Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost

City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost

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Foreword

The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, defined in this report as living in a place not meant for human habitation, has grown to more than 200,000 in recent years. That increase is driven by individuals who are not experiencing chronic homelessness. While not all individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness reside in encampments, encampments have become emblematic of the rise in unsheltered homelessness. In particular, the number of unsheltered homeless individuals has increased since 2016. The problem is most acute in major cities, on the west coast, and in markets that have seen major spikes in housing prices. Even cities with declining unsheltered populations face pressure to address visible encampments in their communities.

Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs was launched as a joint effort between The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of Policy Development and Research and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This study is intended to help policymakers and practitioners understand the nature of encampments, strategies for responding to encampments, and the costs associated with those approaches. The study offers a literature review, summaries of the four study sites, and a comprehensive final report documenting the full scope of the costs associated with the responses to encampments in the included communities.

Underscored throughout the report is an understanding that a complex set of factors around housing precarity have contributed to the growth of encampments. Unsheltered homelessness is the tragic result of the country's affordable housing crisis that stems from a combination of increasing rates of deep poverty and a lack of deeply affordable housing. Due to the impacts of structural racism, the affordable housing crisis is especially dire for Blacks and Latinos who are overrepresented among the homeless population. Within the homelessness system, shortcomings in emergency shelter policies and practices, a sense of community and safety within encampments, and a desire for autonomy and privacy contribute to some people's preferences for encampments over shelters.

The report shows that the four study sites have coalesced around a strategy that involves clearance (removing structures and belongings from encampments) and closure (requiring that people leave encampments) with support (resource-intensive outreach to connect residents with services and to ensure every resident has a place to go upon closure). Although this is the dominant strategy, outreach workers in at least one city highlight that this strategy exacerbates the challenges of moving residents to shelters or permanent housing, which research shows is the most cost-effective and humane strategy, long-term. The report also indicates that responding to encampments is resource-intensive for local governments, costing cities between $1,672 and $6,208 per unsheltered individual per year and requiring coordination across government and non-governmental actors. Since HUD funding is largely not being used for encampment-related activities, city governments cover the vast majority of these costs out of their own budgets.

This study was conducted before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has likely worsened homelessness rates, while simultaneously increasing the urgency for finding safe housing for residents of encampments. At the same time, many homeless shelters have reduced capacity to abide by social distancing protocols, limiting options for those experiencing homelessness and potentially forcing more people into unsheltered homelessness and encampments.

Future research on the characteristics and costs of encampments should integrate the perspectives of people with lived experiences in encampments. Research should also examine the racial inequities between those who live in encampments, how encampment residents are treated under the law, and who

receives supports to enter shelters or housing. Finally, future research should seek to incorporate a fuller accounting of the cost to cities, including additional municipal costs (for example, from police, fire, and health departments), and the costs associated with residents' trauma when faced with clearance and closure of encampments. This fuller accounting of the costs of encampments should also be compared to the cost of employing a Housing First approach to residents of encampments.

Overall, this report reveals that communities need more resources and guidance for addressing encampments through a focus on outreach, engagement, and connection to housing with services. Suggested solutions in the report include expanding the capacity to place people experiencing homelessness into shelters and permanent housing. This suggestion aligns with the Administration's belief in a Housing First approach that invests in homelessness prevention, rental assistance, supportive housing, and services to ensure stable housing acts as a platform for people to access employment, seek medical care, obtain care for behavioral health conditions like mental illness or addiction, and support children.

This study provides useful information to help the field better understand a growing yet under-researched segment of the homeless population—information that we will incorporate into this Administration's holistic vision for reducing homelessness.

Todd M. Richardson

General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research
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About This Report

This is the final report of a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs*. The report describes how some cities are responding to homeless encampments as of 2019, synthesizing findings from a literature review, telephone interviews with nine cities, and site visits to four cities. A major focus of the report is the strategies that Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma are using to attempt to reduce the phenomenon of encampments and provide assistance to encampment residents and what those cities are spending on activities related explicitly to encampments.

Four separate community encampment reports describe the approaches of those four cities for responding to encampments.

This project was co-funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the HUD Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R.)

Abt Associates conducted this research in 2019, so it reflects the strategies communities were following before the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. For up-to-date guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) related to unsheltered homelessness, including encampments, see https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html. In addition, you can find information on COVID-19 resources related to homelessness at:
https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/diseases/#covid-19-key-resources.

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Glossary of Key Terms

chronic homelessness

The situation of an individual or family with a disability or a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years, adding up to at least 12 months of homelessness.

coordinated entry

A centralized system for assessing the needs and program eligibility of people experiencing homelessness and determining priorities for linking them to the housing programs for formerly homeless people that are available in the community.

Continuum of Care (CoC)

A regional or local planning body required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing. CoC refers to the system for coordinating programs that address and prevent homelessness within a geographical region.

emergency shelter

A facility that provides temporary overnight shelter for people experiencing homelessness, typically for a short duration. In addition to providing sleeping accommodations, shelters may or may not offer supportive services to assist people in exiting homelessness.

Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)

Run by city police departments, a team of trained officers who focus on building rapport with encampment residents. In addition to referring encampment residents to available supportive services, HOT officers support encampment clearance and closure activities. If necessary, HOT officers can make arrests and enforce laws and ordinances within encampments.

homeless services provider

An organization that delivers outreach and case management services to encampment residents, including assessing them for coordinated entry, helping them navigate the way to housing, and connecting them with public assistance programs.

low-barrier shelter

A shelter that imposes few or no requirements for people who desire to stay there. Often, these programs allow people to stay in the facility as long as their habits or behaviors do not negatively affect other shelter users or staff.

navigation center

A low-barrier shelter with onsite case managers who provide assistance with accessing housing resources, obtaining mental and physical health care, and connecting to mainstream public benefits.

permanent housing

Housing in which the resident is the leaseholder and has no time limit on occupancy. Permanent supportive housing is a type of subsidized permanent housing reserved for people leaving homelessness and, usually, for people who could benefit from supportive services linked to the housing because they have disabling conditions.

unsheltered homelessness

A person is considered to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness when he or she is living in a place not meant for human habitation. This term encompasses a wide range of circumstances, including living in tents not used for temporary recreational purposes, other impermanent structures,

and cars and RVs without connections to power or sanitation and sleeping on sidewalks, in doorways, in abandoned buildings, and in public spaces, such as train stations. All encampment residents are considered people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, but not all unsheltered homeless people live in encampments.

Executive Summary

As of 2019, homeless encampments were appearing in numbers not seen in almost a century. The growth of encampments mirrored the increase in unsheltered homelessness overall and seemed to reflect a complex set of societal factors, including a lack of affordable housing and the persistence of deep poverty and chronic homelessness. Encampments have implications for the health, safety, and well-being of the people living in them and can negatively affect the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. Nationwide, communities are struggling to respond to public pressures to relocate encampment dwellers and prevent the formation of new encampments with only a weak knowledge base on which to structure that response.

To learn more about encampments and cities' approaches in responding to them, Abt Associates conducted the study *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs* for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After completing a literature review,[1] the study team selected nine cities currently responding to encampments to participate in telephone interviews in early 2019. The nine cities were Chicago, Illinois; Fresno, California; Houston, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington. In the fall of 2019, the team conducted site visits to Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma to collect cost information on expenditures explicitly related to encampments, interview implementation partners, observe encampments, and interview a small number of encampment residents.

Findings from this study—this report on costs, individual site summary reports, and the literature review— are intended to help federal, state, and local policymakers and practitioners understand the nature of encampments, strategies for responding to encampments, and the costs associated with those approaches.

What are encampments?

Currently, no standard approach prevails for defining an *encampment*.[2] The study's literature review identified three concepts commonly used in defining the term: (1) the presence of structures, (2) the continuity of location, and (3) the permanency of people staying there. Over time, some cities, such as San Jose and Tacoma, developed their own formal definitions of *encampment* that contain additional concepts, including (4) the number of people living together, (5) the presence of personal belongings, and (6) a sense of community or social support. Although some cities have adopted a formal definition, others rely on a more informal one shared among local organizations or city departments responding to encampments making data collection and comparisons across jurisdictions difficult.

Location. Encampments are found in many types of locations, from inner city sidewalks and highway underpasses to secluded wooded areas or along waterways. All nine cities reported that encampments are emerging in more visible and public places as a result of decreases in undeveloped, vacant, or less visible spaces. Such encampments might occur in shared common spaces, such as parks or highway rights of way. Elsewhere, encampments are appearing in more remote and hidden locations, such as along railroad tracks or in caves or tunnels. In many of the cities in the study, encampments form in close proximity to

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[1] Rebecca Cohen, Will Yetvin, and Jill Khadduri, *Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses: Emerging Evidence as of Late 2018* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019).

[2] Although there is no standard definition for encampments, encampment residents are a subset of the unsheltered homeless population, which does have a standard definition: staying in a place not intended for human habitation.

homeless services providers and shelters, so residents have easy access to resources such as food assistance, restrooms, showers, and case management.

Size. Encampments vary in size both within and between cities. Some cities have primarily smaller encampments, of perhaps fewer than 15 people; other cities—including Houston, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia—have predominately larger encampments, of as many as 200 people. Chicago, San Jose, and Tacoma have a mix of smaller and larger encampments. Regardless of size, encampments typically contain personal belongings and may have features such as grills and dining and storage tents to make them feel more permanent. Specific data on the size of encampments was unavailable for this study. Most cities do not specifically enumerate encampment residents outside the broader count of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Resident characteristics. Across the nine cities in the study, people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders live in encampments; however, encampment residents are most often men with multiple barriers to securing permanent housing, such as justice system involvement, substance use and mental illness. In some of the nine cities, encampments emerged among specific populations, including substance users, veterans, and Native Americans. In many of these cities, people living in encampments have high rates of disabling conditions, including physical disabilities and behavioral health challenges. Across all nine cities, service providers interviewed cited opioid use and alcohol use as the most prevalent substance use disorders.

Most people living in encampments have ties to the local community. In the four cities where the study team conducted site visits, most encampment residents had grown up in the city or in the immediate geographic region.

Why do encampments form?

Researchers and people responding to the encampments in the nine cities (for example, homeless services providers, law enforcement, outreach workers, and city staff) identified the reasons they believe encampments form.

First is the shortage of affordable housing nationwide and acute shortages in certain metropolitan areas combined with the lack of sufficient resources to prevent and end homelessness in certain cities. Second is the composition and requirements of local shelter systems, which can push people into encampments for various reasons. Some cities lack enough shelter beds; others have shelter beds available that go unused because of regulations or conditions that are incompatible with potential clients' expectations or needs. Third, compared with shelters, encampments can offer more autonomy or a sense of community, allowing people to come and go as they please; they also may offer a greater sense of privacy.

How are cities responding to encampments?

Across the country, cities are developing and implementing approaches to respond to the growing number of encampments. A city may follow more than one approach—depending on the size, visibility, and other characteristics of its encampments—and a city's strategy may evolve over time—based on experience, pressures from the public, litigation, or leadership transitions.

Strategies. The four cities that are the main focus of this study are converging on a common strategy for responding to their most visible encampments — "clearance and closure with support." In this common approach, clearance (removing structures and personal belongings from the encampment) and closure (requiring people to leave the encampment), cities have followed resource-intensive outreach to help connect encampment residents with needed services to try to ensure that every encampment resident has somewhere to go at the point of its closure. While working toward clearance and the ultimate closure of major encampments, the cities may decide on the level and timing of responses using priority systems driven by the visibility and size of the encampments.

The cities also are pursuing the creation or expansion of low-barrier shelters to accommodate people exiting encampments. At the same time, these cities are attempting to connect encampment residents with permanent housing before clearance and closure begin.

Coordination and decision-making. Essential to responding effectively to encampments are the coordination of city efforts and a clear path for decision-making. In all nine cities in the study, the mayor's office or a city department coordinates a diverse set of implementation partners, many of which are not traditionally involved in providing homeless assistance. Across the cities, several common implementation partners participate in encampment response. In addition to their regular duties, city *police departments* sometimes operate Homeless Outreach Teams (HOTs), whose officers focus on building rapport and connecting encampment residents to services instead of enforcing laws, or other specialized response teams work with encampment residents. City *departments of solid waste or sanitation* help clean encampments by removing waste and providing trash bags and receptacles at designated encampments.

Homeless services providers deliver outreach and case management services to encampment residents, including assessing them for coordinated entry, helping them navigate the way to housing, and connecting them with public assistance programs. Other city entities that provide staff and equipment to assist residents in encampment settings and to clean, close, and clear encampments are public health and fire departments, transportation and airport authorities, and parks and neighborhood services departments. In some cities, local utilities or other independent authorities have an important role in encampment responses.

Core activities. Most cities in the study focus their encampment responses on a core set of activities:

- *Outreach.* Over time, outreach staff build rapport with encampment residents, gaining their trust so that the outreach staff can provide mental and physical health services (including substance use treatment), food assistance, and limited financial assistance. HOTs run by police departments also conduct outreach activities to encampment residents, trying to connect them to services.

- *Cleaning.* If a city is not planning to close an encampment imminently, it may conduct routine cleanings (for example, weekly visits to remove trash and empty toilets and dumpsters), sometimes supplemented by "deep" cleanings (temporarily closing the site to remove debris and mitigate environmental hazards). During deep cleanings, outreach workers may be present to encourage residents to access services.

- *Clearing and closing.* When a city decides to clear and close an encampment, it first posts notices, and outreach teams visit the area to connect residents to services and shelter. The city may also help residents store their belongings. Once an encampment is cleared of structures and possessions and residents are required to go elsewhere, some cities may take the additional step of fencing off the area or erecting barriers to prevent people from returning and the encampment being reestablished.

What is the cost associated with cities' responses to encampments?

Overall cost. Annual spending related to city responses to encampments is significant for the four cities in which the study team collected cost data. Costs ranged from $3,393,000 in Houston to $8,557,000 in San Jose in fiscal year 2019. Chicago spent $3,572,000, and Tacoma spent $3,905,000 during the same period. Several factors drive differences in costs in each city, including the number of people who are unsheltered, the city's strategy and resources for responding to encampments, and the varying nature of the encampments. These cost figures are a snapshot of spending in just one year. Cities may have incurred higher costs in previous years or may spend more in future years as the result of significant one-time activities, such as clearing a large encampment or erecting a low-barrier shelter.

Cost per person. The study found that encampment-related expenditures were more closely related to the number of unsheltered homeless people in the city than to the city's overall population. The cost per unsheltered homeless person was $2,835 in Chicago, $2,102 in Houston, $1,672 in San Jose, and $6,208 in Tacoma; however, the cost of a city's encampment response per unsheltered homeless person was not highest in the cities with the largest unsheltered homeless populations. City strategies and willingness to devote resources seemed more important than population size. Because cities do not have accurate counts of the number of unsheltered homeless people living in encampments, which are a subset of the total number of unsheltered homeless people, actual cost per encampment resident is necessarily higher than the cost per unsheltered person reported.

