

Department of Health and Human Services

**OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**FLORIDA DID NOT ENSURE THAT
SOME PROVIDERS COMPLIED WITH
REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERMINING
ELIGIBILITY FOR ITS PROJECTS FOR
ASSISTANCE IN TRANSITION FROM
HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM**

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Office of Inspector General

<https://oig.hhs.gov>

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Report in Brief

Date: May 2023

Report No. A-02-21-02008

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Why OIG Did This Audit

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded States \$64.6 million in grant funds for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 under its Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness (PATH) program. PATH programs are funded to support outreach and other services to homeless individuals with serious mental illnesses. SAMHSA awarded Florida approximately \$4.3 million for the period August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019 (grant period) for PATH grant funds and was among the States awarded the most grant funds. This is the third in a series of audits by OIG to ensure the integrity and proper stewardship of PATH grant funds aiming to reduce homelessness.

Our objective was to determine whether Florida complied with PATH program requirements.

How OIG Did This Audit

Our audit covered \$4.3 million that Florida received for its PATH program for the grant period. We selected a simple random sample of 70 consumers out of a sampling frame of 2,963 consumers and determined whether they were eligible for the PATH program. We also judgmentally selected and reviewed certain PATH program costs for all 22 PATH providers in Florida.

Florida Did Not Ensure That Some Providers Complied With Requirements For Determining Eligibility for Its Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness Program

What OIG Found

Florida complied with PATH program requirements related to certain program costs and non-Federal contributions. However, Florida did not comply with certain PATH program requirements when determining consumers' eligibility in its PATH program. Specifically, 6 of the 70 sampled consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in the PATH program or ineligible to enroll in the program.

These errors occurred because Florida lacked adequate oversight to ensure that PATH providers accurately reported PATH program enrollment and maintained sufficient documentation to support that enrolled consumers met PATH program eligibility requirements. On the basis of our sample results, we estimated that 254 of 2,963 consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in Florida's PATH program or were not eligible to enroll in the program.

What OIG Recommends and Florida's Comments

We made several recommendations to Florida, including that it instructs PATH providers to disenroll ineligible consumers from the PATH program and strengthen its oversight of the PATH program to ensure that PATH services are only provided to eligible consumers.

In written comments on our draft report, Florida did not indicate concurrence or nonconcurrence with our findings or recommendations; however, it described actions it has taken or plans to take to address them. Among its actions, Florida stated that it instructed the associated providers to confirm that the consumers identified in our report were disenrolled from the PATH program. Subsequently, Florida indicated that the providers confirmed that the consumers were not enrolled in the PATH program. In addition, Florida stated that it plans to draft contract documents to instruct PATH providers to conduct quarterly reviews of consumers' case files to determine if consumers are eligible for enrollment in the PATH program and disenroll ineligible consumers.

After reviewing Florida's comments, we clarified our findings to indicate that certain sampled consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in the PATH program.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE DID THIS AUDIT

On a single night in 2020, approximately 580,000 people were experiencing homelessness in the United States. This marked the fourth consecutive year that total homelessness increased in the United States, with Florida being among the States with the largest increase.¹ To assist States with providing services to individuals with serious mental illness experiencing homelessness, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded States approximately \$64.6 million in grant funds for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 under its Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness (PATH) program.² Florida's PATH program was one of the largest recipients and was awarded approximately \$4.3 million for the period August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019 (grant period). This is the third in a series of audits by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to ensure the integrity and proper stewardship of PATH grant funds aiming to reduce homelessness.³

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to determine whether the Florida Department of Children and Families (the State agency) complied with PATH program requirements.

BACKGROUND

Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness Program

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendments Act of 1990⁴ (Stewart B. McKinney Act) established the PATH program, which is administered at the Federal level by SAMHSA. SAMHSA awards PATH grants to States using a formula. States use the grants to fund local public and nonprofit organizations, known as PATH providers.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, [The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress](#). Accessed on Dec 20, 2022.

² The terms and conditions of the PATH grant award gave grantees 27 months from the beginning of the grant period to liquidate the grant funds. As a result, this was the most recent grant period we were able to review at the time we began our audit.

³ *New York Provided Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness Grant Services to Ineligible Individuals and Did Not Contribute Any Required Non-Federal Funds* ([A-02-19-02006](#)), issued December 2020; and *Texas Did Not Ensure Documentation Supported That Individuals Met Eligibility Requirements and That Its Annual Report Was Accurate Under Its Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness Program* ([A-02-21-02001](#)), issued February 2022.

