



The Role of the New York City Department of Homeless Services in Homeless Encampment “Cleanups”

What questions did the audit look at?

- ▶ Does the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) accurately track and report the results of homeless encampment sweeps?
- ▶ How effective is DHS in directing homeless people at these sites to temporary shelter, permanent housing, and support services?

Why does it matter for New Yorkers?

In March 2022, the Mayor created an interagency task force to dismantle and remove homeless encampments in the five boroughs, and to provide people living in these encampments with housing, social services, and other assistance. DHS is responsible for coordinating the City’s response, answering service requests and assigning outreach teams before the encampments are actually dismantled. These operations are called “sweeps” (or “cleanups”).

According to DHS, between March 21 and November 30, 2022, the task force conducted over 2,000 sweeps. The audit found that DHS’ outreach attempts during this time met with limited success.

Of the 2,308 people that DHS reported interacting with during these sweeps, only 119 accepted temporary shelter, and only three were able to attain permanent housing. Of the people who went into shelter, many did not even spend one night. When the auditors visited a sampling of these sites in April 2023, they found that homeless activity had resumed at 31% of them. The audit also found that DHS did not track people who refused shelter placement, nor did it document the support services the outreach teams provided to those people.

This lack of data or documentation makes measuring the efficacy of DHS’ activities extremely difficult. However, the results of the audit suggest that DHS sweeps bear little tangible impact beyond disrupting the lives of homeless New Yorkers. In its mission to provide shelter and services to people living on the street—one of New York City’s most vulnerable populations—it appears that DHS is failing.

What changes did the agency commit to make following the audit?

- ▶ DHS will “explore [the] feasibility” of updating its case management software to track encampment sweep reports.

AUDIT FINDINGS



Only 119 people living in encampments accepted temporary shelter from DHS outreach teams.



Only three people attained permanent housing.



31% of swept encampments saw homeless activity resume by April 2023.



DHS did not track homeless people who did not accept shelter placement.



DHS did not document the support services it provided to people living in encampments who did not accept shelter placement.



DHS did not adequately track placement referrals.



Audit Recommendations	Agency Response
<p>1 In addition to tracking the referral of homeless individuals to temporary shelters as a result of sweeps, DHS should also consistently track its key activities and outcomes.</p>	<p>PARTIALLY AGREED</p>
<p>2 DHS should publicly report key indicators that provide transparency relating to the effectiveness of its outreach efforts in connection with homeless encampments and other homeless sites.</p>	<p>DISAGREED</p>
<p>3 DHS should re-assess how it engages with homeless individuals at the homeless encampment and pop-up sites to improve its success rate in encouraging temporary shelter.</p>	<p>DISAGREED</p>
<p>4 DHS should re-configure its systems so that the agency can readily capture all shelter entry and re-entry dates for each individual.</p>	<p>DISAGREED</p>
<p>5 DHS should consult with other localities and establish effectiveness best practices for engaging, and tracking and reporting encounters with, individuals living at homeless sites.</p>	<p>DISAGREED</p>



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