Cost by activity type. Across the four cities, the greatest expenditures related to encampment-related activity were for outreach, costing between $870,000 in San Jose and $3,082,000 in Chicago in fiscal year 2019. Those activities included engagement of encampment residents, case management, and housing navigation services offered to encampment residents by homeless services providers and HOTs. That fiscal year, cities spent between $140,000 in Chicago and $4,910,000 in San Jose on clearing encampments—the second-highest spending category overall. Two cities also incurred costs related to encampment prevention ($293,000 in Tacoma and $1,495,000 in San Jose); two used funds for a new emergency shelter developed explicitly as part of the encampment response ($297,000 in Chicago and $2,347,000 in Tacoma). Houston had an expenditure in FY 2019 of $782,000 for permanent supportive housing that was explicitly targeted to people who left an encampment during a clearance that took place the previous year. The study could not include the costs of responses by fire departments and emergency medical services—which can be the largest single encampment-related expense for cities—because of issues with data quality and availability. Furthermore, activities such as law enforcement responding to the areas around encampments were not included as data are largely not available, and distinguishing encampment-specific activity from responses related to homelessness generally is difficult.

Spending by partners. Although city departments led the encampment response in all cities the study team visited, each city partnered with homeless services providers and other organizations, such as independent local authorities, to conduct activities related to encampments. Across the four cities, spending by homeless services providers was as great as 65 percent of all encampment-related spending in Chicago and as little as 13 percent in San Jose. City departments—in particular, police departments—spent significant portions of the funding. A public utility, the Santa Clara Water Authority, spent more than one-half (57 percent) of the resources devoted to the encampment response in San Jose.

Funding sources. City governments were the largest source of funding for encampment responses in FY 2019. Much of the funding for overall responses of communities to homelessness comes from the federal government (in particular, from HUD) and flows through local Continuums of Care (CoCs). HUD funds cannot be used for cleaning, sanitation, or policing activities related to encampments, however. Furthermore, CoCs usually have committed the federal funds they control to permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing, so they cannot quickly redirect funds to emergency response programs related to encampments. As a result, cities provide a large portion of the funding for encampment responses from their own resources. In Chicago and Tacoma, the city government provided more than 90 percent of encampment-related funding. In San Jose, the city and the Santa Clara Valley Water District together accounted for 94 percent of the funding. Houston was an exception because the overall costs of the encampment response included the use of federal funds for permanent supportive housing and also some private philanthropic funding (from the government of Qatar) in the wake of Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

Looking ahead

This study furthers our understanding of encampments: what they are, why they form, how cities are responding to them, and what those responses cost. The information provided in this report may help communities across the country better understand their own encampments of people experiencing homelessness and the strategies they could implement to respond to encampments. The study does not provide in-depth information on the characteristics of encampment residents and their needs and preferences; that information will require data collection efforts that communities are just now beginning to undertake. This study does not attempt to measure the relationship between various state and local policy decisions around drug enforcement and treatment on encampment formation or community outcomes. This study also does not attempt to measure the outcomes of encampment responses or to compare the effectiveness of different approaches to reducing the phenomenon of encampments and meeting the needs of encampment residents; that analysis will require going beyond descriptive studies. Finally, the study does not provide estimates of the cost-effectiveness of different approaches or examine the motivations for those approaches; instead, the cost estimates presented in the study can help cities choose strategies and budget for them.

The descriptions of encampments and of city responses presented in this report also suggest areas in which city policies and strategies need to be further developed. For example, the observations in this study suggest a need for the following:

- Deeper links between city strategies to address encampments and the homeless services systems that have been developed to help people leave homelessness. Policymakers in those efforts will have to make tradeoffs between immediate emergency responses and expanding the capacity to place people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.

- Creating more shelters and encouraging more people in encampments to stay in shelters, where they can be linked to available housing assistance and supportive services.

- Further evolution of approaches to reach out to and engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including tailoring those approaches to the characteristics and needs of encampment residents.

- Consideration of the complex linkages between encampments and substance use challenges. This may require research on the impact of state and local drug policy, from both from the law enforcement and social services perspectives, on encampment formation and resident outcomes.

- A more systematic understanding of the relationship between encampment residents and law enforcement, including both past justice system involvement and current interactions between encampment residents and those enforcing laws.

- More robust data collection and technical assistance.

1. Introduction

As of 2019, homeless encampments were appearing in numbers not seen in almost a century. Today's encampments, mirroring the increasing numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, seem to reflect a complex set of factors: the persistence of deep poverty and chronic homelessness; lack of affordable housing; a shortage of shelter beds and, in some places, shelter rules; wage stagnation; large numbers of people who have been incarcerated; and substance use. Local policies and the availability of resources and capacity to develop systems that serve homeless people can affect how commonly people experiencing homelessness choose to stay in encampments rather than enter shelters.

Homelessness is primarily a housing affordability problem, reflecting income levels that fail to keep up with rents and insufficient levels of housing assistance in certain cities. Homelessness typically is triggered by a crisis, and once the crisis is resolved, many people regain stable housing (Shinn & Khadduri 2020). Additional factors may explain why more people are choosing to stay in encampment settings: addiction issues; lack of mental health treatment; a lack of knowledge about resources to assist people experiencing homelessness; past involvement with the criminal justice system, and the greater perceived safety, anonymity, autonomy, and social supports offered by encampments compared with shelters.

Encampments have implications for the health, safety, and well-being of the people who use them—as well as for the surrounding communities—with possible adverse effects on public health and safety, environmental quality, economic vitality, and the allocation of public resources (Chamard 2010). Communities are struggling to respond to public pressures to relocate existing encampment dwellers and prevent the formation of new encampments with only a weak knowledge base on which to structure a response.

To learn more about encampments and cities'[3] approaches to responding to them, Abt Associates conducted a study called *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs* for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Findings from that study are intended to help federal, state, and local policymakers and practitioners understand the nature of encampments, strategies for responding to encampments, and the costs associated with those approaches.

1.1. Research approach

To document what was known about homeless encampments, the Abt study team conducted a literature review on homeless encampments (Cohen, Yetvin, and Khadduri 2019) and nine interviews with scholars and practitioners. Building on that information, the study team—in consultation with HHS, HUD, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness—selected nine cities currently responding to encampments to participate in telephone interviews. The nine cities were Chicago, Illinois; Fresno, California; Houston, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington. Across the cities, the study team conducted 39 telephone discussions in the spring of 2019 with stakeholders involved in responding to encampments.

In the fall of 2019, the study team conducted site visits to Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma. During the site visits, members of the study team collected cost information on expenditures explicitly related to encampments, interviewed implementation partners, observed encampments, and interviewed a

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[3] In some places, county government rather than a city may take the lead role in responding to encampments. The study team is using the term *city* to refer to any political jurisdiction that is attempting to respond to the emergence of encampments.

small number of encampment residents.[4] (Appendix A includes more information on the study's methodology, and Appendix B is a guide that may help other cities determine how to collect and analyze cost data on encampments.)

The study team selected Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma because of their geographic diversity, varying numbers of unsheltered homeless people, and different approaches to responding to homeless encampments. Exhibit 1-1 shows the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in each city in 2019 and the change between 2017 and 2019. Exhibit 1-2 shows the percentage of each city's homeless population that is unsheltered. San Jose has both the largest number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and the greatest recent increase of these four sites. San Jose also has by far the greatest percentage of people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered. Chicago experienced a decrease in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, whereas the other three cities all experienced large percentage increases during the same period.

Exhibit 1-1. Numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in 2017 and 2019 in four cities

Notes: This data is for the Continuum of Care (CoC) in which each city is located. With the exception of Chicago, the CoC includes the surrounding county as well as the city itself.

Sources: HUD 2017 and 2019 Continuum of Care (CoC) Point-in-Time Count data

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[4]   The study team authored four community encampment reports summarizing the approaches and costs associated with encampment responses in Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma.

Exhibit 1-2. Percentages of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people in four cities, 2019
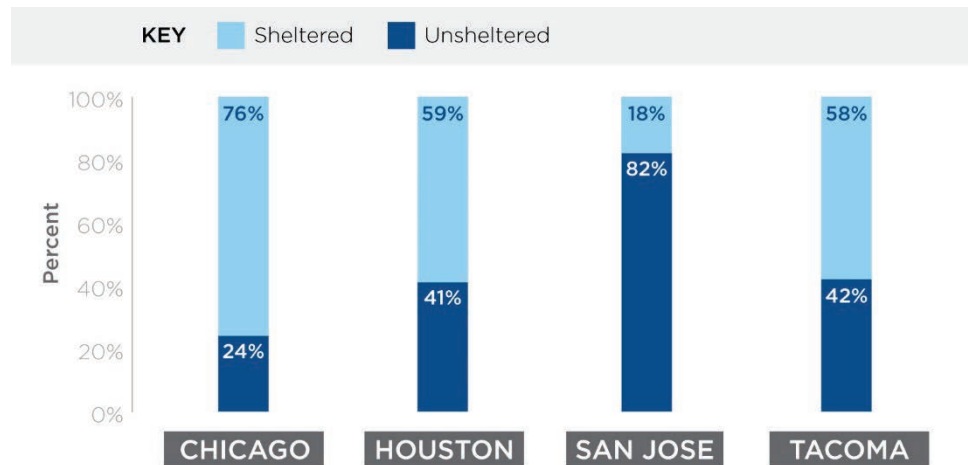
Notes: This data is for the Continuum of Care (CoC) in which each city is located. With the exception of Chicago, the CoC includes city and the surrounding county.

Source: 2019 HUD CoC Point-in-Time data

1.2.   Report organization

This report synthesizes the findings from the study's literature review, telephone interviews with nine cities, and the site visits to four cities to present an understanding of cities' current responses to homeless encampments. First, the report explores definitions of encampments, provides physical descriptions of encampments, and presents common characteristics of encampment residents. Next, the report describes the strategies cities are using to respond to encampments as of 2019 and how the cities are setting priorities for implementing those responses. The report then describes the implementation partners that participate in city responses and details key elements of the responses in four cities: Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma. The following section of the report presents cost estimates related to the approaches followed by those four cities in 2019. The report concludes with thoughts on the implications of encampments for cities and on what we have yet to learn.

2. Understanding Encampments

This section presents the varying definitions that cities are implementing in their efforts to respond to encampments. It then identifies some factors that seem to have contributed to the recent rise—in cities across the country—of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in highly visible groups.

2.1. Definitions of encampments

The term *encampment* is widely used by journalists and researchers to describe groups of people living in tents or other temporary structures in public spaces in cities across the country. Although the common definition of unsheltered homelessness is "staying in a place not intended for human habitation,"[5] no standard approach exists for defining an encampment. The study's literature review concluded the same but revealed that several concepts are often included: the presence of structures; the continuity of location; and the permanency of people staying there (Cohen, Yetvin, and Khadduri 2019).

In the absence of a common definition, cities have over time developed their own definitions of encampments that may include structure, continuity, and permanency but also reflect how encampments look in their community. San Jose and Tacoma have formal definitions of encampments. San Jose defines an encampment as "any camp located along a sidewalk, other public right of ways, creek, or other waterway located in San Jose that has not been permitted" by the agency with jurisdiction over that property. Tacoma defines encampments as "one or more tent, lean-to, structure, tarpaulin, pallet, or makeshift structures used for purposes of habitation." Those formal definitions focus primarily on the location of encampments and the structures present and relate to the jurisdiction's formal encampment response approach.

Other cities that were part of this study do not have formal definitions of encampments, but they do have informal definitions that are shared among the implementation partners involved in responding to encampments locally. For example, although Chicago and Houston have not established formal definitions of encampments, stakeholders articulated shared common elements of a definition that drive the city's encampment response strategy.

In looking across nine cities, the study team identified several additional elements present in definitions of encampments:

- **Number of people residing at the location.** Some cities differentiate between unsheltered homelessness and an encampment by the number of people currently staying in a location. In Chicago, three people must be present in a single space not meant for human habitation for the space to be considered encampment. In Houston, implementation partners said that a minimum of at least three to eight people must be experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a single location for that place to be considered an encampment.

- **Presence of some type of physical structures.** The concept of physical structure is very widely defined and can include camping tents, a series of cardboard boxes fashioned into a lean-to shack, tarps strung from a stand of trees, structures built into riverbeds, or old campers, vans, and cars together with other components of a temporary built environment. Typically, cities do not define a small group of people in sleeping bags on a sidewalk as an encampment.

- **Presence of personal belongings.** People living in encampments often have amassed an array of personal belongings, including bicycles, clothes, coolers, mattresses, tables, and other household

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[5]   Definition of Homelessness for HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs.
       https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HEARTH_HomelessDefinition_FinalRule.pdf.

items. Those items may be owned by individuals in the encampment or shared communally among the residents.

- **Sense of social support or community.** Residents may provide support to each other, assisting with daily living tasks or providing a sense of community, safety, and security.

2.2. Reasons people form encampments

Researchers generally concur that increases in homelessness are the result of insufficient affordable housing. In addition to an acute shortage of affordable housing, researchers and people responding to encampments in the study cities cite several other factors that result in people forming and staying in encampment settings.

Requirements of shelter systems

Requirements in emergency shelter systems are consistently identified in the literature as a primary factor that "pushes" people to form encampments. Many communities have literal shortages in the capacity of the shelter system to provide beds for everyone experiencing homelessness (Herring and Lutz 2015; National Coalition for the Homeless 2016; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 2014; Speer 2018). Several of the cities included in this study—including Fresno, Minneapolis, Portland, San Jose, and Tacoma—have a shortage of emergency shelter beds for individuals on any given night. People experiencing homelessness in those cities do not have the opportunity to enter a shelter or another type of temporary facility, such as transitional housing. In Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia, shelter beds are available but go unused because of rules or conditions that are incompatible with potential clients' expectations or needs. Those reasons may be separation from a partner or pet; shelter entry or exit times that are inconvenient or incompatible with people's schedules, including employment; concerns about personal health and safety, as well as the safety

> ### Resistance to Shelter
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> People with experience living in encampments who were interviewed by the study team gave a variety of reasons why they were hesitant to accept referrals to emergency shelters from outreach workers who visited the encampments. To stay in a shelter, encampment residents believed they had to sacrifice some personal autonomy. One woman in San Jose prefers camping over emergency shelter because she likes having her own space to live and create her home. She prefers choosing her own friends rather than having to sleep with people she doesn't know. A man in Tacoma said that he can manage his own life and keep warm without shelter. A man in Chicago and a woman in Houston explained that shelter life didn't work for them because shelters have too many rules and restrictions. Overall, the encampment residents interviewed thought the benefits of personal autonomy outweighed the benefits provided in temporary emergency shelters.

of belongings; and rules such as sobriety requirements and entry fees. The availability and the type of shelter available seem to be key drivers of encampments, as people weigh the disadvantages of staying in a shelter against their tolerance for the difficulties of staying in an unsheltered location (City of San Francisco 2015; Herring and Lutz 2015; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 2014).