⁴ P.L. No. 101-645 (Nov. 29, 1990).

The PATH program supports outreach and other services to individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorder who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.⁵ To be eligible for PATH program services in Florida, individuals must be age 18 suffering from serious mental illnesses and homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.⁶ (We refer to these individuals as “consumers” throughout the report.) SAMHSA requires States, as part of their applications for PATH funds, to develop their own operational definitions of the terms “homeless individual,” “imminent risk of homelessness,” and “serious mental illness.”⁷

At the end of each grant period, grantees are required to submit to SAMHSA a *Statewide Annual PATH Report* (Annual PATH Report) that details their PATH program activities. SAMHSA requires PATH providers to utilize a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect client-level PATH data.⁸ These data systems are regulated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and provide a platform for coordinating care and improving access to housing resources. Each HMIS is administered by a local Continuum of Care (CoC) that is responsible for designing its HMIS in accordance with HUD requirements and working with HMIS software vendors.⁹

⁵ PATH services include outreach, screening and diagnostic treatment, habilitation and rehabilitation, community mental health, alcohol or drug treatment, staff training, case management, and referrals for health, job training, education, and housing services.

⁶ Stewart B. McKinney Act § 522(a).

⁷ Florida Fiscal Year 2018 PATH Agreement.

⁸ Stewart B. McKinney Act § 528(a); SAMHSA’s *PATH Annual Report Manual*.

⁹ The CoC is a HUD-funded group of representatives that coordinate homeless services and homelessness prevention activities across a specified geographical area. During the grant period, there were 7 Managing Entities (MEs) that utilized 27 different HMIS software vendors for Florida’s PATH program.

Florida's Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness Program

Florida's PATH program is administered at the State level by the State agency. For the grant period we reviewed, SAMHSA awarded Florida approximately \$4.3 million in PATH grant funds. The State agency contracted with seven private, not-for-profit agencies known as Managing Entities (MEs) to manage PATH funding for PATH program services.¹⁰ The MEs contracted with a total of 22 providers to provide these services to approximately 3,000 enrolled consumers. PATH providers have utilized HMIS to collect and report PATH data since 2016. PATH providers are required to generate and submit detailed reports of their PATH activities. The State agency is required to review and approve the PATH data before submitting its Annual PATH Report to SAMHSA.¹¹

Florida's PATH Program Definitions

In its grant application for the grant period, the State agency defined *homeless individuals* as individuals who lacked housing, regardless of whether they were a member of a family. This included individuals whose primary residence at night was a facility that provided temporary living accommodations and transitional housing. Individuals were considered at *imminent risk of homelessness* if they lived in a condemned building without a place to move, or in temporary or transitional housing; were being discharged from a health care or criminal justice institution without a place to live; had received an eviction notice for unpaid rent; and/or maintained a doubled-up living arrangement where the individual's name was not on the lease. Individuals were considered as having a *serious mental illness* if they were suffering from a diagnosable mental, behavior, or emotional disorder that causes serious functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities. (Fiscal Year 2018 PATH Agreement.)

HOW WE CONDUCTED THIS AUDIT

Our audit covered \$4.3 million that the State agency received for its PATH program for the grant period. We selected a simple random sample of 70 consumers out of a sampling frame of 2,963 consumers and determined whether they were eligible for the PATH program. We also judgmentally selected and reviewed certain PATH program costs for all 22 PATH providers.¹²

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

¹⁰ The MEs are responsible for implementing the PATH program in their respective geographic areas and ensuring PATH funds are used as required by the grant.

¹¹ *Fiscal Year 2018 Projects for Assistance in Transition From Homelessness (PATH) Agreements* between the State agency and SAMHSA.

¹² We reviewed certain PATH program costs that made up the majority of the grant funds used during the grant period, which included salaries and indirect costs. We also reviewed all of the non-Federal funds that the State agency was required to contribute toward its PATH program.

Appendix A contains the details of our audit scope and methodology, Appendix B contains our statistical sampling methodology, and Appendix C contains our sample results and estimates.

FINDINGS

Based on our review of certain PATH program costs and non-Federal contributions that the State agency was required to make toward its PATH program, we determined that the State agency complied with these PATH program requirements. However, the State agency did not comply with certain PATH program requirements when determining consumers' eligibility in its PATH program. Specifically, 6 of the 70 sampled consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in the PATH program or ineligible to enroll in the program.

