about improving coordinated entry.

Finally, we recommended that OCD, OHSS, and UNITY improve their communication with providers and that OHSS and UNITY clearly communicate to the public what resources are available for homelessness services.

As part of their responses, OCD agreed with the five recommendations pertaining to it, and LHC agreed with the one recommendation pertaining to it.

OHSS agreed with six of the recommendations pertaining to it and disagreed with one.

UNITY agreed with six of the nine recommendations pertaining to it, and neither agreed nor disagreed with the other three recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*