Legal Framework

Fear of legal challenges can influence how cities approach closing encampments. Local jurisdictions want to avoid being taken to court over due process and cruel and unusual punishment challenges. This concern has likely grown following the September 2018 ruling of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Martin *v. City of Boise.* The 9th Circuit, which covers the states of California and Washington, and other courts have found that depriving homeless people of the rights to perform survival activities in public spaces when no alternatives are available violates the 1st, 4th, 5th, 8th, and 14th Amendments to the

Constitution. In Martin *v.* City of Boise, the court held that "as long as there is no option of sleeping indoors, the government cannot criminalize indigent, homeless people for sleeping outdoors, on public property."

Sense of autonomy or community offered in encampment settings

In contrast to the rules that govern many aspects of shelter stays, staying in an encampment allows people to come and go as they please. The ability to exercise autonomy, anonymity, and freedom of movement seems to be a powerful factor that draws some people to encampments (Lutz 2015; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 2014; Sparks 2017). More remote encampments, such as those observed by the study team in San Jose near creeks and other waterways, offer privacy that may not be available in a shelter setting or even in a larger encampment. Local outreach workers and city staff note that people living in such encampments do not want to be disturbed and sometimes post "Do Not Enter" signs and have guard dogs.

Conversely, living in encampments may appeal to some people more than staying in shelters because of the sense of safety and community they can offer. People who stay in encampments may perceive them as involving less interaction with law enforcement (Burnes and Brown 2016), as well as fewer assaults or the theft of belongings (Donley and Wright 2012; Speer 2017). Residents of an encampment in Chicago told the research team that they rely on fellow encampment residents to watch their personal belongings while they are at work during the day. They may prefer living in encampments over staying in unsheltered locations on their own because of a sense of "safety in numbers" that may be particularly prevalent in some long-standing and highly organized encampments. Residents of some encampments have established around-the-clock security patrols and developed shared norms and standards for behavior (Lutz 2015; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 2014; Sparks 2017). An encampment setting may offer a sense of community or even serve as a surrogate family to someone during this particularly challenging period in his or her life.

> **The Encampment Family**
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> Residents of encampments often described other people in the encampment as family who provide support for each other. A current resident of Pierce encampment in Houston explained how she definitely feels a "part of a community and a family," and she feels safe in the encampment because of that fact. "[Among the residents] I'm like the momma; they love me and I love them," she said. She makes sure everyone is fed and keeps medical supplies and clothes for people who need them. Two men in the People's Park encampment in Tacoma who called themselves "overseers" of the encampment explained that everyone knows everybody else, and they have "developed community." Residents in People's Park are like neighbors, borrowing things from each other and resolving disputes that arise. In Chicago, a woman said that although people in her encampment came from different backgrounds and were racially diverse, "We're family and take care of each other." People helped each other if someone got sick or needed food or warmth.

The influence of the encampment community can also be negative, however. Stakeholders in Chicago, Houston, and San Jose cited high levels of the use and sales of illicit drugs in encampments, as well as associated crime. The majority of residents in four large encampments in the Kensington area of Philadelphia in 2018 bought and used opioids in the encampment or nearby. An encampment survey conducted by outreach workers to identify encampment residents and learn more about them found near universal substance use (93 percent) among those staying in the four encampments, which were known to be hubs of opioid sales and use (Metraux et al. 2019).

3.   Nature of Encampments and Their Residents

3.1.   *Encampment environments*

The location, size, and structures present in encampments varied across and within the nine cities that participated in this study.

Location of encampments

All communities reported that encampments are emerging in more visible and public places as a result of decreases in undeveloped, vacant, or less visible spaces. Implementation partners in both Houston and Portland explained that economic development, including the development of vacant spaces and the redevelopment of abandoned buildings, has pushed encampment residents into more visible parts of the city. In past years, encampments in Houston were scattered throughout the downtown area, mostly underneath highways and along the bayous; however, increased development of downtown Houston and the bayou trails pushed residents into three large encampments located underneath highway overpasses in downtown Houston on Texas Department of Transportation property. Portland is also experiencing increased visibility of encampments. Historically, homeless encampments in Portland have mostly been in remote places (e.g., viaducts, forested areas, and undeveloped parts of the city). Economic development has changed Portland's physical landscape, and undeveloped spaces have become scarce, pushing encampment residents into more densely populated areas.

> **Familiarity is a Key Factor in Choosing an Encampment Location**
>
> The people the study team interviewed moved into specific encampments because they knew someone currently living in the encampment or were familiar with the neighborhood where the encampment was located. Both men the study team spoke to in Tacoma moved to the People's Park encampment because they knew a few people living there already. A woman moved to an encampment near the Chicago airport because her boyfriend was there. Another man in Chicago described how encampments grew because people experiencing homelessness would bring their friends (who were also experiencing homelessness) to the encampment with them when they moved in. A woman in San Jose chose to set up her camp in the neighborhood she grew up in and near the school she attended as a child. Although she no longer could afford to live in a house in the neighborhood, the familiarity of the area brought comfort and safety to her while she lived in an encampment.

Urban Areas

Encampments in urban areas often are located on city streets, in parks, under bridge overpasses, or near highway exit ramps. In Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, a series of encampments exist underneath three major Lake Shore Drive overpass tunnels, known locally as viaducts. Each of the viaducts has a main road, with concrete barriers that serve as partitions between the road and the sidewalk. Encampment residents set up tents on the concrete sidewalks on both sides of the road. Two of Houston's major encampments, Chartres and Hamilton/Pierce, are located under highway overpasses that offer large swaths of unused land protected from the weather, including sun and rain. In Las Vegas, some encampments are located in storm drains and tunnels underneath the Las Vegas Strip.

Encampment on Felipe St., San Jose, October 2019.

Hamilton/Pierce encampment, Houston, October 2019.

In San Jose and Tacoma, some small encampments are found on sidewalks in the central business districts. Those encampments may be less stable because police often ask people to take their belongings and move.

In many of the cities that participated in the study, encampments formed in close proximity to homeless services providers and shelters so residents could easily access resources, such as food assistance, restrooms, showers, and case management. In Fresno and Las Vegas, homeless encampments are located near the area of the city's emergency shelter and other homeless assistance programs. In Houston, the Chartres encampment, which occupies an area under Highway 69, is less than one-tenth of a mile from two homeless services providers, as well as the Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen. In San Jose, the most populated encampments are near a large, low-barrier shelter,[6] which offers an array of services, such as mental health counseling, employment placement, hot meals, showers, and restrooms. In Tacoma, a row of tents is located across from Nativity House, a large shelter and supportive housing project. Fresno had several large encampments between 2013 and 2016 near the city's rescue mission and a drop-in day center.

Encampments may be located near other providers of services to low-income communities. In Tacoma, the People's Park encampment is across the street from the Tacoma Housing Authority. The large Hiawatha/Franklin encampment that existed in Minneapolis in 2018 was close to many Native American community organizations.

Secluded areas

Sometimes encampments are in more secluded and out-of-sight locations, such as creeks, riverbeds, and underground tunnels. Such locations may be hidden in the terrain. Many encampments in San Jose are along creeks, waterways, and the surrounding hills. Those encampments have resulted in significant environmental degradation, such as water contamination from human waste and trash, habitat destruction, and the accumulation of trash and other hazardous materials.

Secluded encampment along Guadalupe Creek, San Jose, October 2019.

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6   Although the low-barrier shelter is often at capacity, some people living in encampments decline to enter the shelter even when space is available.

Encampments in Cold Climates

In cold climates, some encampments may not be out of doors. Chicago has some outdoor encampments and some in which people avoid sleeping outside.

- **CTA "L" Red Line Encampment.** Rather than a physical gathering with tents, "L" individuals ride the Red Line of the "L" to stay warm and sheltered from the elements. The Red Line operates 24 hours a day, so people do not have to leave the train cars or, if they do leave the train car at the end of the line, they can get right back on so that they are not outdoors for several hours at night. Hundreds of people experiencing homelessness ride "L" lines continuously every day, and service providers report that often as many as 10 people experiencing homelessness can be found in a single "L" train car.

- **O'Hare Airport.** A 24-hour outreach program based at Chicago's O'Hare Airport focuses on individuals and groups who sleep in the O'Hare terminals, parking structure, and public transit passages that connect to the airport.

In Tacoma, some encampments are in wooded areas, with vegetation and trees that make preventing encampments with fencing and other obstacles challenging. Some encampments In Las Vegas are in the desert or in abandoned mines.

Encampments near highways or railroads

One emerging trend across many cities—including Houston, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and San Jose—is the establishment of encampments on property that belongs to states' Departments of Transportation (DOTs) or private transportation companies. Land owned by state DOTs often sits vacant or with minimal activity, making it the ideal location for people who need a place to put their tent and belongings. In addition, the local police often do not have jurisdiction to enforce local laws or to tell the encampment residents to vacate property owned by the DOT or private railroad company.

Encampments that are in close proximity to railroad tracks often are the most logistically challenging for cities to respond to. In Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, encampments formed near the active Conrail railroad tracks as well as in abandoned rail infrastructure. The city worked with Conrail to secure and clean up the area along the tracks in an effort to close the Kensington encampments. In San Jose, numerous encampments formed next to freeways and under highway overpasses on land owned by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), as well as in the spaces between barrier fence or wall and the railroad tracks owned by Union Pacific. San Jose is able to send outreach teams to encampments on Union Pacific property but must coordinate beforehand to ensure the outreach team's safety from trains.

Size of encampments

Some cities have numerous, small encampments with fewer than 15 people, whereas other cities have primarily large encampments of more than 70 people. Some cities have a mix of both small and large encampments. Chicago has encampments of various sizes, ranging from fewer than 5 to more than 150 people. San Jose has a large number of smaller encampments scattered along its creeks, riverbeds, and railroad tracks. At its height, the Hiawatha/Franklin encampment in Minneapolis had 250 to 300 people. In Philadelphia, four tent encampments that had formed on the sidewalks of highway overpasses ranged in population from 16 to 100 individuals each. The population of the city does not correlate to the size of the encampments; encampments of various sizes occur in both large and small cities. Specific data on the size of encampments is elusive. Most cities/ do not specifically enumerate encampment residents outside the broader count of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Encampment structures

A common element of all definitions of encampments is that they must have some type of built structures. These structures can take many forms, including tents, small structures on pallets, and shanties or lean-to shacks. Many encampment residents use camping tents designed for two or three people and then reinforce the structure with tarps and blankets for privacy and protection against the weather. Some encampments residents add household items such as rugs, mattresses, furniture, and shelving to the inside of their tents to make the inside of the tent comfortable so that it functions more like a home. Some encampments are groups of tents in close proximity, whereas others include tarps and tents linked to cars and RVs. Depending on the size of the encampment and the items that residents have available, residents may create common cooking and socializing areas with chairs and couches. In Chicago, at the Belmont and Kedzie encampment, residents created dining and restroom tents and strung blankets over the fences that surround the encampment, likely both for privacy and to control the noise from the traffic that surrounds them. The encampment also has a stock of general supplies, including wooden pallets, grills, rocking chairs, and crates to store belongings.

Personal belongings at Lower Wacker Drive encampment, Chicago, October 2019.

Most encampments that the study team observed during the four site visits had many personal belongings, including shopping carts, bicycles, mattresses, blankets, clothing, cooking items, and furniture; however, whether the items belonged to the encampment residents or were left behind by other people was unclear. Stakeholders in San Jose explained to the study team that encampments can become a "dumping site" for community residents to bring household goods that are not being used anymore. In Houston, city officials and outreach workers described a similar trend, in which community residents "donate" furniture and personal belongings to the encampment residents even though the residents may not want the items.

3.2.   Characteristics of encampment residents

Demographics of encampment residents

Across the cities in the study, people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders live in encampments. Most encampment residents are adults. In Houston, one-half of encampment residents are between the ages of 25 and 50, and another one-fourth are between 51 and 60. Similarly, in Chicago, most encampment residents are between the ages of 25 to 65. In San Jose, outreach workers reported that transition-aged youth (TAY) established their own encampments, separate from adults, and Chicago has at least one encampment with predominately younger people. San Jose has several small encampments composed primarily of veterans, whereas in Chicago, very few veterans are found in encampments. A high percentage of encampment residents are men, although women also are present in encampment settings. Some encampment residents are in partner relationships. The more remote encampments in San Jose include some families with children.

Although people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds live in encampment settings, Chicago and Houston—cities with large African American populations—have still higher percentages of African Americans living in encampments. In Minneapolis, the residents of Hiawatha/Franklin encampment were primarily Native Americans. In Chicago, the residents of the Lower Wacker Drive encampment are mostly African American and tend to be younger than those in other Chicago encampments. Residents of Chicago's Belmont and Kedzie encampment are mainly Latinx and people of Polish descent, reflecting the demographics of the surrounding neighborhoods. All cities have some people staying in encampments who are employed—in particular, residents of the Belmont and Kedzie encampment.

In some cities, people living in encampment settings have high rates of disabling conditions. In Houston, Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) records show that 96 percent of the residents of the Chartres encampment and 98 percent of Hamilton/Pierce encampment residents have at least one disability. In Chicago, San Jose, and Tacoma, outreach workers reported that encampment residents exhibit high rates of both mental illness and substance use disorders. Outreach workers in Chicago, however, reported that severe mental illnesses are not as common among people in encampments as among unsheltered people living in more isolated settings; depression is a more typical mental illness among encampment residents. Across all nine cities in which the study team conducted interviews, service providers cited opioid use and alcohol use as the most prevalent substance use disorders. In West Coast cities, service providers also reported significant use of methamphetamines. The Kensington encampments in Philadelphia emerged around people engaged in the use and sale of opioids.

Encampments within the same city may have residents with different levels of acuity and high barriers to housing. In San Jose, people with higher levels of co-occurring disorders tend to be in downtown encampments, whereas people who locate near the creeks often have fewer needs and related barriers to housing. Residents of the Houston encampments have very high rates of co-occurring conditions, including physical and mental health conditions, as well as substance use disorders, which is likely a reflection of a relatively inexpensive housing market and the availability of shelter beds for people willing to use them. Similarly, many residents of the Jungle encampment in Tacoma, who are now staying in temporary outdoor shelters that replaced the encampment, have very high needs. In this case, people with lower needs may have relocated to other encampments.

People living in encampments often are long-time local residents and often have ties to the community where the encampment is located. In the four cities where the study team conducted site visits, most encampment residents grew up in the city or in the immediate geographic region. Over time, people turned to living in encampment settings because of untreated behavioral health conditions, past involvement with the justice system, trauma, and other complex factors—all while facing rapidly increasing housing costs in their city or the larger metropolitan area. Outreach workers in San Jose said that the majority of people living in encampment settings grew up in either San Jose or Santa Clara County. As the housing market has become increasing unaffordable in that region, people have been

displaced from their homes and cannot or will not rely on assistance from their family or social network. One San Jose encampment resident said that she grew up in the same neighborhood as her camp, attending the school across the creek bed. Now, she cannot afford housing in the city. Living in the same neighborhood as when she was a child—albeit in an encampment setting—offers her a sense of safety and familiarity.