These errors occurred because the State agency lacked adequate oversight to ensure that PATH providers accurately reported PATH program enrollment and maintained sufficient documentation to support that enrolled consumers met PATH program eligibility requirements.

On the basis of our sample results, we estimated that 254 of 2,963 consumers (9 percent) were inaccurately reported as enrolled in Florida's PATH program or not eligible to enroll in the program.¹³ Based on our estimate, the State agency overstated the number of eligible consumers reported by the State agency in its Annual PATH Report to SAMHSA, which may impact funding decisions made by SAMHSA.

FLORIDA'S PROGRAM COSTS AND NON-FEDERAL CONTRIBUTIONS COMPLIED WITH PROJECTS FOR ASSISTANCE IN TRANSITION FROM HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The State agency and PATH providers had adequate accounting systems and maintained effective internal controls to ensure that PATH grant funds were accounted separately from other State agency-administered programs and used for PATH program activities.¹⁴ We reviewed a judgmental sample of employee salaries and indirect costs at each of the 22 PATH providers and determined that these costs were allowable, allocable, and reasonable.¹⁵

In addition, non-Federal contributions made by the State agency and PATH providers met PATH program cost-sharing requirements.¹⁶ Specifically, the State agency reimbursed PATH

¹³ The 90-percent confidence interval for the estimated number of consumers inaccurately reported as enrolled in Florida's PATH program ranges from 114 to 477.

¹⁴ 45 CFR § 75.303.

¹⁵ 45 CFR §§ 75.403, 404, and 405.

¹⁶ States are required to contribute non-Federal funds equal to not less than \$1 for every \$3 of Federal funds awarded towards the costs of providing PATH program services (Stewart B. McKinney Act § 523(a)).

providers nearly \$4.3 million for PATH program costs using grant funds and PATH providers directly made \$1.6 million in non-Federal contributions toward the PATH program.¹⁷

FLORIDA DID NOT COMPLY WITH CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES

PATH services may be provided only to eligible individuals—those with serious mental illnesses who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. In its Fiscal Year 2018 PATH Agreement, the State agency defined individuals with *serious mental illness* as individuals age 18 or older who are having a diagnosable mental disorder of such severity and duration as to result in functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits major life activities. It also defined *homeless* individuals as individuals who lack housing (regardless of whether they were a member of a family), including those whose primary residences during the night are facilities that provide temporary living accommodations, and individuals who are residents in transitional housing. Further, the State agency defined individuals *at imminent risk of homelessness* as those (1) who maintained doubled-up living arrangements where the individual's name is not on a lease, (2) living in a condemned building without a place to move, (3) having arrears in rent/utility payments, (4) receiving an eviction notice without a place to move, (5) living in temporary or transitional housing that carries time limits, and/or (6) being discharged from a health care or criminal justice institution without a place to live. In addition, contracted PATH providers are required to document all assessments and other PATH services provided to consumers in the providers' records.

Six of the 70 sampled consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in the PATH program or ineligible to enroll in the program. Specifically:

- For five sampled consumers, the State agency inaccurately reported the consumers as enrolled in the program due to clerical error by the associated providers.
- For one sampled consumer, there was no evidence in the associated PATH provider's case file that the consumer met certain PATH program requirements (i.e., the consumer was no longer homeless). Therefore, the provider should have disenrolled the consumer once the consumer was no longer homeless.

These deficiencies occurred because the State agency lacked adequate oversight to ensure that PATH providers accurately reported consumers who were enrolled in the PATH program and determined that individuals met program eligibility requirements. Specifically, the State agency relied on MEs to conduct oversight (e.g., perform site visits) of providers to ensure compliance with Federal PATH requirements. Although the MEs' oversight included a review of some case files to determine whether consumers were eligible for the PATH program, their oversight

¹⁷ Contracts with PATH providers indicated the minimum non-Federal contributions that the PATH providers were required to make toward the PATH program.

primarily focused on reviews of providers' compliance with other program requirements (e.g., utilization of funds and services).

