Supportive Housing Services: Shared oversight reduces transparency and accountability

Why this audit is important

In May 2020 voters in the Metro region approved a ballot measure to establish a region-wide Supportive Housing Services program (SHS). The measure was expected to generate $250 million annually to address the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

Revenue for SHS is generated from a marginal tax on personal income (1%) and business profits (1%) above certain thresholds. Metro reserves 5% of funds, after tax collection costs, for administrative expenses. Clackamas (21.33%), Multnomah (45.33%), and Washington (33.33%) counties receive the remaining revenue.

This is the second performance audit of SHS by the Metro Auditor. It follows up on recommendations made in 2021 and provides updated analysis of the oversight structure and performance measurement system.

10-year program regional goals

5,000+ chronically homeless households connected to supportive housing

10,000+ households at risk of/experiencing homelessness stabilized in permanent housing

Source: Metro website (January 4, 2024).
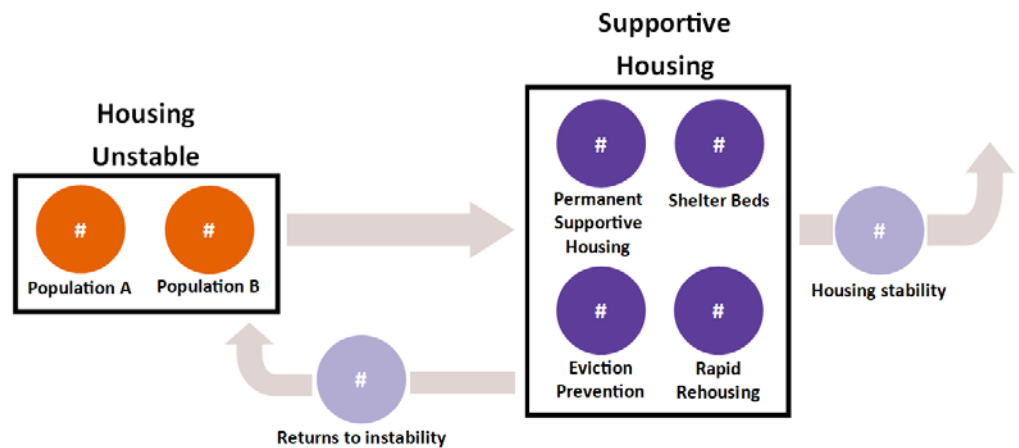*http://oregonmetro.gov/public-projects/supportive-housing-services/progress*

What we found

Metro made progress on the three recommendations in the May 2021 audit. One was fully implemented and two were in process. The audit identified opportunities to strengthen oversight by reducing duplication in some areas, and more clearly assigning responsibility in others. Specifying how each role relates to others, and what timelines are needed to ensure timely alignment would enhance program oversight.

Although the performance management system has improved since 2021, gaps remain. We found variation in definitions, reports, and calculations that made it difficult to understand how the program has progressed. Ensuring reports are accurate and complete is an important element of accountability to the public. In addition, Metro will use monthly and quarterly data to monitor compliance with any corrective action plan, so data reliability is important to ensure agreements are followed.

Logic models can help the public, stakeholders, and decision makers understand how each part of the program is connected to deliver on desired outcomes. Adding actual numbers for each of the circles below could help the program put performance data in context to show the overall impact of SHS investments.

Logic models help visualize how each data point impacts program outcomes

Source: Auditor's Office model of how current data could be combined to show program outcomes.

Reliable data is important not only for current efforts, but to inform future actions. Starting to think about the long-term plan now will be critical to ensure the region has a data-driven strategy to inform priorities when the SHS taxes sunset at the end of 2030.

What we recommend

The audit includes 18 recommendations. Seven were designed to ensure timely and ongoing program oversight. Six focus on improving the reliability and consistency of program performance data and reporting. The other five recommendations were made to identify programs that provide efficient, effective, and equitable services to inform long-term planning.