4.   Strategies Cities Are Using To Address Encampments

Cities across the country are in the midst of developing and implementing approaches to the growing and increasingly visible phenomenon of encampments. This section starts with an overview of city strategies as of 2019. City responses are evolving quickly, and what the study team observed may not reflect the strategy that a particular city will follow over the next few years. The four cities that were the primary focus of this study, however—Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma—have well-developed strategies as of late 2019, and the following sections describe those strategies as well as those of five other cities where the study team conducted stakeholder interviews. This section also describes the prioritization systems the four focus cities are using and how the city's strategy relates to the broader effort to end homelessness in the community.

Section 5 of this report provides more detail on the responses of the four cities, describing the lead agencies and implementation partners that carry out the city's strategy and detailing how the activities that constitute the city's response work. Section 6 then provides cost estimates for activities carried out directly as part of four cities' strategies and describes who incurs those costs and who pays for them.

4.1.   Responding to encampments

In response to the number and variety of encampments, the same city may follow more than one approach, depending on the size, visibility, and other characteristics of an encampment. Exhibit 4-1 summarizes the key activities of each city related to encampments between 2017 and 2019, as well as those planned for 2020. In Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma, some encampments are allowed to remain—at least for a period of time—during which the cities work to mitigate unsanitary conditions and other negative environmental consequences. San Jose has not attempted to clear all of the small encampments near waterways; Chicago provides routine outreach services to encampments with fewer than five people; and Houston and Tacoma also have smaller encampments that receive modest levels of response.

Exhibit 4-1. Key encampment activities by city, 2017–2020

City	2017	2018	2019	2020*
Chicago	• Conducted routine cleanings of Lower Wacker Drive encampment	• Formed Task Force to Reduce Homelessness • Opened Pilsen low-barrier shelter • Conducted five Level 1 encampment responses (highest level)** • Performed routine cleanings of Lower Wacker Drive encampment	• Conducted four Level 1 encampment responses (highest level) and five Level 2 (second highest level) responses • Performed routine cleanings of Lower Wacker Drive encampment	• Continue all levels of encampment responses • Conduct biannual citywide scan to identify encampments
Houston	• Enacted city encampment ordinance in response to increased encampments after Hurricane Harvey	• Performed routine cleanings of Wheeler, Chartres, and Hamilton/Pierce encampments • Closed Wheeler St. encampment	• Performed routine cleanings of Chartres and Hamilton/Pierce encampments • Began Housing Harvey's Homeless (H³) (November)	• Open navigation center • Implement Housing Harvey's Homeless (H³) to clear Chartres encampment

City	2017	2018	2019	2020*
San Jose	• Performed routine clearance, closure, and cleanups of encampments	• Created Hope Village sanctioned encampment • Performed routine clearance and closure of approximately 300 encampments	• Closed Hope Village sanctioned encampment • Performed routine clearance and closure of encampments	• Increase funding for encampment outreach providers • Perform routine clearance and closure of encampments
Tacoma	• Closed Jungle encampment • Created mitigation and stability sites • Launched Homeless Outreach Team	• Performed routine clearance and cleanups of encampments • Executed cleanup and clearance of a large encampment on Tacoma Public Utilities property	• Performed routine clearance and cleanups of encampments • Increased outreach and services provided to People's Park encampment	• Close People's Park encampment • Create temporary emergency micro-shelters site • Open Tacoma Rescue Mission emergency shelter

* This column includes activities planned by cities before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.
** For more information on Chicago's encampment response, see the text box on p. 26.
Source: Implementation partner interviews, 2019

At the same time, these four cities are converging on a common strategy used to respond to the largest and most visible of their encampments. This strategy can be characterized as "clearance and closure with support." Clearance means removing structures and personal belongings from the encampment site. Closure means requiring encampment residents to leave the site and no longer sleep there.[7] Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma have cleared and closed large encampments and have plans to close others. In every case, the clearance has included resource-intensive outreach to help encampment residents connect with needed services and to try to ensure that the closure does not mean an encampment resident has no place to go. Often the closure is preceded by weeks or even months of outreach to the residents of the encampment. During this period, outreach workers try to engage with the residents, providing services on site or linking them to services. The outreach workers try to persuade encampment residents to enter shelters and to connect them with programs that may be able to provide permanent housing placements before the date when the clearance and closure occurs. Outreach workers provide "housing navigation" services: helping people obtain documents, connecting them with housing providers, taking them to visit housing units, and helping them move in and stabilize. The efforts to find another place for encampment residents to stay may continue through the day of the closure.

Chicago follows a variant of this strategy for dealing with its largest encampments through an effort to clear the encampment—or at least to downsize it—through intensive, several-day efforts to persuade residents to leave voluntarily. Chicago does not close encampments by requiring current residents to take their belongings and go elsewhere, however. Illinois state law has been interpreted to prohibit law enforcement from preventing people from sleeping on public property.

Chicago's strategy has elements in common with the other three cities: intensive outreach and provision of services preceding and during a clearance and a "deep" cleaning of the encampment site. In a few cases, the city has tried to contain the footprint of an encampment by fencing off part of the site and

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[7] Cities may use different terminology to describe this approach. For example, San Jose refers to a clearance and closure as an "abatement." Chicago refers to a clearance as a "Level One response." The report uses standardized terminology to reflect the common characteristics of the strategies cities use.

enforcing laws prohibiting structures on public property. The settlement of a 2015 lawsuit defines the "portable personal property" that encampment residents are allowed to keep. Chicago's objective is to eliminate encampments of more than 10 people. So far, the city's approach has had only modest success, as several relatively large encampments still exist across the city.

Although these four cities may not prioritize closing or downsizing smaller and less visible encampments, in 2019 none of the four had a "sanctioned" encampment in the sense of an outdoor place a group of people would be permitted to stay indefinitely with public support. Portland has such sanctioned encampments, and San Jose and Tacoma had them for brief periods before 2019.

As part of the 2017 clearance and closure of The Jungle, an encampment of roughly 100 people located underneath Interstate 705, Tacoma operated a "mitigation site" and still operates a "Stability Site," which is intended to provide a place for former encampment residents to stay until permanent placements can be found. In existence for a brief period (May–June 2017), the mitigation site was an existing encampment that was cordoned off and occupied both by people who had been staying there and by people who relocated from The Jungle. Some services and amenities were provided, and the short-lived mitigation site could be considered a sanctioned encampment. The Stability Site that replaced the mitigation site in June 2017 has a large tent within which smaller tents are placed. Although it is not in a permanent structure, the study team considers the Stability Site a low-barrier shelter. City officials make the rules about who can stay there and how the space is used, and the city provides extensive services that attempt to place people into housing.

The creation of low-barrier shelters such as Tacoma's Stability Site is a common element of the response strategies across three of the four cities. Some cities call these low-barrier shelters that offer onsite intensive services "navigation centers." Tacoma plans to open another temporary, low-barrier shelter to support the closing of the People's Park encampment. The City of Chicago contracted with a nonprofit organization to create the low-barrier Pilsen shelter (in an existing building) with no sobriety requirements and guaranteed available beds when the clearance of a large encampment is in progress. Houston is planning to open a navigation center that will be open during the day, have a curfew much later than other shelters in the city, and not require sobriety as a condition of entering. San Jose does not intend to create a low-barrier shelter because city officials consider creating permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness a higher priority.

All four cities attempt to connect encampment residents— in particular, residents of an encampment scheduled for clearance or clearance and closing—to permanent housing.

- Houston was able to close the Wheeler Street encampment because of the availability of housing assistance for all encampment residents. Implementation partners, including the Houston Coalition for the Homeless, aligned the encampment closure with the opening of a new permanent supportive housing building—the type of housing that many of the more vulnerable encampment residents needed. Outreach workers and housing navigators worked with residents of the Wheeler Street encampment and helped them prepare to move into housing. The majority of Wheeler Street residents left the encampment for housing; only a small number chose to relocate to another encampment. For the planned closing of the Chartres encampment, the Houston and Harris County housing authorities have committed to providing housing choice vouchers to support the affordability of the permanent housing placements of encampment residents. Houston also has an initiative called Housing Harvey's Homeless, which will use philanthropic funding (from the government of Qatar) to provide permanent housing to former Chartres residents.

- In Chicago, the organization that manages the coordinated entry system that matches people to resources of the homeless services system recently changed its protocol to take the length of time a person has experienced homelessness into account. Any experience of unsheltered homelessness is a

tiebreaker. Permanent supportive housing in Chicago is now reserved for individuals with a disability who have experienced homelessness for more than 2 years. Stakeholders report that more encampment residents are being matched with permanent supportive housing since this change took effect.

- In San Jose, outreach and engagement of encampment residents includes referrals to Santa Clara County's coordinated entry system, but so far encampment residents do not receive any special priority for access to permanent supportive housing or other affordable housing programs. Tacoma has an affordable housing action strategy developed in September 2018. The strategy has 10-year goals for producing and preserving affordable housing but is not linked explicitly to the city's response to encampments.

Three of the other five cities that were included in the study (with stakeholder interviews but no site visits or collection of data on costs)—Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Portland—seem to be following a similar strategy of clearance and closure, with extensive outreach and support for the encampment residents. Following the clearance and closuring of the Hiawatha encampment, Minneapolis established some small, seasonal encampments at which outreach workers provide some support for residents. Following the clearance and closure of the Kensington encampments, Philadelphia has made vigorous efforts to prevent additional encampments from forming—a policy based in part on the view that the city has adequate shelter capacity. In addition to clearing and closing encampments and providing outreach and support for the residents, Portland continues to permit the operation of four sanctioned encampments that were created in the past.

Fresno follows a different strategy as of 2019: clearing and closing encampments and providing limited support for the residents. The strategy followed by Las Vegas is difficult to characterize because the region has three jurisdictions (Las Vegas, Clark County, and Henderson), and, as of 2019, they had not yet coalesced around a coordinated strategy.[8]

4.2. Prioritization of encampment responses

All four cities in which the research team conducted site visits and intensive interviews described their priority systems for deciding on the level and timing of responses to particular encampments. Chicago and San Jose have explicit priority systems, and Houston and San Jose described similar emphases, prioritizing highly visible encampments in downtown areas, along major thoroughfares, and in public areas frequented by city residents and tourists. Houston focuses the city's efforts on the largest encampments in the downtown core. In Chicago, the number of people living in an encampment is the primary factor that determines which of three levels of encampment response occurs. Although smaller encampments exist throughout the four cities, they often are spread throughout the city or in more out-of-the-way locations.

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[8] The study team was able to complete only two interviews with Las Vegas stakeholders.

In 2018, the City of Chicago created the Task Force to Reduce Homelessness. Led by the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), the task force created the city's first official encampment response strategy with three tiers, or levels of encampment responses. The response at a specific encampment is determined by the number of people living in the encampment and the funding available for that fiscal year. DFSS provides similar services for each response level but varies the intensity and duration of those services based on the number of residents.

- A *Level One* response is for encampments with 10 or more people and aims to connect encampment residents to a low-barrier shelter, other permanent housing, medical care, and supportive services. During Level One responses, DFSS, other city departments, and homeless service agencies are on site at the encampment providing 10 consecutive days of onsite services. DFSS offers all encampment residents the opportunity to enter a low-barrier shelter. Residents who do not wish to leave the encampment or engage with services are allowed to remain in the encampment.
- A *Level Two* response occurs for smaller encampments of six to nine people. For a Level Two response, DFSS coordinates with a subset of service agencies—depending on the location and needs of the encampment residents—to provide 2 to 3 days of onsite services.
- *Level Three* responses are encampments with fewer than five people. DFSS considers a Level Three response to be "business as usual" outreach to small groups of people residing in unsheltered locations. DFSS or a service agency visits the encampment periodically to ensure that residents know about available services and provides referrals and transportation to appropriate supportive services.
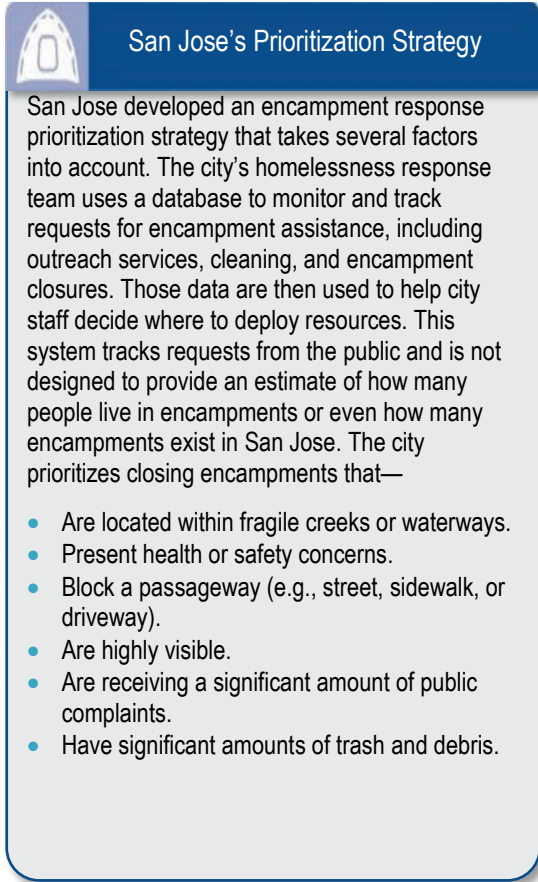
In addition to size and type of location, the prioritization of encampments for a formal city response may be driven by other factors.

The extent of the health, safety, and environmental hazards posed by the encampment. Encampments can pose public health and safety hazards to encampment residents and to surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. Those hazards include human waste, used needles, rodents, disease, and criminal activity (primarily drug use and prostitution). Encampments also can cause negative impacts on the natural environment. Trash and waste from people living in encampment settings without access to regular sanitation services can pollute waterways and soil.

- At the request of the mayor, Houston's Health Authority inspects the city's largest encampments periodically to ensure sanitary conditions. An inspection usually results in a deep cleaning that temporarily closes the encampment. During those cleanings, encampment residents must remove all of their property so cleaning crews can power wash sidewalks and other paved areas; remove contaminated dirt; and vacuum sewers, drains, manholes, and sidewalk gutters of human waste and trash. The Health Authority inspects the site again before residents are permitted to return.

- In Tacoma, the mayor and city council responded to the large encampment under Interstate 705 called The Jungle by declaring a State of Public Health Emergency, which allowed the city to access increased funding to develop an encampment response. One component of the response, a mitigation site, was designed to resolve the health and safety hazards associated with The Jungle by providing portable toilets, trash services, and around-the-clock security.

- San Jose prioritizes encampments that are near fragile creeks or waterways in response to the 2016 settlement of a lawsuit filed by a conservation group to protect the community's waterways. Such encampments can cause significant environmental damage and pollution as trash, debris, and human waste enter the waterways.

The level of public and political pressure. As a
result of complaints from local residents and
businesses, city officials—including mayors and
other elected officials—may prioritize responding
to certain encampments.

