

Responses to Homeless Encampments: A Look at Four City Responses in 2019

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Study background

- Funded by HHS/ASPE and HUD/PD&R to learn more about encampments and cities' approaches to responding to them
- Findings intended to help federal, state, and local policymakers
- Research included:
 - Literature review
 - Phone interviews with 9 cities
 - Site visits to 4 cities



What are encampments?

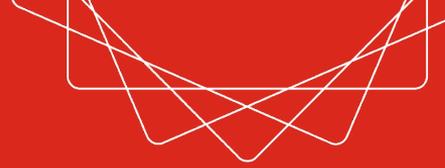


Definition of encampment



- No standard definition
- Common elements in formal and informal definitions include:
 - Continuity of location
 - Number of people residing at location
 - Presence of physical structures and personal belongings
 - Sense of social support or community

Encampment locations varied



Encampment along Guadalupe Creek,
San Jose



Hamilton/Pierce encampment, Houston

Encampment size and structures



- Encampments vary in size both within and between cities
- Structures vary from blankets and tarps to tents to cardboard lean-tos
- Sometimes common belongings and supplies shared among residents

Characteristics of encampment residents



- Most encampment residents adults, more men than women
- Encampment residents have high rate of disabling conditions, including substance use disorder and mental illness
- Encampment residents often lived in the city prior to becoming homeless

Reasons people form encampments



- Severe shortages of affordable housing
- Shortcomings of shelter systems
 - Insufficient shelter beds
 - Barriers to entry (couples, pets, sobriety), program rules (hours incompatible with working); lack of personal safety and security of possessions
- Sense of autonomy and community offered in encampment settings
 - The “encampment family”

City responses to encampments

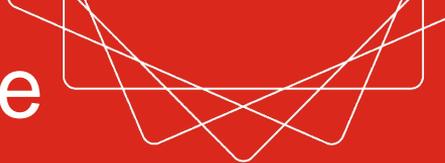


City responses to encampments



- For the largest encampments, four cities converging on a similar approach— clearance and closure with support
- Support means major focus on outreach and engagement
- Try to connect encampment residents with shelter or housing
- May include creation of low-barrier shelters

Prioritization of encampment response



- Cities prioritize responses to encampments that:
 - Are located in highly visible locations or large in size
 - Pose significant health, safety, and environmental hazards
 - Generate significant public and political pressure

Encampment responses



Cleaning

- Regularly scheduled cleanings – basic sanitation and touchpoint for outreach
- Periodic “deep” cleanings – more thorough with more implementation partners involved

Clearance and closure

- Provide advance notice via signage and notification by outreach team
- During clearance, store property
- After closure, clean up site to remove structures and mitigate environmental impact

Prevention

- Cities erect fencing or other physical barriers to prevent people from returning
- Most common for larger encampments and those with negative environmental impacts
- Police enforce no camping ordinances

Outreach – ongoing and intensive



- Invest significant time building rapport and trust with encampments residents
- Cities contract with homeless service providers to conduct outreach activities
- Specialized outreach teams:
 - Police Homeless Outreach Teams (HOTs)
 - Build rapport and refer to services
 - Enforce laws and ordinances around encampments, can make arrests if observe illegal activity
 - Medical and substance use outreach

Coordinating the effort



- City government has the lead role, establishes the strategy, and coordinates the implementation partners
- Partners include police, sanitation, other city departments, homeless services providers
- CoC is a separate entity in these four cities so need to link to coordinated entry and outreach providers

Chicago key encampment activities



Lower Wacker Drive encampment, Chicago, October 2019.

