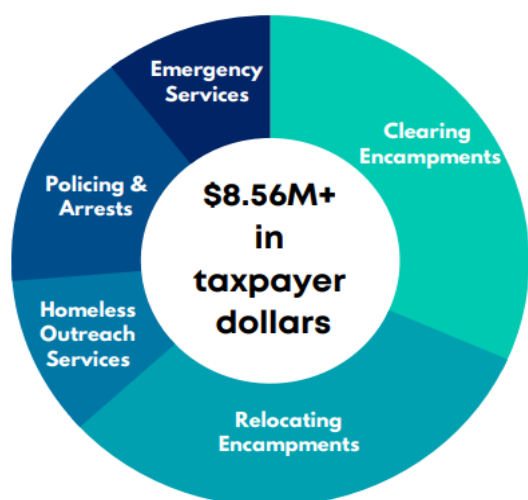


# Rapid Response to Homeless Encampments

A Guide for Policymakers and Community Leaders  
*Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)*

Many states have seen an increase in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and staying in encampments resulting from rising rents, lack of affordable housing, and people not being connected to the systems intended to help them live healthy lives. With more focus on acting quickly, cities and states have moved to enact legislation

that focuses on removing people from public properties, mandating mental health treatment, increasing the use of policing, and creating designated sleeping areas where people must go.



It's not uncommon for the legislation to also reallocate funding for supportive housing and other proven solutions and put it into systems that can cost the same or more without being connected to a long-term solution that help people stay housed and live productive lives.

Responding to encampments can cost upwards of \$8.56 million. Cities and states carry the cost burden since federal funding for homelessness cannot be used for policing or cleaning encampment locations. Further, clearing encampments without connecting people to housing and services doesn't solve the problem, it just moves it to other parts of the city.

Policymakers looking for ways to respond to encampments can look to examples from cities like Denver, Boston, and Dallas, among several others, that have all successfully reduced unsheltered homelessness by using a public health approach that brings together coordinated outreach, health systems, and housing partners. These examples demonstrate that there are timely and effective ways to address encampments that do not rely on costly emergency services and institutions and that also break the cycle of being released from jails and hospitals back into homelessness.



This Policy Framework for policymakers and community leaders offers guidance for implementing a **rapid response** to encampments that is person-centered and fiscally responsible. The available resources can be used to develop additional strategies.

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## Policy Framework for Encampment Response

Encampment closures focus on the needs of people living there.

- Encampment closures should only be done after an assessment of needs is conducted with the residents in the encampment and a cross-sector team is developed to respond.
- During the process of closing an encampment residents should be offered services and health care to address their needs.
- Encampment closures must be communicated to all residents with a clear timeline.
- Individuals living in encampments should never be forcefully removed or have their personal property disposed of.
- Individuals should be directed to alternative locations where they can safely sleep or, when possible, provided a hotel room, housing voucher, or rental assistance to help them move to an indoor location.

Public areas that have been designated by jurisdictions for sleeping outside are properly resourced and managed.

- Designated sleeping areas should be seen as short-term interventions with clear plans on how to service residents sleeping there, provide needed services, and link individuals and families to appropriate housing options.
- They should be low-barrier, flexible, and meet the needs of multiple individuals and family types, including those with disabilities and those living with partners, dependents, and/or pets.
- They must include restrooms and sanitation, storage for personal property, and onsite services or transportation to services.
- There must be an identified agency responsible for oversight and accountability of all designated sleeping areas.
- The responsible agency should use engagement techniques that support the cultural difference of residents, support residents in accepting support, and address past and on-going trauma that affect the residents' daily lives.

Short-term interventions align with long-term strategies that address the need for more permanent housing solutions.

- A planning and response team should be developed to oversee and manage encampment closures and other short-term crisis interventions, as well as support the development of long-term strategies that focus on moving people into permanent housing.
- The team should be made up of interagency representation include, at minimum, housing partners such as the Continuum of Care (CoC), street outreach teams, public housing authorities, and housing finance agencies, as well as public health, human services, healthcare, transportation, corrections, and sanitation.
- Any short-term interventions and resources developed should expand existing housing continuums and not replace or remove funding from other permanent housing solutions.

Approaches to addressing homelessness are supported by data and evidence-based strategies

- There must be a focus on moving people out of crisis and into permanent housing according to a set of goals and outcomes developed by the planning and response team.
- The auditing of any funds being used to address homelessness should rely on existing data collection methods and assess data from all systems including homeless, police, hospitals, jails, and psychiatric hospitals.

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## Additional Resources

- [U.S. Interagency Council – 19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#)
- [U.S. Interagency Council – What Other Cities Can Learn from Boston’s Public Health Approach to Homelessness](#)
- [U.S. Interagency Council – Case Studies: Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments](#)
- [CSH - Community Toolkit for Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness](#)
- [HUD – Engaging Individuals with Lived Experience in Homeless Response](#)
- [Urban Institute – Breaking the Homeless-Jail Cycle: Results from the Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice – Police-Mental Health Collaboration Toolkit for Responding to Homelessness](#)