- In Houston, complaints to the mayor's office
  about specific encampments trigger a response.
  The mayor requests that the health authority
  inspect the encampment, which results in a
  deep cleaning and subsequent inspection for
  sanitary conditions before encampment
  residents may return.

- In San Jose, the city's housing department
  bundles all encampment complaints. A large
  volume of complaints from city residents and
  businesses about a specific encampment can
  elevate that encampment to the mayor or city
  council, which can expedite the encampment's
  priority for response and abatement.

- Tacoma's Jungle encampment resulted in a
  large amount of political pressure on the mayor
  and the city council. In an effort to respond
  more quickly, the city manager expedited
  closure of the encampment.

San Jose's Prioritization Strategy
San Jose developed an encampment response prioritization strategy that takes several factors into account. The city's homelessness response team uses a database to monitor and track requests for encampment assistance, including outreach services, cleaning, and encampment closures. Those data are then used to help city staff decide where to deploy resources. This system tracks requests from the public and is not designed to provide an estimate of how many people live in encampments or even how many encampments exist in San Jose. The city prioritizes closing encampments that—

- Are located within fragile creeks or waterways.
- Present health or safety concerns.
- Block a passageway (e.g., street, sidewalk, or driveway).
- Are highly visible.
- Are receiving a significant amount of public complaints.
- Have significant amounts of trash and debris.

- Some stakeholders said that complaints from Chicago residents resulted in the city undertaking a
  larger number of the most intensive—Level 1—encampment responses in the affluent neighborhoods
  of the city's north side.

- Complaints from residents and business owners in San Jose and Tacoma often result in police asking
  people on sidewalks to clear their encampment with little notice. As a result, outreach workers often
  prioritize assisting people in sidewalk encampments.

Prioritization systems, formal or informal, may shift in response to the competing interests and
perspectives of stakeholders, such as concerns about encampments' impact on downtown businesses or
residential neighborhoods; environmental degradation; and health hazards to encampment residents and
others associated with large, dense encampments.

4.3. Linking the strategy for responding to encampments to the broader effort to end homelessness

In each of the four cities that were the focus of this study, the city government has the predominant role in
not only creating the encampment response strategy but also (as will be detailed in Sections 5 and 6)
carrying it out and funding it. Each city (and often the surrounding county) has a broader set of
institutions responding to homelessness overall, not just to encampments. The encampment strategy can
relate to that broader system in several ways:

- Making changes to the emergency shelter system to improve its ability to serve encampment
  residents, thus encouraging more people to leave encampments and enter shelters.

- Making use of the organizations that are already providing outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

- Bringing encampment residents into the coordinated entry system for placing people experiencing homelessness or chronic homelessness into permanent housing.

In none of the four cities has the existing emergency shelter system changed substantially as part of the strategy to respond to encampments. Those cities have instead created new types of shelter explicitly targeted to encampment residents: a new, low-barrier shelter in Chicago; a temporary, tent-based shelter in Tacoma; and a planned navigation center in Houston.

Three of the four cities expanded the use of preexisting teams that provide outreach to unsheltered homeless people to offer these services to encampment residents. This is probably the deepest connection between the cities' strategies for responding to encampments and the broader homeless services system.

Ultimately, the response to encampments must go beyond the shelter system and provide opportunities for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to be placed in permanent housing. This objective is challenging because not one of the four cities has sufficient resources to meet the needs of its homeless population for permanent housing. Continuums of Care have developed coordinated entry systems to prioritize housing resources and to match people to programs appropriate to their needs.

Chicago and Houston seem to have gone further than the other two cities in making use of broader systems to provide permanent housing for at least some former encampment residents—in Chicago, through changes to the coordinated entry system agreed to with the Continuum of Care, and in Houston, through a combination of dedicated funding and agreements with the local housing authorities to provide long-term housing voucher subsidies to former encampment residents. San Jose and Tacoma—with larger numbers of unsheltered homeless people and high-cost, tight housing markets—face greater challenges. In every case, linking encampment residents to housing providers requires tradeoffs between supporting the encampment response strategy and serving other people experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered), who may have even higher needs.

In many cities, the faith-based community has a large role in the broader response to homelessness. The role of the faith-based community in encampment response strategies seems to have been modest in these four cities. In Chicago, a faith-based organization operates the new, low-barrier shelter to which encampment residents have preferential access. In other cities, the faith-based community provides humanitarian aid such as food, water, and basic supplies to residents of encampments. Although those efforts are well intentioned, partners implementing the encampment response strategy in Houston said that they believe that this support sometimes discouraged encampment residents from fully engaging with available supportive services or leaving the encampment to take advantage of housing assistance.

5.   Carrying Out the Strategy: Leadership, Implementation Partners, and Activities

The overall response to homelessness in a community usually is coordinated by a local Continuum of Care (CoC), which may be an agency of the city government or a nonprofit organization. The response to encampments has been different in different cities, with the mayor's office or a city department taking the lead role. As will be shown in Section 6 of this report, city governments are by far the largest funders of encampment responses. Much of the funding for homeless assistance programs from the federal government—in particular, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—flows through the CoC; however, HUD funds may not be used for cleaning, sanitation, and policing activities related to encampments. Furthermore, CoCs usually have committed the federal funds they control to permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing and cannot quickly redirect funds to emergency response programs related to encampments, such as low-barrier shelters and navigation centers. Although CoCs do not generally dedicate funding to encampment responses, their resources do assist people living in encampment settings by providing the trained outreach staff who work with encampment residents and by enabling referrals to CoC-funded homeless assistance programs.

5.1.   Coordinating the city effort

In the four cities where the study team conducted site visits and the other five cities for which only telephone interviews occurred, a representative of the mayor's office or a city department coordinates a diverse set of implementation partners—often entities not traditionally involved in homelessness assistance. As part of the city's response to encampments, they divert resources from their core, "business as usual" tasks. Coordination of efforts and a clear path for decision-making are essential.

In Houston, the Special Assistant to the Mayor for Homeless Initiatives leads the city's encampment response. In San Jose, the Department of Housing has been designated as the lead agency, whereas in Tacoma, the Neighborhood and Community Services Department takes the lead. In Philadelphia, the Managing Director's Office, a cabinet-level office that oversees the city's operating departments, played a critical role in closing the Kensington encampments by facilitating collaboration between different city departments as well as outside organizations.

Another approach is the formation of a task force or working group to oversee the city's encampment response. Chicago created a Mayor's Task Force to Reduce Homelessness, staffed by the city's Department of Family and Support Services. Fresno County established a Working Group to Address Homeless Encampments in 2016 to coordinate the work of countywide agencies that were responding to encampments outside the city of Fresno. Working group members include the county's sheriff's department; the Departments of Environmental Health, Social Services, Behavioral Health, and Public Works; and homeless services providers.

Some communities have moved forward without a clear coordinating entity and have faced challenges. In Minneapolis, the rapid formation of the Hiawatha/Franklin encampment forced a response before a coordinating entity emerged. A stakeholder explained how difficult decision-making and accountability are when so many organizations are involved without a single group being wholly in charge of decision-making. The Southern Nevada region has no cross-jurisdictional plan for addressing encampments. Each of three political entities—Las Vegas, Henderson, and Clark County— has its own strategy, and that has led to overlapping, fragmented, or even conflicting approaches to addressing encampments. One example of this situation is that the city of Las Vegas funded the construction and operation of a low-barrier emergency shelter—the Courtyard—despite opposition from the county and other community partners who wanted the city to spend its resources differently.

Common implementation partners for cities' encampment response existed across all of the cities that participated in the study. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 describe the roles of the implementation partners; Section 5.4 provides more detail on the encampment activities.

Police

Police respond to people living in encampments during the course of their regular duties. In addition to regular responses to disturbances and criminal activity, police play a key role in their city's encampment responses. Partnerships with police departments exist in all study cities, but the degree of law enforcement involvement with encampment residents varies. In some cities (Fresno, Houston, Las Vegas, and Tacoma), outreach workers and service providers work alongside police officers when visiting encampments. The presence of police officers provides security to outreach workers and other staff, and their role is one of enforcement. In other cities (Chicago, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Portland, and San Jose), outreach workers coordinate with police officers but visit encampments and offer services separately from police. For example, Portland makes a concerted effort to maintain strict separation between outreach workers, who conduct assessments and provide services, and police officers and others involved in the encampment clearance process. Regardless of the approach, police officers who participate in these partnerships often receive specialized training in mental health services and crisis intervention and typically focus on connecting people experiencing homelessness with community resources rather than enforcing laws. Across all nine cities, stakeholders report that police make very few arrests in encampments, preferring nonpunitive or jail-diversion responses.

Some city police departments have specialized response teams that work with encampments and their residents.

- The Chicago, Houston, and Tacoma police departments have *Homeless Outreach Teams (HOTs)*. These teams, with four to six assigned officers, typically receive special training related to crisis intervention. In Houston, the HOT is supported by three case managers with mental health training. HOT officers typically focus their efforts on building rapport with encampment residents to ultimately connect them with services such as case management, food assistance, and mental health services. HOT members also are present at encampment cleanings in Houston and Level 1 and 2 responses in Chicago.

- In San Jose, a dedicated team of eight officers operates as the *Street Crimes Unit*. These officers focus on quality-of-life crimes across the city, including criminal complaints related to encampments and crimes committed against homeless people. Members of the Street Crimes Unit then work with housing department staff and other city officials to share information. These officers try to build rapport with encampment residents while also enforcing the law.

- In Chicago, a *Crisis Intervention Team* (separate from the HOT) consists of officers that have completed a 40-hour training course that includes recognizing the symptoms of mental illness and how to interact, intervene, and de-escalate situations in which an individual may be experiencing a mental health crisis. Members of the Crisis Intervention Teams may join the city's Level 1 response to the largest homeless encampments.

Sanitation /Solid Waste/ Environmental Services

City departments of sanitation, solid waste, or environmental services are key partners in cities' encampment responses. Their primary role is to lead the periodic cleanings of encampments. In Chicago, the Department of Streets and Sanitation is responsible for posting notices at encampments about upcoming cleanings. Staff are then on site during the cleanings, removing trash and other debris. In Tacoma, the Department of Public Works clears encampment-related debris that poses an immediate

public safety concern. For routine cleanings, the Environmental Services Department contracts with an outside organization that conducts cleanings of city encampments, including removal of solid waste. Houston's Solid Waste Department engages a biohazard cleaning crew to conduct deep cleanings of the two major encampments in the city. Staff attend all cleanings and provide clear trash bags for residents to store their personal belongings at the designated city facility. The department also participates in twice-weekly cleanings of the two largest encampments. During those cleanings, the portable toilets and dumpsters are emptied and trash around the encampment is removed. These departments also routinely empty trash receptacles located at larger encampments.

Homeless Services Providers

In all nine cities in the study, encampment response strategies are linked—to various degrees—with the broader homeless service system, including the services coordinated by the local CoC.

- *Outreach and case management.* Typically, the same agencies that provide outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness more broadly also work with encampment residents in particular. Outreach workers often conduct assessments and subsequently enter encampment residents into their community's coordinated entry system. They also provide referrals to emergency shelters or navigation centers, temporary or bridge housing, or permanent supportive housing. In Chicago, both daytime and nighttime outreach teams establish relationships with encampment residents. These teams connect residents with supportive services, including housing navigation, food assistance, and behavioral and mental health services. In Houston, outreach workers spend a great deal of effort on the early stages of housing navigation, such as obtaining their personal documents (e.g., driver's license or state identification card, birth certificates, or passports). In San Jose, outreach workers respond to complaints from the city's Homeless Concerns Hotline that residents call or email to report encampments of concern. While visiting these encampments, outreach workers offer food and supplies to residents, conduct housing assessments, provide referrals to shelter, and help encampment residents to access state and federal public benefits. Outreach workers may also offer transportation to medical services or shelter. In Tacoma, outreach workers provide referrals to housing, the Stability Site, shelter, and other supportive services and financial resources such as bus tokens to help them get there.

- *Medical and mental health services.* Other services frequently offered to encampment residents are medical and mental health services. In San Jose, the Valley HealthCare Program supports a backpack medical team that consists of a nurse, a mental health clinician, and a community health worker; the team visits encampments three times a week. In Houston, Healthcare for the Homeless provides low-level medical care once a week, including blood pressure checks, wound care and cleaning, and basic medical checks. The nurse practitioner can also refer and make medical appointments for encampment residents. During a formal encampment response in Chicago, Heartland Alliance's Health's medical team offers a mental and physical health examination and then can offer medications, prescriptions, and supplies to address common conditions or illnesses. The medical team also offers referrals to other medical providers as well as follow up appointments.

- *Substance use services.* Substance use treatment is another service to which outreach workers attempt to connect encampment residents. In Chicago and Houston, organizations specializing in substance use sometimes join the outreach workers who visit encampments periodically or at the time of a clearance and closure, offering connections to treatment programs. Notably, Houston is the only city with encampment-specific costs related to substance use disorder programs. This does not reflect the presence of or costs associated with services that may be broadly available to homeless people in the other city. See Appendix A for more information on the cost study methodology.

- *Food assistance.* In Chicago, the Salvation Army's Mobile Feeding and Outreach Program delivers meals to three encampments in the city 365 days a year. Two outreach workers accompany the mobile unit and attempt to engage encampment residents during the meal and provide a connection to supportive services.

- *Financial assistance*. In Tacoma, Comprehensive Life Resources provides temporary financial assistance—for example, bus tokens—to encampment residents, as well as connections to shelter and other services.

5.3. Other implementation partners

In addition to the implementation partners that are common to all cities in the study, some cities engage other important partners in their responses to encampments.

Department of public health

Houston's Public Health Department oversees the periodic deep cleanings. The city's Health Authority (the physician who oversees the department) inspects the encampments and requests the deep cleaning. After the cleanings, the Health Authority conducts an inspection to confirm that conditions in the encampment are sanitary before residents are allowed to return. The process usually takes a full day. In Chicago, the Department of Public Health contracts with Heartland Alliance Health to provide medical care and outreach during the city's encampment response.

State Departments of Transportation

In six of the nine cities in the study, a significant number of encampments were (or still are) on property belonging to the state's Department of Transportation or a private transportation company. For example, in Houston, encampments exist below highways on Texas Department of Transportation (TX DOT) property. For decades the TX DOT did not allow people to camp on its property, but recently it decided to cease enforcing that policy. As a result, the city of Houston is now left with responsibility for enforcement and cleanup of those areas. In San Jose, stakeholders reported encampments on public California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) property and private Union Pacific railroad property. They explained that the police will not relocate those encampment residents because jurisdictional boundaries are unclear. Recently, a state legislator's office worked to facilitate coordination between outreach workers and Caltrans to address some of those challenges. In addition, some homeless services providers do not visit those encampments because of safety and trespassing concerns. By contrast, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN DOT) is heavily involved in Minneapolis City and Hennepin County's response to encampments on its property. MN DOT continues to report encampments to outreach workers and is exploring the adoption of an assessment tool to determine the appropriate response to encampments on its property.