- Focus on downsizing encampments
- Prioritize largest encampments and those that generate most political pressure
- Opened 28 bed low-barrier Pilsen shelter

Houston key encampment activities

- Closed Wheeler St. encampment in 2018
- In 2019, launched initiative to permanently house residents of city's largest encampment, Chartes
- Plan to open temporary emergency shelter in 2020



Pierce/Hamilton encampment, Houston
October 2019

San Jose key encampment activities



Encampment along Guadalupe River,
San Jose– October 2019

- Many encampments along local waterways
- Effort to clear and close waterway encampments led by Santa Clara Water District
- Briefly created Hope Village sanctioned encampment

Tacoma key encampment activities

- Closed the Jungle encampment in 2017 and created temporary Mitigation site
- Established temporary emergency shelter in 2017
- In 2020, creating Temporary Emergency Micro-Shelters to clear People's Park encampment and opening Rescue Mission emergency shelter



Tacoma's Stability Site – October 2019

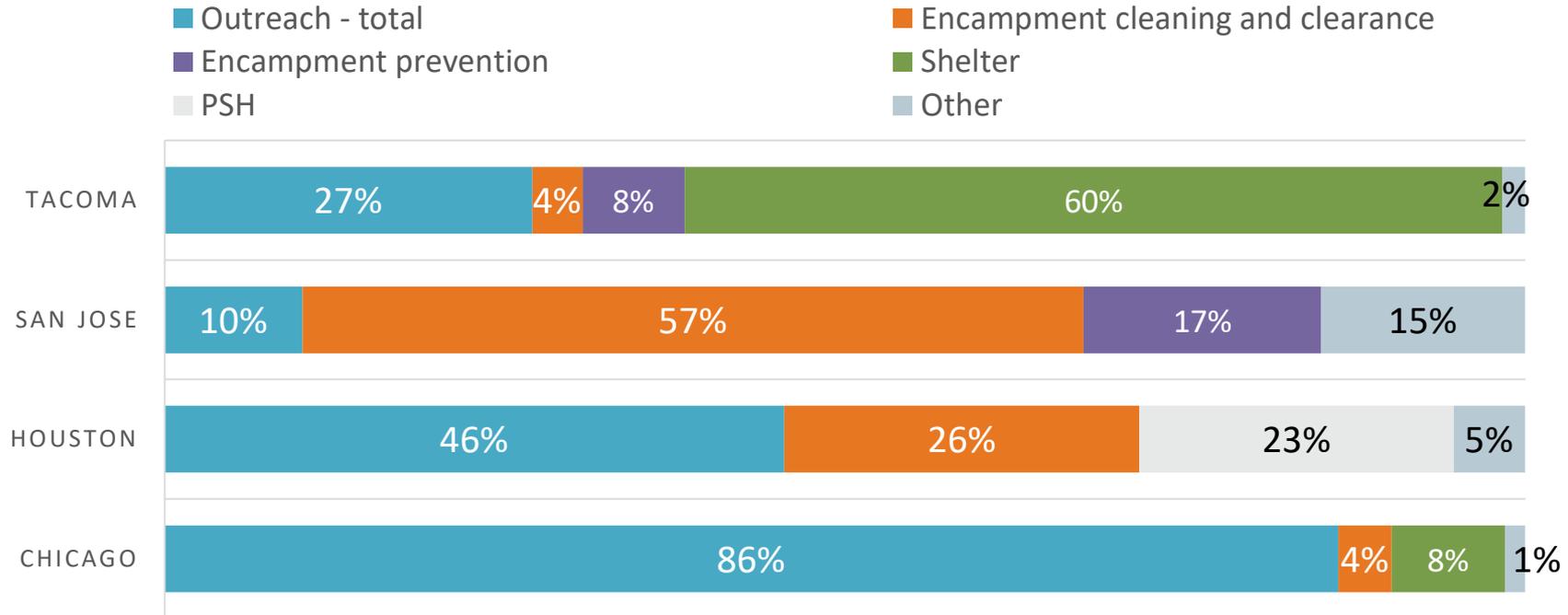
Direct costs of encampment responses



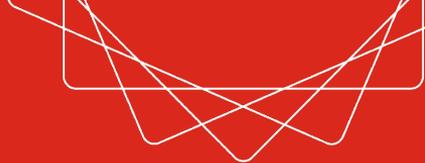
Cost by activity type



Costs by type of activity by percentage of total encampment spending, FY 2019

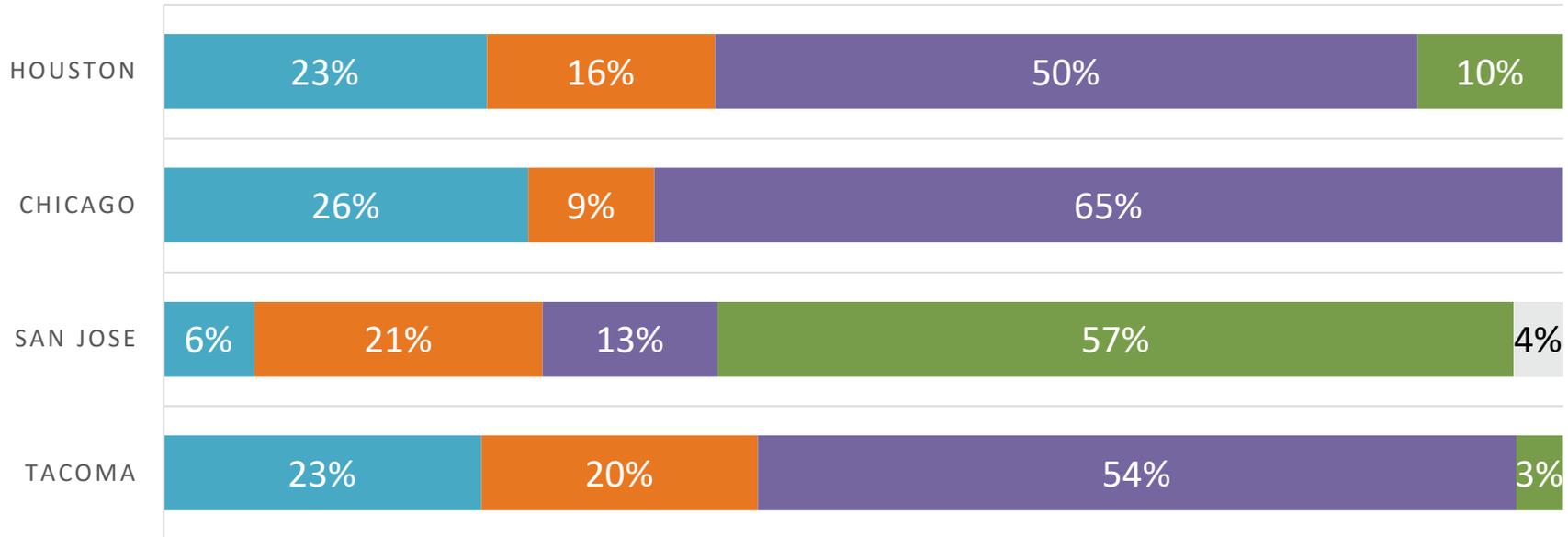


Spending on encampment responses



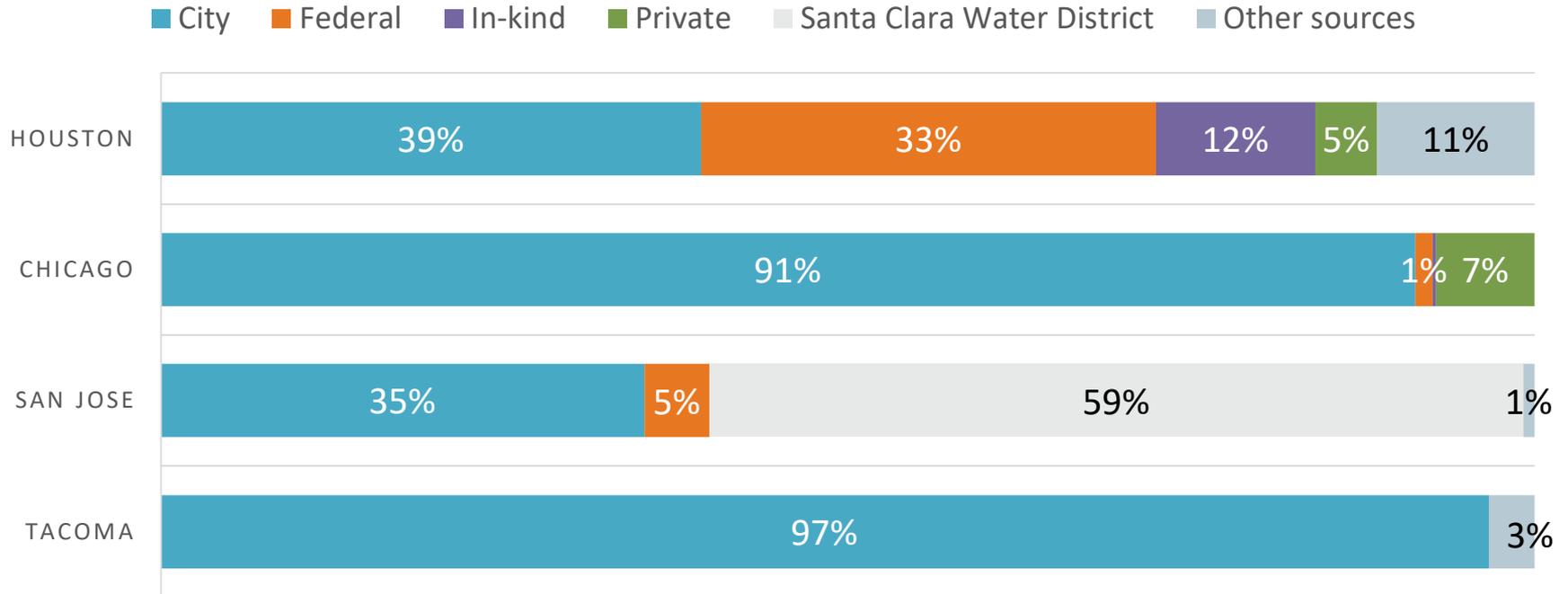