On the basis of our sample results, we estimated that 254 of 2,963 consumers (9 percent) were inaccurately reported as enrolled in Florida's PATH program. Based on our estimates, the State agency overstated the number of eligible consumers in its Annual PATH Report to SAMHSA. The State agency indicated that, after the grant period, it implemented new policies and procedures to ensure that all enrolled consumers have a file or record created in HMIS by providers.¹⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Florida Department of Children and Families:

- instruct PATH providers to disenroll from the PATH program the consumers identified in our report as ineligible to receive PATH services,
- instruct PATH providers to review consumers' case files to determine if consumers are eligible and disenroll ineligible consumers from the PATH program, and
- strengthen its oversight of the PATH program to ensure that PATH services are only provided to eligible consumers.

STATE AGENCY COMMENTS AND OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL RESPONSE

In written comments on our draft report, the State agency did not indicate concurrence or nonconcurrence with our findings or recommendations; however, it described actions it has taken or plans to take to address them. Among its actions, the State agency stated that it instructed the associated providers to confirm that the consumers identified in our report were disenrolled from the PATH program. Subsequently, the State agency indicated that the providers confirmed that the consumers were not enrolled in the PATH program. In addition, the State agency stated that it will draft contract documents to instruct PATH providers to conduct quarterly reviews of consumers' case files to determine if consumers are eligible for enrollment in the PATH program and disenroll ineligible consumers. Further, the State agency indicated that it plans to draft contract documents to encourage MEs to improve their oversight of the PATH program to ensure that PATH services are only provided to eligible consumers.

After reviewing the State agency's comments, we clarified our findings to indicate that certain sampled consumers were inaccurately reported as enrolled in the PATH program. The consumers identified in our draft report as ineligible were included in enrollment data provided

¹⁸ Specifically, the State agency issued its *Florida PATH Program Manual* for PATH program providers.

by the State agency through its MEs to SAMHSA.¹⁹ The State agency, as the primary recipient of PATH program funds, is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of this enrollment information so that SAMHSA can make informed funding decisions. Also, although the State agency cited Florida statutes to note that it is mandated to use MEs to conduct oversight of PATH providers, it is the State agency's responsibility—not the responsibility of its MEs—for ensuring that PATH services are only provided to eligible consumers. We commend the State agency for the actions it has taken and those it plans to take to address the findings identified in our draft report. The State agency's comments are included in their entirety as Appendix D.

¹⁹ We provided the State agency the opportunity to provide documentation to support whether the individuals identified in the draft report were not included as active enrollees in the State agency's Annual PATH Report to SAMHSA. The State agency did not do so.

APPENDIX A: AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

SCOPE

Our audit covered approximately \$4.3 million in PATH grant funds that SAMHSA awarded the State agency for the period August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019 (grant period). Our review of internal controls was limited to the State agency's systems and procedures, along with SAMHSA's guidance to the State agency to account for, report on and monitor PATH program funding. To verify consumers' eligibility determinations, we reviewed a simple random sample of 70 consumers. We also reviewed PATH program costs for all 22 providers. We limited our review of the State agency' internal controls to those applicable to its administration over the PATH program.

We performed our audit work from September 2021 through December 2022.

METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our objective, we:

- reviewed applicable Federal and State requirements;
- reviewed the State agency's grant award notice, PATH application, and reports filed with SAMHSA;
- interviewed SAMHSA officials to gain an understanding of PATH program requirements;
- interviewed State agency officials to gain an understanding of their oversight of Florida's PATH program;
- interviewed officials from all 7 MEs to gain an understanding of how each of the 22 providers utilizes their HMIS to report PATH activities;
- reconciled the grant amount the State agency received during the grant period against disbursements made to PATH providers;
- assessed the design and implementation of the State agency's internal controls to the extent necessary to address the audit objective;
- obtained from the State agency Excel files containing data on consumers enrolled in the PATH program during the grant period;
- reconciled the number of consumers reported by the State agency to the number of consumers detailed in its *Annual PATH Report for Fiscal Year 2019*;

- created a sampling frame of 2,963 consumers obtained from the State agency into an Excel file;
- selected a simple random sample of 70 consumers;
- for each sampled consumer, obtained and reviewed supporting documentation to determine whether the consumer was eligible for the PATH program;
- obtained supporting financial documentation from all 22 PATH providers and judgmentally selected and reviewed certain program costs to determine whether PATH funds were spent in accordance with PATH program requirements;
- estimated the total number of consumers who were not eligible to enroll in the PATH program; and
- discussed our findings with State agency officials.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

APPENDIX B: STATISTICAL SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING FRAME

We obtained lists of consumers who were enrolled in Florida's PATH program during the period August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019, for each of the 22 PATH providers. We combined these lists into an Excel spreadsheet to create a sampling frame of 2,963 consumers.