Airport authorities

The Chicago Department of Aviation (part of the city government) contracts with a local nonprofit organization to provide outreach and engagement to people who are using the terminal buildings, parking structure, and public transit tunnels at O'Hare International Airport as encampments. An outreach team walks though the airport and terminals 24 hours a day, trying to engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and administering assessments for coordinated entry. Outreach staff also provide housing navigation services to link those people to shelters and housing and offer connections to detoxification or substance use treatment programs.

Other transportation authorities

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) participates in encampment responses on the city's "L" Red Line. CTA also funds two security teams that operate at both ends of the Red Line in an attempt to curtail continuous riding or congregating in the subway stations.

Neighborhood services and parks departments

Tacoma's Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) Department is the lead city department that responds to encampments, working closely with other city departments, managing contracts related to the city's Stability Site, and coordinating cleanup efforts. NCS also assesses areas where encampments regularly occur for potential physical changes that could help deter the establishment of future encampments. As part of a local city beautification initiative focused on blight reduction, San Jose's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department provides trash bags to encampment residents for their refuse and funds local organizations who conduct cleanups after the closure of encampments along local waterways.

Utilities

Local utilities can play important roles in encampment responses. Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) maintenance crews are responsible for identifying, reporting, and coordinating with the city's Neighborhood and Community Services Department in Tacoma to facilitate responses to encampments on TPU property. As part of its role to maintain waterways, the Santa Clara Valley Water District funds encampment responses, including a cleanup contractor to remove trash and debris along waterways, mitigation work that offsets the damage caused by encampments close to waterways, and off-duty police officers that provide security for encampment closures. Valley Water also provides heavy machinery (e.g., compactors and Bobcat-style bulldozers or backhoes) as needed for cleaning encampments, removing structures, and abating the environmental effects of the encampments.

Fire departments

City fire departments typically have an ancillary role in encampment responses. Their most common role is responding to calls for medical services in encampments (which may not be more frequent than among other people experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness). Some calls, especially in the San Jose encampments that are in natural settings, are related to trash or vegetation fires. As detailed in Section 6, fire department costs are not included in the costs of encampment responses because of data quality limitations.

Other publicly funded organizations

The Downtown and Midtown Management Districts are important partners in Houston's encampment response. These tax- and assessment-funded organizations supplement the city's cleaning efforts by providing staff that operate ride-on street vacuum cleaners to reduce litter at the encampments. They also regularly transport encampment residents' personal property to the city storage facility during cleanings. The Downtown Management District also provides dumpsters and portable toilets at the Chartres encampment that are emptied on a weekly basis by their staff. Both organizations also fund private security to help deter the any additional encampments in their sections of Houston.

5.4. Core activities for responding to encampments

City responses to encampments have key elements in common. They focus on a core set of activities: helping encampment residents through outreach and engagement, periodic cleanings, clearing encampments, and (when permitted by law) closing them.

Outreach

Outreach is a key component of city responses to encampments. Outreach teams focus on building rapport with people living in encampments, gaining their trust, and ultimately helping them understand and gain access to available housing and supportive services. Outreach workers described the challenges of providing supportive services to encampment residents. Encampment residents are highly mobile, hard to contact, and often have mental health and substance use conditions that create barriers to communication.

As a result, outreach workers invest significant time establishing trusting relationships with encampment residents that enable the outreach workers to provide supportive services. Outreach staff often begin their work by offering encampment residents supplies, such as bottled water, nonperishable snacks, and hygiene materials. Outreach staff also may help encampment residents by transporting them to medical appointments. Workers frequently visit encampments many times a week to focus on relationship building. If an encampment resident declines to engage, outreach workers often will approach the person again after a few weeks.

> ### Relationships with Outreach Workers
>
> Across four cities, the study team consistently heard from people living in encampments who had developed good relationships with outreach workers and who appreciated their kindness and support. "My hat's off to outreach workers," a woman in Houston said about the outreach workers she had seen provide housing for many people from her encampment. A woman in San Jose appreciated the snacks and other supplies outreach workers brought to her, including pet food for a dog. Both men the study team interviewed in Tacoma's People's Park encampment described their positive relationships with outreach workers, mentioning that outreach workers distributed hygiene kits, toiletries, and snacks and were helpful in connecting encampment residents to services and resources to improve their situation. One of the men said an outreach worker from Comprehensive Life Resources is like family to him. Their close relationship means the outreach worker can always come to him when something needs to be done in the encampment or if information must be communicated to all encampment residents.

Outreach workers in the four cities said that they spend significant time on the early stages of housing navigation, gathering identification and other documents needed to move encampment residents into housing. A stakeholder in Tacoma said that outreach workers spend about 75 percent of time overcoming barriers to service provision, such as locating or securing driver's licenses, Social Security cards, or birth certificates.

Outreach workers at all four cities help in identifying and securing housing. The first step in that process typically is administering assessments for the CoC's coordinated entry system. This assessment helps the outreach worker determine which housing options are available, based on the person's homeless history, income, and mental and physical health. Drawing on the information from the coordinated entry assessment used in each community, the outreach worker next provides housing navigation assistance. In Chicago, San Jose, and Tacoma, the outreach staff conduct housing navigation, whereas in Houston, both outreach workers and separate housing navigators work with encampment residents. Housing navigation helps encampment residents accessing permanent housing by helping them locate affordable housing units or programs, completing applications, visiting housing units, and moving from the encampment to the housing. Navigation can also include a warm handoff to a housing provider, such as a housing authority or the manager of a permanent supportive housing program. Entry into another housing program by an encampment resident is likely to appear in the local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) but usually without identifying that the person was an encampment resident as distinct from the broader unsheltered population.

Outreach workers also offer referrals to social and supportive services—including mental health and substance use treatment—and assistance applying for mainstream benefits.

Medical and substance use outreach
Outreach workers often partner with healthcare providers to offer medical services at the encampment or to have trained staff offer referrals to services, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment.
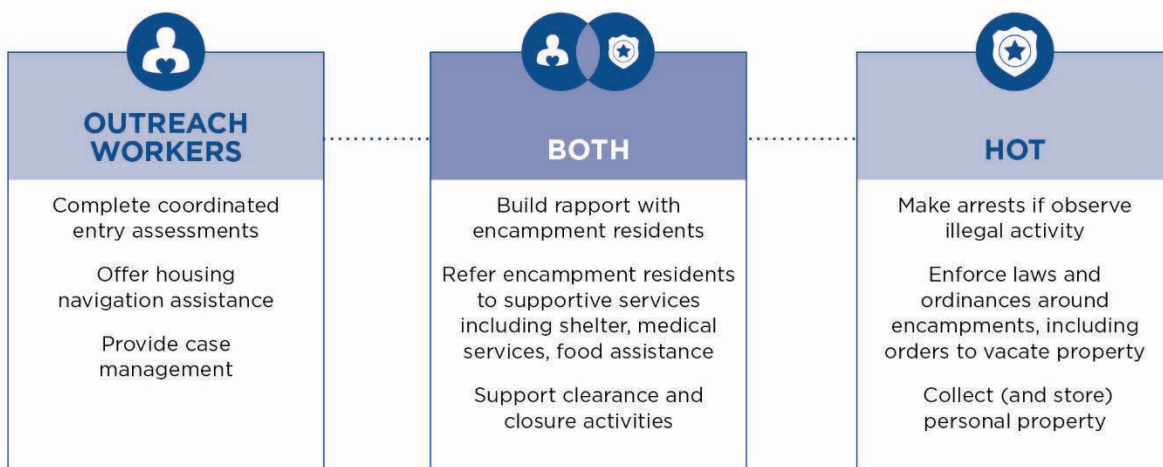
- Formal encampment responses in Chicago include local partner organizations with expertise in substance use and recovery services, mental health, and comprehensive health care. Those partner organizations provide onsite case management and related services from 1 to 10 days during Level 1 and 2 responses. Heartland Alliance Health outreach teams also make routine visits to encampments

across Chicago, offering basic onsite medical care, prescription medications, and supplies, as well as making referrals to Heartland's medical clinics for further diagnosis and treatment.

- In Houston, a nurse practitioner from Health Care for the Homeless and a case worker from a substance use treatment program sometimes accompany outreach teams. The nurse practitioner visits the encampments in the morning and provides basic medical care, such as blood pressure checks and routine wound care. She then may refer patients for same-day appointments at a local medical clinic or provide referrals for behavioral health care. A staff member from the Recovery Center in Houston also visits encampments and provides referrals to the Sobering Center and other substance use services.

- In San Jose, the Valley Homeless HealthCare Program (funded by the Santa Clara County Health System) supports a backpack medicine team consisting of a nurse, mental health clinician, and a community health worker. The team provides medical services to encampments in Santa Clara County two to three times a week.

Role of police in outreach

Some city police departments also participate in outreach activities. A number of cities established Homeless Outreach Teams (HOTs), whose members focus on outreach efforts to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

OUTREACH WORKERS	BOTH	HOT
Complete coordinated entry assessments	Build rapport with encampment residents	Make arrests if observe illegal activity
Offer housing navigation assistance	Refer encampment residents to supportive services including shelter, medical services, food assistance	Enforce laws and ordinances around encampments, including orders to vacate property
Provide case management	Support clearance and closure activities	Collect (and store) personal property

- In Chicago, HOTs operate in specific areas of the city, establishing relationships with people experiencing homelessness within that area. Using their established rapport, HOT members refer people experiencing homelessness to supportive services including shelter, medical services and food assistance. If a Level 1 or 2 encampment response occurs in the geography covered by a HOT, the officers will attend and participate in the encampment response.

- The Houston Police Department HOT includes a sergeant, six officers trained in crisis intervention, and three case managers with training in mental health services. The HOT focuses its work on building rapport with encampment residents through regular visits to the encampments, "bringing the services to people in encampments" by offering onsite connections to available services, including shelter and medical assistance.

- The HOT in Tacoma consists of two outreach members, five police officers, and one mental health professional. This team's philosophy is to first connect people experiencing homelessness with services rather than immediately enforce laws. The HOT takes a long-term approach and expects that they will

have many repeat interactions with people who initially refuse to accept services. If Tacoma officials schedule the clearance of an encampment, the HOT is sent to the encampment to offer services and ensure that residents vacate the property. The HOT collects any personal property remaining at the encampment and transports it to a city facility to be stored for a maximum of 60 days.

Cleaning encampments

If a city is not planning to close an encampment in the immediate future, it may conduct regularly scheduled cleanings. In addition to maintaining sanitary conditions, these cleanings provide another touchpoint for outreach staff and HOT members to interact with encampment residents and encourage them to access shelters and supportive services.

- The Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation conducts weekly cleanings of the Lower Wacker Drive encampment. The cleanings focus on removing trash and debris from in and around this large encampment. Notices of a cleaning are posted in advance, and DFSS staff are on site to ensure that personal belongings are safeguarded.

- A key component of the response to encampments in Houston is twice-a-week cleanings of the largest encampments. During the cleanings, the portable toilet and dumpster are emptied, and the trash around the encampment is removed. These short cleanings take only a few hours, and encampment residents do not have to leave or move their belongings. Outreach staff and HOT members are present for the cleanings, offering assistance and referrals for other services.

In some instances, regular cleanings are supplemented by periodic "deep" cleanings. Deep cleanings often involve more staff and focus on maintaining sanitary conditions in the encampment by removing human waste, drug paraphernalia, and items that are no longer being used, such as furniture and bicycles.

- In Chicago, the Department of Streets and Sanitation is present during Level 1 responses (encampments with more than 10 people) to remove trash, litter, and other debris. If the Department determines that needles or other biohazards are present that make the area unsafe, they call in a hazmat team. Notices of deep cleanings are posted 72 hours in advance.

- Houston conducts deep cleanings of encampments when the mayor requests that the health authority inspect an encampment. Typically, these deep cleanings occur quarterly. An inspection that results in a deep cleaning triggers a temporary closure of the encampment to facilitate the cleaning process., Notices are posted in English and Spanish 72 hours before a deep cleaning to alert encampment residents that they must remove all of their property from the area during the cleaning. If belongings remain at the time of the deep cleaning, they are removed as trash.

Clearance and closure of encampments

If an encampment is to be cleared and closed, officials provide the residents between 24 and 72 hours' notice by posting signage around the area. Outreach teams often visit the encampment shortly before a clearance to connect residents to services and, if available, shelter. If an encampment is abandoned or residents are not present at the time of clearing, officials work to collect, label, and store personal belongings for a set amount of time, usually between 30 and 90 days.

- In San Jose, if the city decides to clear an encampment, it begins with a notification of abatement or clearance that is posted at the encampment site at least 72 hours in advance. One or two days before the clearance and closure, outreach teams and housing department staff remind encampment residents of the upcoming clearance. They provide garbage bags and shelter and service referrals to encampment residents. Outreach teams visit the encampment on the days before the clearance but usually are not present when the closure occurs. If encampment residents are still on site when the clearance begins, they have 15 minutes to collect their belongings and leave the site. Items of value

(e.g., tents, bicycles, and personal documents) that are left behind are labeled and placed into storage for up to 90 days for encampment residents to retrieve.

- Once Tacoma decides to close an encampment, the city posts a notice to vacate the premises 72 hours in advance. The HOT and other outreach workers visit the encampment, providing linkages to housing for encampment residents. On the day of the scheduled closing, the HOT is sent to the encampment to ensure that residents have left and taken their belongings. Any remaining personal property is transported and stored for 60 days.

In San Jose and Tacoma, cleaning of the encampment site occurs after people leave the encampment and remove their belongings.

- In San Jose, several organizations participate in encampment cleanup efforts. The Santa Clara Valley Water District funds a cleanup contractor to offset environmental impacts of encampments after their closure. Sometimes those efforts include heavy equipment to facilitate the removal of larger encampment structures or abating the environmental impacts of the encampment. Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful and South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition clean up trash and debris along Coyote Creek and the Guadalupe River after encampments are closed.

- To expedite the closure of encampments in Tacoma, the city created a mitigation site nearby to offer basic health and safety amenities, such as portable toilets, trash services, and 24/7 security to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. A few months later, in June 2017, city officials closed and fenced off the mitigation site and opened an outdoor temporary shelter called a Stability Site. The Stability Site has a large, sprung-style FEMA-style tent that can hold up to 100 individual tents, which are provided by the city. The site also has one-room units called pallet shelters, as well as trailers for bathrooms, laundry, and service provision.

> **Negative Impacts of Clearing and Closing Encampments**
>
> The goals of reducing public health hazards and nuisance complaints by cleaning and closing encampments can sometimes work against goals of housing encampment residents and lowering the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Outreach workers report that cleaning and clearing an encampment often exacerbates the challenges of moving residents to shelter or permanent housing because residents lose identification, legal documents, and medications. In addition, cleanings and clearings can disrupt relationships between outreach workers and encampment residents.