Spending on encampment responses by type of organization by city, FY 2019

■ Police ■ Other city departments ■ Homeless services providers
■ Local independent authorities ■ Environmental non-profits



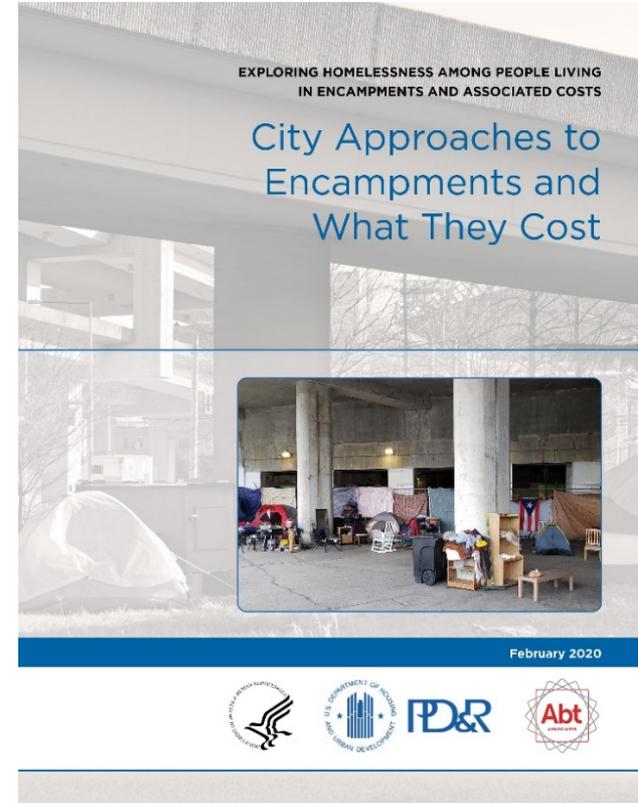
Encampment response funding sources

Costs of encampment responses by source of funding by city, FY 2019



Study reports

- [Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses: Emerging Evidence as of Late 2018](#)
- City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost
- Strategies and Costs of Responding to Encampments in 2019
- Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma Community Encampment Reports



Questions?

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