SAMPLE UNIT

The sample unit was a consumer enrolled with a specific provider for the grant period.

SAMPLE DESIGN AND SAMPLE SIZE

We used a simple random sample and selected a sample of 70 consumers.

SOURCE OF RANDOM NUMBERS

We used the OIG, Office of Audit Services (OIG/OAS), statistical software to generate the random numbers.

METHOD OF SELECTING SAMPLE ITEMS

We sorted the sample units in the sampling frame by (1) the PATH provider who performed services, (2) the consumer's last name, and (3) the consumer's first name. We then consecutively numbered the consumers in the sampling frame from 1 to 2,963. After generating 70 random numbers, we selected the corresponding frame items.

ESTIMATION METHODOLOGY

We used the OIG/OAS statistical software to estimate the number and percentage of consumers who were not eligible for the PATH program. For each characteristic, we calculated a point estimate and a two-sided 90-percent confidence interval.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE RESULTS AND ESTIMATES

Table 1: Sample Detail and Results

Number of Consumers in the Sampling Frame	Sample Size	Number of Ineligible Consumers
2,963	70	6

Table 2: Estimated Number and Percentage of Ineligible Consumers in the Sampling Frame
(Limits Calculated at the 90-Percent Confidence Level)

	Number of Ineligible Consumers	Percentage of Ineligible Consumers
Point estimate	254	9%
Lower limit	114	4%
Upper limit	477	16%

APPENDIX D: STATE AGENCY COMMENTS



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Shevaun L. Harris
Secretary

Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Response: HHS OIG Audit: FY2018-19
Projects for Assistance in Transition to Homelessness (PATH) Programs CIN A-02-21-02008
Florida PATH

**Finding 1. FLORIDA DID NOT ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENTS FOR
DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES**

**Recommendation 1. Instruct PATH providers to disenroll from the PATH program the
consumers identified in our report as ineligible to receive PATH services.**

Since 2018, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health proactively amended its contract documents to improve PATH administrative standards such as establishing minimum record-keeping requirements and encouraging the use of the PATH Enrollment Checklist. The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health has also facilitated two statewide PATH conferences (one in person and one virtual), including training on the PATH requirements, HMIS, and PDX data entry. The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health will continue to provide technical assistance and facilitate PATH conferences annually, dependent on the availability of resources.

Per the recommendation from the OIG, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health instructed the five PATH providers to confirm the individuals identified in the audit report were disenrolled from the FY18-19 PATH program. The PATH providers confirmed the individuals were not enrolled in their PATH programs.

**Recommendation 2. Instruct PATH providers to review consumers' case files to
determine if consumers are eligible and disenroll ineligible consumers from the PATH
program.**

Since 2018, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health proactively amended its contract documents to improve PATH administrative standards such as establishing minimum record-keeping requirements and encouraging the use of the PATH Enrollment Checklist. The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health has also facilitated two statewide PATH conferences (one in person and one virtual), including training on the PATH requirements, HMIS, and PDX data entry. The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health will continue to provide technical assistance and facilitate PATH conferences annually, dependent on the availability of resources.

Per the recommendation from the OIG, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health will draft contract documents to instruct PATH providers to conduct quarterly reviews of consumers' case files to determine if consumers are eligible and disenroll ineligible consumers from the PATH program.

**Recommendation 3. Strengthen its oversight of the PATH program to ensure that PATH
services are only provided to eligible consumers.**

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Mission: Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

Note that the Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (Department) is statutorily mandated to use Managing Entities to conduct oversight of providers. Specifically, s. 394.9082(5)(m), F.S., stipulates that Managing Entities are responsible for monitoring provider performance and provider compliance with contract requirements, laws, rules, regulations, and grant requirements. Additionally, s. 402.7306, F.S., requires the Department to adopt policies that, "Limit administrative, licensure, and programmatic monitoring to once every 3 years if the mental health or substance abuse service provider is accredited by an accrediting organization whose standards incorporate comparable licensure regulations required by this state." Managing Entities may continue to monitor providers as necessary with respect to ensuring compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, "if such monitoring does not duplicate the accrediting organization's review pursuant to accreditation standards," pursuant to s. 402.7306(2)(c).

Per the recommendation from the OIG, the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health will draft contract documents to encourage Managing Entities to improve oversight of the PATH program to ensure that PATH services are only provided to eligible consumers.