

# Audit at a glance



## Homeless Encampments

APRIL 2023

**ABOUT** | Several city agencies and contracted service providers are involved in responding to homeless encampments in the City and County of Denver. In addition to enforcing city laws and conducting health and safety assessments, the city provides outreach to connect people to services before the city cleans up an encampment site.

These are the agencies involved in responding to homeless encampments:

- Mayor's Office
- City Attorney's Office
- Department of Public Health and Environment
- Department of Transportation & Infrastructure
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Department of Housing Stability,
- Department of Public Safety
- Police Department
- Fire Department
- Denver Human Services

## In the report

### **FINDING: The city lacks sufficient procedures and reliable data to ensure people experiencing homelessness who live in unauthorized encampments are treated equitably and lawfully**

- The city was mostly, but not fully, compliant with the Lyall Settlement from 2019 and the city's unauthorized camping ordinance. We found:
  - Some personal property was being disposed of before 60 days.
  - The webpage did not include a phone number and listed the wrong property storage address for three months.
  - A staff member from Transportation & Infrastructure did not take required sensitivity training because the department was not adequately monitoring its records.
  - The data multiple city agencies use to track encampment enforcement, outreach services and connections, and cleanups was often unreliable.

- The city cannot ensure people experiencing homelessness have equitable access to services or their stored personal belongings because the storage facility is not easy to reach without transportation, personal property can be moved to an off-site facility without notice, and instructions are provided only in written English with no accommodations for people who speak another language or have a visual or learning disability.

### **FINDING: The city is not tracking expenses related to homeless encampments or sufficiently monitoring invoices and contract performance**

- We calculated how much the city spends on homeless encampments by having the 10 city agencies responsible provide summaries of their encampment-related spending from January 2019 through June 2022.

#### **WHY IT MATTERS**

If city leaders do not adequately track expenses and keep reliable data for the city's activities related to encampment response — including for enforcement, outreach, and cleanup — they cannot assess the effectiveness of their efforts, be transparent with Denver residents, or ensure cleanups are performed equitably and that services are provided to all people experiencing homelessness.

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The total came to \$13.65 million divided between enforcement, outreach, and clean-up costs. But the actual figure could be higher because the city is not tracking these expenses. Because of this, the city:

- Cannot ensure its encampment-related spending is efficient, effective, and meeting goals.
  - Cannot be transparent with Denver residents.
- While the 10 agencies conduct some reviews of contractors' invoices, we found they are not adequately overseeing the approval and payment of invoices. This hinders the city's ability to ensure contract deliverables are met and that taxpayer dollars and other funding are being used to provide services effectively and efficiently to those experiencing homelessness in Denver.

**FINDING: A draft city plan needs improvement to effectively guide city agencies in their responsibilities over unauthorized encampments**

- The Mayor's Office and a group of city leaders created a draft program management plan for the Denver Unauthorized Encampment Response Program in March 2021. Their

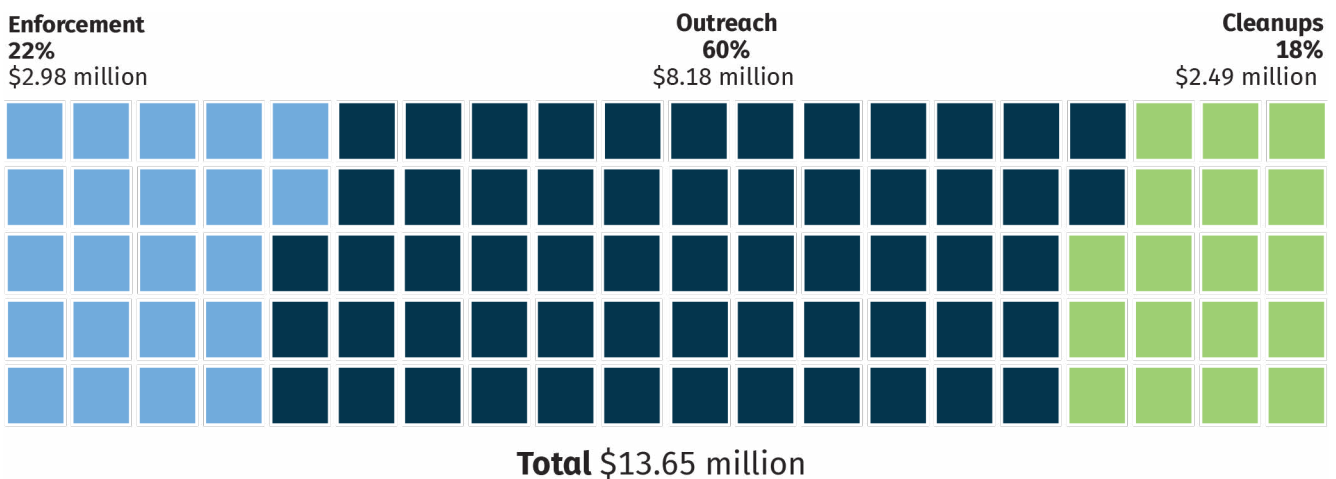
goal is to reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and ultimately eliminate unauthorized encampments, while also addressing adverse health and safety risks in public spaces. But they did not document their formal needs assessment or develop policies and procedures to guide all agencies involved in encampment response, including enforcement and outreach.

**FINDING: The city's encampment response program may not be appropriately staffed to achieve its goals and responsibilities**

- The Mayor's Office and the Unauthorized Encampment Response Program coordinator did not conduct a workforce analysis to identify staff needed to ensure program goals are met. Staffing issues and burnout will continue to be a concern as homelessness remains an issue. But without a completed workforce analysis, managers cannot ensure the city has adequate staff to achieve program objectives to respond to encampments, provide services, and reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

**Estimate of citywide spending on encampment-related expenses, January 2019 through June 2022**

This is only an estimate; we cannot provide assurance over the accuracy or completeness of this amount. Because of the limitations in the agencies' self-reported financial information, it is possible the city spent more or less on each effort than what we estimate here.



Source: Auditor's Office analysis of agencies' self-reported expenses as provided by each agency.

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