Preventing reestablishment of encampments

Once an encampment is cleared of people and personal belongings, some cities take steps to prevent former residents or other people from returning and reestablishing the encampment. City departments or local utilities fence areas or erect other barriers to discourage future encampments. This practice is most common for larger encampments and for encampments that have negative environmental impacts on local greenspace or waterways.

- After Philadelphia and Houston cleared and closed the Kensington and Wheeler encampments, respectively, city officials fenced off the areas so that the encampments did not re-form. Similarly, when Tacoma cleared the Jungle encampment, the city repaired existing fencing around the site and routinely monitors the location to prevent the establishment of a subsequent encampment.

- After an encampment in Tacoma is cleared of people and personal belongings, a city contractor conducts a rigorous cleaning of the area. In most cases, the city is not able to prevent people from returning because it does not want to restrict public use of the area; however, the city conducts what it calls site reclamation of public areas to make them less desirable for camping by trimming vegetation, leveling the ground, and adding lighting to increase visibility. In other locations, such as under bridges and freeways, the city installs fencing and erects boulders or other obstacles to discourage public use of the space.

- In San Jose, the Santa Clara County Water District repairs fences to prevent the formation of encampments in areas where they could contaminate the water supply. Valley Water also employs off-duty police officers to patrol and enforce no-camping regulations.

6. Direct Costs of Encampment Responses

Each of the four cities at which the study team conducted site visits and collected cost data undertook significant efforts to respond to homeless encampments. At the same time, costs varied widely across the cities—for a number of reasons. At the policy level, cities implemented different approaches to responding to encampments and devoted varying levels of resources to their response efforts.[9] This section compares the ongoing costs of responding to encampments in fiscal year (FY) 2019 across Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma on a number of dimensions. Those dimensions include overall expenditures, variations in spending by activity type, spending by the various organizations implementing the responses, and the sources of funding for the responses.

These costs are a snapshot of spending in 1 year. As cities undertake initiatives to permanently reduce the number of people residing in encampments, the costs of those initiatives may push expenditures higher in FY 2020. (See Exhibit 4-1, for a list of major encampment activities, 2017–2019, and activities planned for 2020.)

The methodology used for collecting and analyzing the cost data is presented in Appendix A. Appendix B is a detailed presentation of approaches for estimating the costs of encampments intended to inform the efforts of other cities.

6.1. Overall costs and costs by type of activity

The total costs of encampment responses in the four cities in FY 2019 ranged from $3.4 million in Houston to $8.6 million in San Jose. Several factors drove differences in those costs, including the number of people who were unsheltered in each city, the strategy and resources for responding to encampments, and the varying nature of its encampments.

Expenditures per capita, per person

Exhibit 6-1 shows that spending on encampments is not related to the total population of the city. In FY 2019, Chicago was the largest of the four cities but ranked third in total spending on encampments. San Jose, less than one-half the size of Chicago, spent more than twice as much as Chicago on its encampment response. Tacoma was by far the smallest of the cities—less than one-tenth the size of Chicago or Houston—but Tacoma spent more than either city. On a per capita basis, Tacoma spent much more than the other three cities—more than twice as much as San Jose and more than 10 times as much as Chicago or Houston.

Exhibit 6-1. Total costs and cost per capita of encampment-related expenditures by city, FY 2019

	Total spending on encampment activities	Population	Cost per capita
San Jose	$ 8,557,000	1,035,317	$ 8.27
Tacoma	$ 3,905,000	213,418	$ 18.30
Chicago	$ 3,572,000	2,716,450	$ 1.31
Houston	$ 3,393,000	2,312,717	$ 1.47

Sources: City cost data; U.S. Census

As would be expected, encampment-related expenditures are more closely related to the number of unsheltered homeless people in a city than to its overall population. San Jose, the third largest of the four cities in population, has roughly five times the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

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[9] Technical reasons also account for differences in reported costs of encampment responses, including differing definitions of encampments, differences in how data are reported and categorized, and missing data.

than any of the other cities. Given the magnitude of the encampment issue in San Jose, it is not surprising that San Jose has the largest expenditures. Per unsheltered homeless person, however, San Jose spends the least of the four cities, at around $1,080. Tacoma spends the most, at about $6,200 (Exhibit 6-2). This is *not* the cost per encampment resident; the unsheltered count includes people staying by themselves rather than in groups or in locations with tents or other structures. Because encampment residents are a subset of all unsheltered homeless people, an estimate of costs per encampment resident would by definition be greater than cost per unsheltered person.

Exhibit 6-2. Costs of encampment response per number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness by city, 2019

	Total spending on encampment activities, FY 2019	Unsheltered homeless population, 2019[1]	Cost per unsheltered homeless person, 2019
Chicago	$ 3,572,000	1,260	$2,835
Houston	$ 3,393,000	1,614	$2,102
Tacoma	$ 3,905,000	629	$6,208
San Jose	$ 8,557,000	7,922	$1,080

[1] The unsheltered homeless population for Chicago is for the city, whereas the numbers for Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma include the surrounding counties (Harris, Santa Clara, and Pierce Counties).

Source: City cost data; 2019 CoC Point-in-Time data, HUD

Expenditures by activity

Encampment-related expenditures reflect differences in city encampment responses. Exhibits 6-3 and 6-4 show expenditures by type of activity for each city in dollar amounts and as a percentage of total spending on encampment activities.

Exhibit 6-3. Costs of encampment responses by type of activity by city, FY 2019

	Chicago	Houston	San Jose	Tacoma
Outreach (total)	$ 3,082,000	$ 1,546,000	$ 870,000	$ 1,056,000
Outreach and housing navigation	$ 2,110,000	$ 834,000	$ 800,000	$ 168,000
Homeless Outreach Teams	$ 931,000	$ 630,000	$ 0	$ 887,000
Substance use disorder programs	$ 0	$ 27,000	$ 0	$ 0
Medical assistance	$ 33,000	$ 52,000	$ 53,000	$ 0
Financial assistance	$ 7,000	$ 3,000	$ 17,000	$ 1,000
Encampment clearance	$ 140,000	$ 887,000	$ 4,910,000	$ 144,000
Encampment prevention	$ 0	$ 0	$ 1,495,000	$ 293,000
Shelter	$ 297,000	$ 0	$ 0	$ 2,347,000
Dedicated permanent supportive housing	$ 0	$ 782,000	$ 0	$ 0
Other	$ 53,000	$ 178,000	$ 1,281,000	$ 65,000
Total	**$ 3,572,000**	**$ 3,393,000**	**$ 8,557,000**	**$ 3,905,000**

Source: City cost data.
Notes: Outreach and navigation includes services provided during the clearance of an encampment. Police department Homeless Outreach Team costs are shown separately from other outreach services because of their magnitude. All costs of HOTs are included, not only the time officers spend at encampments. Costs of encampment clearance include cleaning and sanitation. Financial assistance generally is modest (e.g., bus tokens to get to services or housing programs). Examples of encampment prevention costs are erecting fencing and other barriers and patrolling former and potential future encampment sites.

Exhibit 6-4. Costs by type of activity as percentage of total encampment spending by city, FY 2019

Legend: Outreach - total | Encampment cleaning and clearance | Encampment prevention | Shelter | PSH | Other

City	Outreach - total	Encampment cleaning and clearance	Encampment prevention	Shelter	PSH	Other
Tacoma	27%	4%	8%	60%		2%
San Jose	10%	57%	17%			15%
Houston	46%	26%			23%	5%
Chicago	86%			4% / 8%		1%
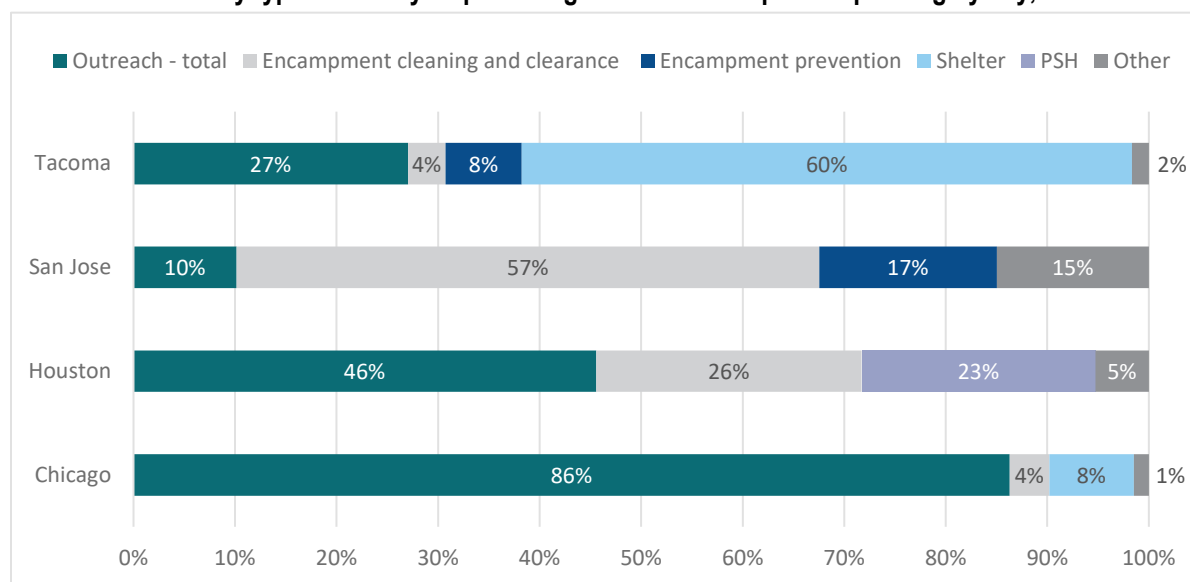
PSH = permanent supportive housing.
Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding
Source: City cost data

Chicago

Chicago did not undertake significant new initiatives related to homeless encampments in FY 2019, but the city did expend significant resources executing existing plans and strategies. Outreach—including activities completed by outreach workers and the HOT—was its largest expenditure, accounting for 86 percent of total spending. Shelter for encampment residents—the 40-bed, low-barrier Pilsen shelter—accounted for 8 percent of spending. The city also conducted routine trash pickups from encampments and a small number of encampment clearances and closures.

Houston

Outreach activities were the largest expenditure in Houston in FY 2019, totaling 46 percent of its encampment-related spending. Encampment clearance was also a large spending category in Houston (23 percent of the total), for two reasons. First, the city completed the Wheeler Street encampment closure in FY 2019. Second, two business management districts contributed to the city encampment response by regularly cleaning two major encampments. The costs of biweekly cleanings in Houston totaled $887,307 in FY 2019. Also, in FY 2019, Houston dedicated significant resources to an initiative to permanently house encampment residents. The city designated 21 permanent supportive housing (PSH) beds for encampment residents, timing the Wheeler Street encampment to coincide with the availability of new PSH units. Expenditures on PSH in Houston accounted for 23 percent of spending. Relatively small amounts of money were spent on other costs, which included coordination and management of the encampment response and encampment services and supports.

San Jose

San Jose, with encampments common along ecologically sensitive creeks and streams, spent the majority of its budget—57 percent—on an estimated 300 encampment clearances and closures. Most of the money was spent by the Santa Clara Water District. Encampment prevention was the next-largest category, at more than 17 percent of the total; again, much of it was spending by the Santa Clara Water District for activities such as repairing fencing and enforcing land use regulations. Outreach, by the San Jose Police Department's Street Crimes Unit and by outreach workers, was about 10 percent of spending. About 3 percent of expenditures were for other costs, including coordination and management and the police

department Street Crimes Unit, which is primarily responsible for working with people experiencing homelessness. None was spent on shelter specifically for encampment residents.

Tacoma

The encampment response in Tacoma, driven by the city's emergency declaration on homelessness that emphasizes shelter for encampment residents, spent the majority (60 percent) of its encampment response dollars on the Stability Site for people leaving encampments. The Stability Site is a large, industrial-style, temperature-controlled tent containing rows of up to 100 individual camping tents, which are provided by the city. In addition to obtaining shelter, residents of the Stability Site also receive services from outreach workers and housing navigators, employment assistance, transportation for appointments, and meals.[10] The City of Tacoma spent an additional 27 percent of its total encampment response budget providing outreach directly to encampment residents via outreach workers and the Tacoma Police Department's HOT. Tacoma also had expenditures for encampment prevention, at 8 percent of the total.

Expenditures for labor and other costs

Although expenditures across activities varied significantly by city, the types of costs incurred did not. All four cities spent significantly more on labor than they did on nonlabor costs (Exhibit 6-5).[11] This finding is not surprising because the bulk of expenditures was for the salaries of police officers on the cities' HOTs; of city staff coordinating the encampment response and carrying out encampment clearances and closures; and of the staff of homeless services providers and other organizations conducting outreach, assisting with encampment clearance and closure, and providing medical care.

Supplies such as blankets, water bottles, and hygiene kits handed out to encampment residents as part of outreach activities had often been donated. The most significant nonlabor expenditure was an in-kind donation of supplies for encampment residents in Houston. In Houston, about 28 percent of expenditures were for nonlabor expenses, including these supplies and also encampment clearance and closure materials, such as dumpsters and use of a truck for picking up trash.

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[10]   Although these costs fall into a variety of categories, they are categorized with the Stability Site as shelter because they are exclusive to Stability Site residents.

[11]   In all four cities, direct financial assistance to encampment residents—typically in the form of cash, bus passes, or hotel vouchers—represented less than 1 percent of expenditures.

Exhibit 6-5. Costs for labor and non-labor expenditures by city, FY 2019
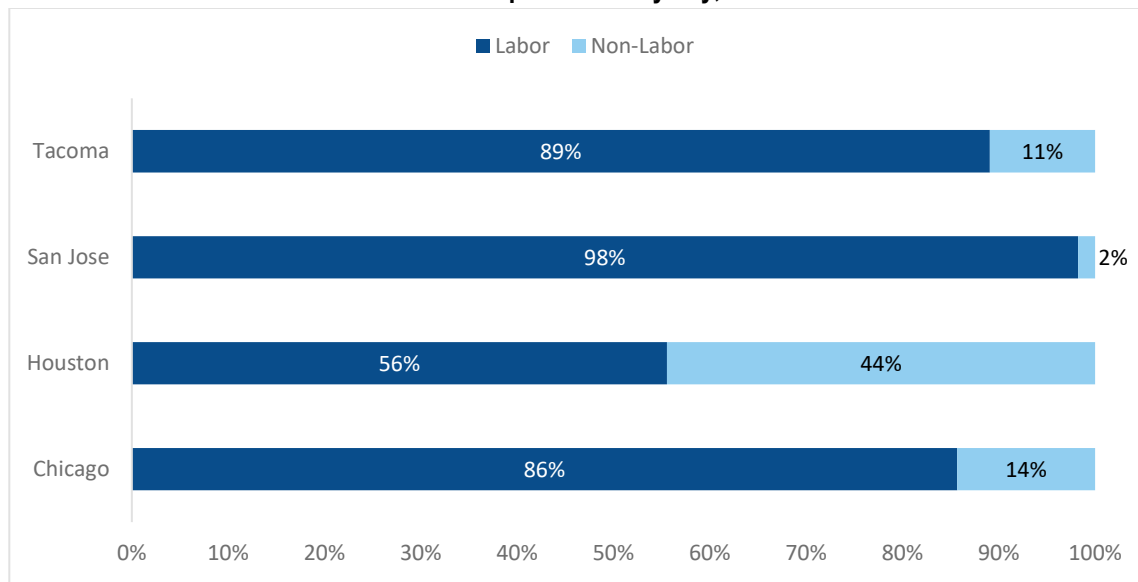
Source: City cost data

6.2. Spending by implementation partners

Although city departments led the encampment response in each site, each city partnered with homeless services providers and other organizations—such as independent local authorities—to conduct activities related to encampments.

