



Homeless Advocacy Project 2025 Funding and Policy Priorities

The Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP) is a collaboration of service providers and advocates that meets monthly to share information and resources to strengthen services and advocate for better policies and funding for unhoused Austinites. A *March 2025 survey* of 60 people, primarily homeless service providers, identified housing and shelter as the two biggest needs and gaps for our unhoused neighbors.

We urge city and county leaders to look at success stories like Denver, which achieved a 45 percent decrease in unsheltered homelessness since 2023. Denver got there by investing in shelter and because the Mayor declared homelessness an emergency and made it his top priority.

HAP supports shelter and housing as the top priorities for homeless response funding for the City of Austin and Travis County in 2025-2026. We also bring forward the following issues and recommendations for cost-effective and high impact solutions that will strengthen the system.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

ISSUES:

Family Homelessness

As of October 2024, **1,284 households with children** were estimated to be homeless in Austin. Currently, all emergency shelters are full and families face long wait lists. Families and victims of domestic violence are often left with no options at all and are living in places not meant for human habitation. This impacts the health and safety of individuals and the community as a whole. It also results in trauma for children coupled with other challenges like hunger and disruption of learning.

- Austin's 2024-2025 budget did not include any funding for **additional family shelter beds** despite the fact that family homelessness is one of the fastest growing demographics in the city. The Homeless Strategy Office's (HSO) current request of \$32 million for emergency shelters does not specifically call for funds for family shelters, but does request funding for

single adults at the 8th Street Shelter, Marshalling Yard, and the Bridge shelters. ECHO's model calls for 50 additional family beds in 2025, but this will not meet the need. \$2 million has been requested for community shelter, which could be earmarked for family shelter.

- Families represented **12 percent** of the unhoused population in 2023 but makeup **20 percent** of the total population in Austin in 2025. The city has added hundreds of beds for singles but has not addressed the growth and need for emergency shelter for families.
- The City of Denver, a model for ending unsheltered homelessness, has twice as many shelter beds as Austin, despite being a smaller city.

SOLUTION:

- **Allocate funding for 100 family shelter beds to better protect kids at risk.**

Public Health

- Most of the people surveyed marked availability of toilets, showers and laundry facilities as one of the highest priorities for the homeless response system. Neither of the city's three navigation centers have laundry facilities, leaving people with few options. Public health and business owners are negatively impacted when these services are not accessible to Austinites.

Request from a provider, June 2, 2025:

"We have a lady with a baby and two toddlers on the street and have been for some weeks due to husband being incarcerated and he was the breadwinner."

They cannot get shelter due to the long shelter waitlists.

Salvation Army Family Shelter, April 2025: **218** children of families on waitlist

SOLUTIONS:

- **Allocate additional funding for hygiene services to better address basic needs for all the unhoused individuals who are not able to access shelter and housing.** Continue the contract to fund laundry services and assistance for unhoused Austinites.
- **Clarify policy and communicate interdepartmentally and externally to ensure that Austin's recreation center shower and restroom facilities are open to serve all Austinites, including the unhoused community.**

Employment Assistance

- As of April 2025 there were 469 unsheltered people in downtown Austin. There are no organizations downtown that give the public access to employment assistance and workforce development services. This gap is a major barrier to people resolving their homelessness.

SOLUTIONS:

- **Pilot an employment assistance program in downtown Austin.** Allocate funding for job training, career counseling, and skills development to help individuals transition into the workforce. Establish employment pathways by partnering with local businesses, workforce development programs, and veteran employment initiatives. This could be funded and overseen by the City and County's Economic Development Departments.

The City and County's Economic Development Departments could play a vital role in getting unhoused Austinites back to work.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

ISSUES:

- **Because there is no prioritization system for City of Austin (COA) shelter beds, many high-risk individuals continue to sleep outside.**

The *COA contracted with the National Alliance to End Homelessness in 2018*, which resulted in the *Recommendations for the Redesign of Emergency Shelters in Austin* Report. The report recommended a standardization of operations of all shelters, and that 50 percent of beds be assigned by coordinated entry referral. However, our coordinated entry system is still not used for shelter entry in Austin. The report goes on to say that a community-wide decision-making process should be used to determine prioritization for who gets shelter beds. Because Austin has not created this system, the highest risk individuals often cannot access shelters because there is no formal prioritization process in place.



- **Progress has been made on a shelter referral system, but there is no bed management tool that helps coordinate availability of all emergency shelters beds city-wide.**

A *July 2023 Report and Assessment from Austin Public Health* recommended that the City establish a bed management tool and a common intake assessment for city-funded shelters.

SOLUTIONS:

- **Establish a prioritization process for shelter entry that makes use of the coordinated assessment tool.**
- **Ensure that Austin's HMIS system uses a bed-tracking tool that all HMIS service providers can use.** Increased

coordination will make the system more efficient and better meet the needs of our most at-risk neighbors.

ISSUES:

- **Though a standard operating procedure for encampment cleanup has been created, many service providers are still not aware of the procedures and outreach teams are limited in how and when they can respond to events.** Though progress has been made, many unhoused individuals and service providers are still reporting that they are not given adequate notice before encampment cleanups and their belongings continue to be discarded. When people's belongings, particularly vital documents, are put in the trash, resolution of homelessness is further delayed.

SOLUTIONS:

- **Make city encampment cleanup policies and procedures available to homeless service providers and ensure that signage and 72- hour notice is given to people when there is no immediate safety risk.** Share notice of cleanups with collaborative partners outside of city government so they can provide resources to unhoused people who are being displaced. Create written procedures for coordination with the State Departments of Public Safety and the Texas Department of Transportation to minimize negative outcomes when these agencies are also involved in encampment cleanups.

ISSUES:

- **The coordinated assessment (CA) process is not clear to many people experiencing homelessness and is often a missed opportunity to provide critical information to our neighbors.**

Most individuals who are unhoused know that they need to take a coordinated assessment, but many believe that this process results in being added to a housing waitlist. Despite this belief, most people who take the coordinated assessment wait for years for Rapid Rehousing or Permanent Supportive Housing. This can lead to an increase in chronic homelessness.

SOLUTIONS:

- **Encourage ECHO and HSO to create communication plans that better ensure that individuals who are unhoused understand the function and limitations of the CA.**
- **Provide information about the most critical services to address immediate needs to all unhoused individuals taking the coordinated assessment.**

Create materials and train assessors to provide resources to meet the most immediate basic needs, such as diversion, shelter, food access, and healthcare. Clarity and additional resources will empower more people to find alternate ways to resolve their homelessness.

For more information about HAP priorities, contact Andi Brauer at andi@cpcAustin.org, 512.565.4480.