



# Evidence for Housing-Based Encampment Strategies

The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and living in encampments is rising.<sup>1</sup> Local leaders are facing increased pressure to close encampments while housing prices surge, and affordable housing is limited.<sup>2</sup> Despite these challenges, housing-based encampment strategies that emphasize transitioning encampment residents to permanent housing are emerging as a promising practice. Stable housing environments, paired with supportive services that address residents' specific needs, can result in improved behavioral and physical health as well as employment outcomes.<sup>3,4</sup>

Housing-based encampment strategies are proving to be a humane, sustainable, and cost-effective alternative to encampment maintenance and repeated clearing.





## Definitions

**The term “unsheltered homelessness”** refers to individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, tents, the street, public spaces, or camping grounds).<sup>1</sup>

**The term “encampment”** is used to describe groups of people living in tents or other temporary structures in public spaces.<sup>11</sup>

**An “encampment clearing”** is when authorities force people to leave a public space where they live with or without trying to assist them in obtaining housing or services. People who do not leave could be fined, arrested, and have their personal items seized.<sup>11</sup> **This practice can sometimes be referred to as an encampment “sweep” or “clean-up.”**<sup>6–10</sup>

## Why Should My Community Consider a Housing-Based Encampment Strategy?

**Dispersing encampments without housing can be harmful to health.**

- Sleeping outside is associated with negative health outcomes and additional challenges accessing and utilizing health care services.<sup>5</sup>
- [Several studies](#) have shown that people experiencing unsheltered homelessness who were involuntarily displaced (i.e., experienced an encampment sweep) had [many negative impacts on health](#), including:
  - ◆ an increase in physical assault, infectious diseases, worsening self-reported mental health, disrupted sleep, changes in substance and alcohol use, and an increase of weather-related exposures and outcomes.<sup>6–9</sup>
- Research shows that dispersing encampments without also housing residents can lead to an [increase in disease, death and a shortened life expectancy](#) among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness who inject drugs.<sup>10</sup>

**Housing-based encampment resolutions can prevent encampments from recurring and save money.**

- Providing permanent or short-term housing for encampment residents prevents encampments from recurring, reducing the substantial and ongoing costs of encampment cleaning and clearing.<sup>11,12,13</sup>
- There are also potential cost benefits of providing permanent supportive housing (PSH) to people who are chronically homeless and living in unsheltered locations.<sup>14</sup>
- When targeted to those who use the most services, PSH can generate gross savings of over \$46,000 per person per year compared to leaving people on the streets.<sup>15</sup>

## Learn More about Successful Housing-Based Encampment Strategies

As communities strive to make unsheltered homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring, promising strategies continue to emerge, showing that cost-effective, humane, and sustainable housing-based encampment strategies are achievable.



**Houston, Texas** implemented an **encampment closure strategy** that **engaged 849 encampment residents**, **housing 65% of residents**.<sup>16</sup>



The **County of Santa Barbara, California** prioritized permanent housing using California's Encampment Resolution Fund initiative, **acquiring a 59-unit hotel** for temporary and permanent housing.<sup>17,18</sup>



In **Dallas, Texas**, an **encampment “closure via housing” approach** is used, meaning their encampments are resolved by placing people into housing. The city's 2024 annual homeless census (i.e., Point in Time count) showed a **24% decrease in unsheltered homelessness** and **19% reduction in overall homelessness** from the previous year, indicating placements into housing is an effective solution to resolving encampments and reducing unsheltered homelessness.<sup>19</sup>

## Housing-Based Encampment Strategies Can Work in YOUR Community

Review the [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)<sup>13</sup> and [request technical assistance](#) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development<sup>20</sup> to get started.

# References

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