



## Leading With Kindness in Encampment Resolution

Communities across the country are dealing with an unprecedented increase in people experiencing unsheltered homelessness with even greater visibility due to encampments. Often referred to by other terms such as tent cities, homeless settlements, and homeless camps, encampments are simply gathering places for groups of people who experience unsheltered homelessness and are trying to find someplace to live and be safe together. Many communities utilize methods that criminalize homelessness and are ineffective in decreasing homelessness, causing unnecessary additional trauma to an already traumatized population. [Understanding encampments](#), and why they may be the only option for some people, is a starting point for communities to learn more about variances in characteristics, social structures, and regions.

In 2022, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness released [7 Principles for Addressing Encampments, which are as follows](#):

- **Principle 1:** Establish a Cross-Agency, Multi-Sector Response.
- **Principle 2:** Engage Encampment Residents to Develop Solutions.
- **Principle 3:** Conduct Comprehensive and Coordinated Outreach.
- **Principle 4:** Address Basic Needs and Provide Storage.
- **Principle 5:** Ensure Access to Shelter or Housing Options.
- **Principle 6:** Develop Pathways to Permanent Housing and Supports.
- **Principle 7:** Create a Plan for What Will Happen to Encampment Sites After Closure.

The importance of centering these principles in encampment resolution is demonstrated by this story from Randy, an encampment survivor. He shared *“I’ve been misplaced and removed from three encampments and the same thing happens each and every time: they come in with force—police with dump trucks removing people’s belongings. I’ve watched tons of food and clothes be thrown in the trash—people’s tents people’s belongings tossed in the trash—and we get put in the streets and what do we do? We relocate and then the same thing happens over and over again. Man, I tell you, people are dying out here; I’ve watched people drinking and drugging themselves to death because they don’t have a place to call home because every time they settle down in our so-called community, they run us out or remove us or lock us up!”*

### **Communities MUST:**

**Conduct intensive outreach.** Provide advance notice by the outreach team, have housing and shelters in place, and designate a place to store property before or during clearance of an encampment. Between 14 and 21 days before an encampment is closed, outreach teams should be meeting daily with residents. Shelter and housing offered should reflect the diverse needs and desires of the people in the encampment.

**Center a Housing First approach.** Give higher priority to those individuals who are experiencing physical and mental illnesses or disabilities, trauma, and addiction for long periods of time. Build and recognize skills, abilities, and goals that a client has to help stabilize the situation and lead to self-sufficiency.

**Coordinate with community partners and stakeholders.** Partner with people with lived experience of homelessness, other homeless agencies, advocates, businesses, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders to develop a “whole of community” response. Consider strategic partnerships to serve specific subpopulations and advocate for low-barrier shelter and housing options.

**Meet basic needs.** Ensure that fundamental support and resources for food, shelter, clothes, transportation, education, and access to quality health care are available.

**Prioritize equitable resources to target the most vulnerable.** Meet people where they are, access all their information, gain their trust, and act on what they give you. Identify resources to help and better serve them.

### **Communities MUST NOT:**

**Criminalize homelessness.** As Executive Director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty Maria Foscarinis said, “Simply razing encampments without ensuring adequate alternatives is not only inhumane, costly, and counterproductive, it would also violate fundamental constitutional rights.”

### **Resources:**

- [Resource Roundup for Addressing Encampments](#)
- [Encampment Principles and Best Practices](#)
- [Using Smart Outreach and Housing First to End Unsheltered Homelessness in Nevada](#)
- [There’s a Right Way and a Wrong Way to Address Encampments](#)
- [The High Cost of Clearing Tent Cities](#)
- [Impact of Encampment Sweeps on People Experiencing Homelessness](#)