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

HPRI Research Symposium
May 26, 2020

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cleaning</th>
<th>Clearance and closure</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| • Regularly scheduled cleanings – basic sanitation and touchpoint for outreach  
• Periodic “deep” cleanings – more thorough with more implementation partners involved | • 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 | • 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

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

Lower Wacker Drive encampment, Chicago, October 2019.
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

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

Encampment along Guadalupe River, San Jose—October 2019
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
Direct costs of encampment responses
## Costs by type of activity by percentage of total encampment spending, FY 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Outreach - total</th>
<th>Encampment cleaning and clearance</th>
<th>Encampment prevention</th>
<th>Shelter</th>
<th>PSH</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TACOMA</td>
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<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAN JOSE</td>
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**个城市：**

- CHICAGO
- HOUSTON
- SAN JOSE
- TACOMA
### Spending on encampment responses by type of organization by city, FY 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Other city departments</th>
<th>Homeless services providers</th>
<th>Local independent authorities</th>
<th>Environmental non-profits</th>
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## Costs of encampment responses by source of funding by city, FY 2019

<table>
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<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>In-kind</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Santa Clara Water District</th>
<th>Other sources</th>
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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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