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Homelessness in California

State Government and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Need to Strengthen Their Efforts to Address Homelessness

Background

California leads the nation with both the highest number of people experiencing homelessness and the highest proportion of unsheltered homeless persons (68 percent) of any state. The federal government provides assistance grants including grants for the Continuum of Care (CoC) program to promote ending homelessness, fund efforts by nonprofit providers and state and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless people, and optimize self-sufficiency among the homeless. Multiple state entities administer a variety of homeless services programs at the state level while CoCs coordinate implementation of a housing and service system within their geographic area at the local level. There are 43 CoC areas in the State including the Los Angeles CoC area, which is composed of most of Los Angeles County and led by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (Authority).

Key Recommendations

- To better serve the needs of homeless Californians, the Legislature should do the following:
 - » Provide statewide leadership to agencies at all levels to improve coordination of efforts to address homelessness and provide funding for CoCs and the state homeless council.
 - » Require the state homeless council to implement a statewide strategic plan, and implement steps to assist CoC lead agencies to meet federal requirements and recommended activities.
- To ensure consistency, efficacy, and transparency in its actions, the Authority should:
 - » Regularly assess and update policies and procedures.
 - » Develop and implement processes to ensure staff use evaluation tools properly and document critical steps in their processes.
 - » Expand the number of service providers by developing and implementing data tracking mechanisms and providing technical assistance programs to analyze results.

Key Findings

- Until recently, California did not have a single statewide entity to address homelessness nor a means to coordinate the many state-funded homeless programs.
- While created in 2016 to pursue 13 statewide goals related to homeless services, the state homeless council has no permanent staff or funding. Further, it is not required to develop and implement a statewide strategic plan to address the homelessness crisis.
- Many lead agencies for California's CoC areas believe that their areas are not equipped organizationally or financially to fully address homelessness and to implement certain activities.
- Though its process for considering funding applications is reasonable and consistent, the Authority can do more to improve the process and address funding variations across Los Angeles County:
 - » Its written procedures are outdated, its documentation process is flawed, and its database doesn't track the results of its application evaluation process.
 - » It awarded the smallest amount of funding for new projects to providers in service areas outside of the city of Los Angeles due to funding restrictions and number of applicants—it cannot adequately analyze its funding decisions based on geographic area.

At 24% of the nation's total, California has the highest homeless population of any other state.

