

Rapid Response to Homeless Encampments

Best Ways to Address Homelessness in Your Community

A Guide for Policymakers and Community Leaders

Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified a widespread housing crisis as evictions and losses in affordable housing outpaced effective housing solutions. Cities across the nation have resorted to arresting or forcibly relocating those experiencing homelessness to sanctioned encampments. These kinds of responses are short-sighted, harmful, costly, and ineffective in addressing the housing crisis.

More effective approaches can include mobilizing public health teams instead of police, connecting people to housing and services that address causes of homelessness, and tapping into the experiences of those closest to the problem. When communities come together in this way, not only are individuals treated with dignity, respect, and autonomy, but research has repeatedly shown that communities enjoy better outcomes and cost offsets.

A Guide for a Better Rapid Response to Encampments



CSH understands that communities are grappling with multiple challenges right now and offers this guide to policymakers and community leaders for implementing a **rapid response** that is person-centered and fiscally responsible.

Policy Principles to Effectively Address People Living on the Streets

Center People



All policies respect individual dignity, autonomy, and civil rights and acknowledge that each person is the decision maker in their own life. People-centered also means that those closest to the issues experiencing homelessness have key insight on the subject. Their voices must be included in designing and implementing policies and related programs.

Homes and Support



All policies acknowledge that safe housing is central to human existence. Policies must ensure that those experiencing homelessness have safe, high-quality, and accessible places to sleep and choose voluntary and self-directed services that support pathways to permanent, affordable housing.

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Mobility



All policies promote pathways to social and economic mobility for progress towards goals they have related to long-term housing, community engagement, finances, employment, and education.

Equity



All policies are grounded in equity and do not directly or indirectly discriminate against people based on their race, gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, or other factors.

Policy Framework to Better Address People Living on the Streets

Crisis interventions focus on the needs of people experiencing homelessness and do not cause further trauma or harm.

- Invite people who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness to guide and inform interventions,
- There is a strategy in place to ensure people have access to services and housing solutions rather than be arrested or further criminalized,
- Access to crisis intervention resources and temporary sleeping locations is low-barrier, flexible, and culturally competent to address multiple family types, including those with disabilities and with partners, dependents, and/or pets,
- Ensure oversight and accountability of any temporary sleeping locations and employ trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and motivational engagement techniques,
- All temporary sleeping locations address individuals' needs, including restrooms and sanitation, storage for personal property, and transportation to services, as needed, and
- Never forcefully remove individuals and their personal property from any location.

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Crisis intervention strategies are temporary, collaborative, and aligned with a plan to end homelessness with permanent housing solutions.

- Crisis intervention response teams that oversees the response comprise an interagency body including, at minimum, housing partners such as the Continuum of Care (CoC) lead agency, street outreach teams, public housing authorities, and housing finance agencies, as well as public health, human services, healthcare, transportation, corrections, and sanitation,
- Resources expand existing housing continuums and are not a replacement for other housing solutions or affordable housing investments,
- Resources must be flexible to be able to respond to fluctuations in need over time,
- There is a focus on moving people out of crisis and into quality, permanent housing according to a standard set of goals and outcome measures that include, at minimum, the number of exits into permanent housing,
- Ensure all temporary sleeping locations have an identified agency responsible for oversight and accountability and are managed by professionals who have experienced unsheltered homelessness, and
- Ensure access to alternative housing options before any encampment removals, and provide sufficient notice of encampment enclosure and assistance with moving for individuals living there and their belongings.

Resources for Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness

- Community Response Resources from CSH
- U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness – 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments
- Engaging Individuals with Loved Expertise in the Homeless System
- People with Lived Experience Must Be Meaningful Partners in Ending Homelessness
- Partnering with Animal Welfare Organizations to Help Homeless People and Their Pets
- Breaking the Homelessness-Jail Cycle
- What Other Cities Can Learn From Boston’s Public Health Approach to Homelessness
- Case Studies: Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments
- Effective Police-Mental Health Collaboration Responses to People Experiencing Homelessness
- Department of Justice – Effective Police-Mental Health Collaboration Response to People Experiencing Homelessness