



The Sexually Transmitted Disease/Human Immunodeficiency Virus (STD/HIV) Prevention Services Grant Program

City of Houston Health Department

Results in Brief

Why OIG Conducted This Audit

The Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Audit and Inspections Division (OIG Audit) conducted an audit of the City of Houston Health Department, a local health department administering sexually transmitted disease (STD) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) control and prevention activities under the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program.

This program provides essential services designed to prevent and control the spread of STDs through monitoring, surveilling, and responding to STD outbreaks.

For the period from January 1, 2019, through August 31, 2021, the City of Houston Health Department had a total budget of \$12.9 million for the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program and received reimbursement for \$12.5 million.

Summary of Review

The audit objective was to determine whether the City of Houston Health Department had processes and controls in place to ensure it administered the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program in accordance with selected grant agreement requirements for performance, data management, reporting, and grant expenditures.

Conclusion

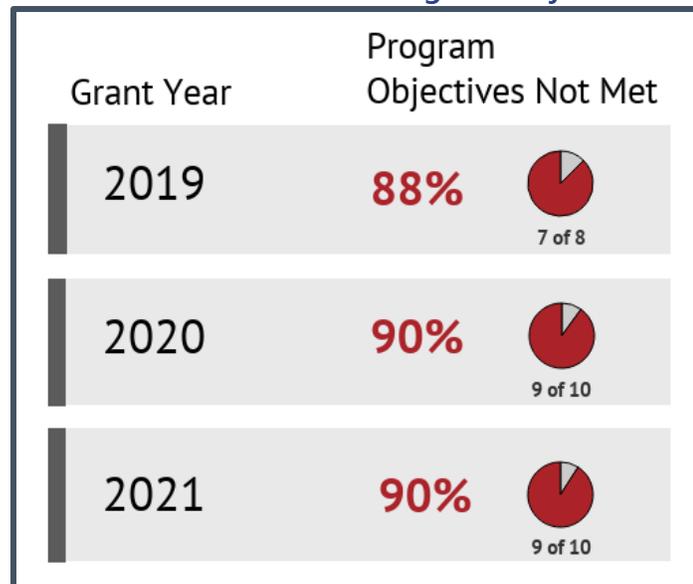
The City of Houston Health Department performed key sexually transmitted disease (STD) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention services activities; however, it did not have processes in place to ensure (a) program objectives were met, (b) financial expenditures were appropriate, and (c) compliance with selected security and confidentiality requirements was achieved.

Key Results

The City of Houston Health Department performed grant agreement activities; however, it consistently did not meet program objectives designed to measure the effectiveness of the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program.

Specifically, the City of Houston Health Department did not meet 25 of 28 (89.3 percent) program objectives reviewed as part of this audit. Figure 1 details the number of program objectives the City of Houston Health Department did not meet by grant year.

Figure 1: The City of Houston Health Department's Performance of Program Objectives



Source: OIG Audit

The audit scope covered the period from January 1, 2019, through August 31, 2021. The audit included a review of the City of Houston Health Department's internal controls as well as testing of controls that were significant within the context of the audit objective.

Background

The DSHS STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program is designed to control and prevent the spread of STDs, including Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and viral hepatitis.

The City of Houston Health Department performs STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program activities to prevent and control the spread of STDs. The prevention activities include identifying individuals with STDs, identifying partners of those diagnosed with STDs, and connecting both the diagnosed individual and their partners to care and treatment. The control activities include conducting surveillance, responding to STD-related outbreaks, and promoting U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-recommended practices to relevant providers.

The City of Houston Health Department directly administers STD testing and provides STD counseling. In addition, DSHS assigns outreach activities to the City of Houston Health Department, which then provides education, outreach, and screening services to individuals diagnosed with STDs and other at-risk populations. DSHS acts as a pass-through entity between the CDC and the City of Houston Health Department for STD prevention and control programs.

Management Response

The City of Houston Health Department partially agreed with the audit recommendations and indicated corrective actions had been fully implemented.

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Additionally, the City of Houston Health Department did not ensure expenses were incurred exclusively for grant activities performed during the grant year and spent a disproportionate amount of their 2019 (49 percent) and 2020 (45 percent) grant agreement budgets during the fourth quarters of each year. Specifically, of the expenses tested, the City of Houston Health Department did not provide sufficient documentation to support:

- 7 of 10 expenses, totaling \$137,016, in 2019.
- 7 of 10 expenses, totaling \$174,615, in 2020.
- 4 of 10 expenses, totaling \$192,349, in 2021.

Further, the City of Houston Health Department did not have sufficient documentation to support 40 salaries tested, totaling \$79,913, charged to the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program in 2019. However, in 2020, the City of Houston Health Department implemented a new process to strengthen its payroll certification controls, and as a result, selected payroll expenses in 2020 and 2021 were supported by required documentation.

In addition, the City of Houston Health Department did not have effective security and confidentiality controls in place to ensure (a) access to systems and information was appropriate or (b) required documentation was maintained.

Recommendations

The City of Houston Health Department should:

- Implement (a) processes to identify when grant activities are not meeting program objectives and (b) initiatives to improve performance.
- Ensure it has processes and controls in place to limit grant expenditures to allowable grant activities for the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program.
- Continue to ensure it has processes and controls in place to verify salaries charged to the STD/HIV Prevention Services Grant Program are appropriate and supported with required documentation.
- Strengthen its security and confidentiality controls for STD/HIV data.

Confidential Information Omitted from This Report

Pursuant to Standard 9.61 of *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, certain information was omitted from this report because the information was deemed to present potential risks related to public safety, security, or the disclosure of private or confidential data. Under the provisions of Texas Government Code Section 552.139, the omitted information is also exempt from the requirements of the Texas Public Information Act.