

New study warns Utah’s proposed homelessness campus would worsen the crisis

A new independent study raises doubts about Utah’s proposed “transformative campus” for people experiencing homelessness. It finds that the campus is unlikely to reduce rising homelessness, is far more expensive than anticipated, and defies best practices. The project is on hold amid budget delays and uncertainty about federal funding.

<p>Campuses do not reduce homelessness.</p>	<p>Research from other cities shows large, centralized shelter campuses do not lower regional homelessness rates. By prioritizing shelter capacity over stable, affordable housing, which is in short supply, the proposal risks keeping people homeless longer.</p>
<p>The Utah campus is oversized.</p>	<p>State leaders describe the campus as serving a narrow population of unsheltered individuals with serious behavioral health needs who frequently cycle through jail. The study finds this group likely numbers in the dozens, not the thousands, making a 1,300-bed facility much larger than is needed.</p>
<p>Location would worsen outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>Placing the campus seven miles from downtown Salt Lake City would move people away from jobs, transportation, and services. Local experience and national research show this approach would increase instability and criminal behavior.</p>
<p>Costs are higher than advertised.</p>	<p>Researchers estimate construction costs of roughly \$165 million, more than double the cited \$75 million, with annual operating costs of \$53 million compared with \$34 million previously claimed. Federal funding would cover only a small share, which would make taxpayers responsible for most of the cost.</p>
<p>The model homelessness program that Utah cites has already changed.</p>	<p>Haven for Hope in San Antonio has moved away from its original coercive approach after it left too many people unsheltered. The program now emphasizes therapeutic services and stable housing pathways.</p>

Bottom line

Decades of research show the best results come from pairing affordable housing with voluntary non-coercive mental health and substance use treatment. The proposed campus would be one of Utah’s largest homelessness investments in decades. The evidence suggests it is unlikely to deliver the outcomes promised.

Study:
Homelessness in Salt Lake County and the Proposed Utah Campus: An Evidence-Based Assessment

Prepared by:
Social Impact Insights for the Corporation for Supportive Housing

Authors:
Kimberly Burnett and Samuel Dastrup