In Tacoma, Chicago, and Houston, homeless services providers carried out one-half or more of the encampment response; in San Jose, a local independent authority (the Santa Clara Water District) carried out the largest share of activities (57 percent; Exhibit 6-6). The activities performed by the Santa Clara Water District were almost entirely related to encampment clearance and prevention. In Houston, independent authorities also participated actively in conducting encampment-related activities, expending 10 percent of funds—primarily clearing encampments.

In Chicago, Houston, and Tacoma, the police department accounted for roughly one-fourth of all expenditures in FY 2019, primarily supporting the police-based HOT in each city. In the City of San Jose, spending on the police department Street Crimes Unit was somewhat less than spending in other cities on HOTs—at about $555,000—compared with $867,000 on average in the other three cities.

City departments (excluding the police) accounted for between 9 percent (in Chicago) and 21 percent (in San Jose) of expenditures. In San Jose, one significant expenditure was by the housing department's homelessness response team, which dedicates about four FTEs (full-time equivalents) to coordinating and managing the city's response to encampments. The housing department also funds a park ranger program, dedicated primarily to preventing encampments. Along with encampment clearance and closure activities, the city spent about $1.8 million in FY 2019 in addition to the police department's expenditures.

In Chicago, city departments other than police have a smaller role in implementing activities than in San Jose (although not necessarily in funding them, as discussed below). Chicago's activities focus primarily on outreach, funded by the Department of Family and Support Services, and encampment cleanings, conducted by Streets and Sanitation. Those expenditures totaled about $321,000 in FY 2019.

Exhibit 6-6. Spending on encampment responses by type of organization by city, FY 2019
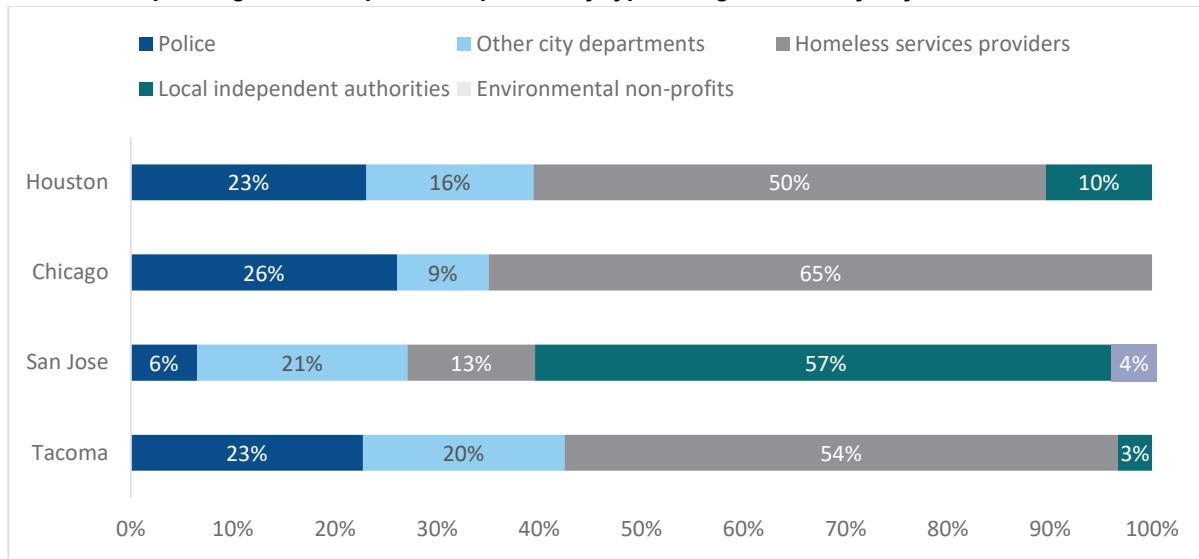
Source: City cost data

6.3.   Sources of funding for encampment responses

The implementation partners involved in city encampment responses did not necessarily provide funding for their own activities. Cities were by far the largest funder of encampment responses, funding between 35 percent of activities (in San Jose) and 97 percent of activities (in Tacoma) (Exhibit 6-7). For example, although non-profit providers of homeless services provided much of the outreach and engagement of encampment residents, they did so under contract to the city.

Exhibit 6-7. Costs of encampment responses by source of funding by city, FY 2019
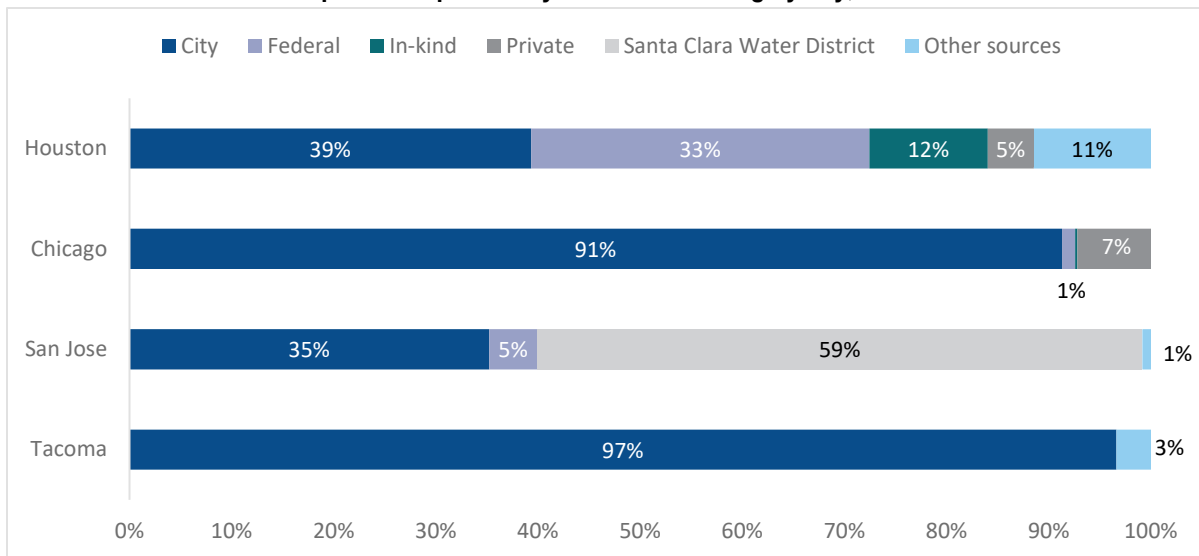
Source: City cost data.
Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Other funders included the federal government (HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]), local independent authorities (e.g., business management districts and an independent

park district), and private funding. In San Jose, an independent local authority (the Santa Clara Water District) played a large role in both implementing and funding encampment-related activities.

Some cities also reported in-kind donations, such as food and clothing, donated to encampments residents and, in some cases, vehicles and equipment to enable the provision of services to encampment residents.

Nonprofit organizations, including homeless services providers, conducted a significant share of the activities that were part of the encampment response in each city through contracts with the city government. Those nonprofit organizations did not provide a significant share of the funding for their own activities, however, via fundraising or other means.

6.4. Major activities before FY 2019

In addition to the costs cities expended in FY 2019, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma had significant expenditures related to major initiatives or encampment responses in previous years. Exhibit 6-8 lists those expenditures (also see Exhibit 4-1 for a timeline of activities by year for the four cities). The largest of those expenditures was in Tacoma for setup costs related to the 100-person Stability Site, totaling $900,000. Tacoma also incurred expenses for establishing the mitigation site, a temporary place for people leaving the Jungle encampment to stay following its closing. Costs related to setting up the mitigation site, which served approximately 80 people, were about $170,000 in 2017.

San Jose and Houston also incurred expenditures for major initiatives before FY 2019. In San Jose, Santa Clara County operated a 20-person sanctioned encampment for 6 months in FY 2018 at a cost of about $215,000. In Houston, the FY 2018 costs of closing the Wheeler Street encampment totaled $202,000.

Exhibit 6-8. Encampment response activities for three cities before FY 2019

Site	Event	Description	Date	Key stakeholders	Cost
Tacoma	Stability Site	Setup costs for the Stability Site	2017 (FY 2017)	City of Tacoma	$900,000
Tacoma	Mitigation site	Creation of a site for residents of the Jungle	May–June 2017 (FY 2017)	City of Tacoma	$169,286
Tacoma	Large encampment cleanup	Clearance and cleanup of large encampment	2018 (FY 2018)	Tacoma Public Utilities	$35,000
San Jose	Hope Village	Temporary "sanctioned" encampment	2018	Santa Clara County	$215,000
Houston	Wheeler Street encampment closure	Encampment closure	FY 2018 (completed in FY 2019)	City of Houston, Midtown Management District, homeless services providers	$202,000

Source: City cost data

6.5. Emergency medical costs

The cost estimates presented above do not include one potentially significant category of costs: the cost of emergency medical responses to encampments. The study team was not able to collect data from either the Chicago or Tacoma fire department on the costs of responses to emergency calls from encampments, and data reported from Houston had a high degree of uncertainty. Although fire departments track the addresses of responses to emergency calls, whether or not those addresses correspond to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness or encampments specifically is generally not tracked. Better data collection and reporting on emergency medical and fire response costs would provide valuable additional context to these findings.

The most reliable data came from San Jose, which reported about 2,500 responses to calls from encampments in FY 2019, at a cost of about $1,900 per call—for a total of about $4.75 million. Clearly, that is a large expenditure: it would be the largest single encampment-related expense in San Jose if it were included in the estimate. Also excluded are costs of responding to homelessness-related fires (most emergency calls are for medical assistance, not firefighting.[12] Among the four sites, that issue is most serious in San Jose, where the study team estimates that the San Jose Fire Department responded to about 100 calls for homelessness-related fires—at a cost of about $195,000 in FY 2019.

Across the cities in the study, whether the costs associated with those calls can be attributed to the existence of the encampment is not clear—that is, are the costs the result of the existence of the encampment or the needs of the people who happen to live in the encampment? High costs of emergency responses may be related to homelessness generally rather than encampments specifically. In comparing calls for medical assistance between patients experiencing sheltered homelessness and patients in an encampment setting, calls related to environmental hazards and substance use seem similar. Anecdotal evidence from stakeholders in Tacoma suggests that among people living in a homeless shelter, requests for emergency medical assistance are also very high—perhaps as high as among those living in an encampment or those who are unsheltered in other locations.

Stakeholders in Tacoma reported that emergency medical services often are used as a taxi service to medical services and appointments. Other cities report similar misuse of 911, both by people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and by those who are currently staying in homeless shelters. In contrast, Tacoma stakeholders reported that emergency responses to the city's Stability Site are rare. That fact may be a result of the connection of residents with outreach and housing navigation staff and provided transportation to medical and other appointments.

Although the study team determined that emergency medical responses by fire departments were not among the costs of city responses to encampments, a broader view of the costs of homelessness would take those costs into consideration, along with the possible cost offsets from providing permanent supportive housing to high users of medical services (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2018).

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[12]   National Fire Protection Association, NFPA Fire Experience Survey. https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/Fire-department-calls

7.   Conclusion

In response to the growing number of encampments nationwide, this study offers a detailed look at the nature of encampments and how cities are currently responding to them. First, the study presents qualitative data from national and community-level stakeholders on what encampments are, what we know about them, and what communities are doing to respond to them. Data on the location and size of current encampments and the characteristics of people living in encampment settings does not exist nationally and is generally limited or inconsistent at the community level. The study summarizes the approaches cities take in responding to encampments and the key implementation partners involved in those responses. Finally, the study presents cost estimates for annual responses to encampments in four cities that were the focus in this report. Unless otherwise indicated, data collected in this report should not be used to develop cost estimates for encampment responses in other jurisdictions. Instead, communities should review Appendix B, which provides a general framework for collecting and analyzing costs related to their local encampment response.

Better understanding the unique needs of encampment residents

The study team found that encampments exist in a variety of locations—from urban sidewalks to wooded areas along riverbeds. Currently, understanding the needs and demographics of people in encampment settings is challenging, as no standards or requirements exist for reporting on this subset of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Although some cities are capturing data via their biennial unsheltered point-in-time counts or via outreach data entered into their local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), many cities are not yet collecting reliable, standardized data on encampment residents. Standardized data collection requirements or protocols for encampments would assist both service providers and policymakers in better understanding the challenges and needs of people living in encampment settings. Based on the limited data available, people living in encampment settings sometimes have complex needs that can make it challenging to help them access shelter or housing. Some cities report high levels of mental illness among encampment residents but also note that severe mental illness may be lower among encampment dwellers than among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in more isolated settings. Other people living in encampments may just need help accessing housing assistance.

Because of the sense of community offered in an encampment, some encampments have people with similar needs or characteristics. Some encampments are composed of specific racial or ethnic groups, often reflecting the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood. Further exploration should be done on approaches to prevent the formation of encampments, including ones that reach out to and serve encampment residents by building on neighborhood and community strengths. This approach could be coupled with enhanced engagement with people who have recently lived in encampment settings. Their perspectives and feedback could offer insight into what assistance would be most helpful both to help people leave encampments and to prevent their formation.

Implementation partners in many cities also noted high rates of substance use and sales in encampment settings. Whether people choose to live in encampment settings to facilitate their substance use or if they begin to increase their use of harmful substances after entering an encampment is not clear, however. The relationship between encampment residents and substance use must be better understood so that solutions can be better tailored to their specific needs.

Further development of outreach practices and housing assistance

Despite conducting different encampment response activities that reflect local factors and policies, cities included in this study are dedicating significant resources to responding to encampments by clearing and (if permitted by law) closing their largest encampments. In all the study cities, outreach plays a key role in their response, with both city departments and homeless services providers filling that role. Outreach workers have traditionally worked with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and tried to engage

them in services, but their strategies and the resources that they can offer may not relate well to the needs and preferences of people living in encampment settings. Research is needed to determine best practices for outreach specifically for encampment populations. Also, given the high number of people in encampment settings struggling with substance use, a stronger emphasis on connections to substance use treatment programs may be needed, as well as more effective outreach strategies, such as treatment on demand, for motivating engagement in substance use recovery or "harm reduction" mitigation of the consequences of abuse.

Cities are working to connect people living in encampments with housing assistance; however, the four study cities face a shortage of housing assistance for people leaving encampment settings. Without meaningful connections to housing assistance, outreach workers may not be able to convince people to leave an encampment. As a result of that shortage, some cities are developing or expanding low-barrier, service-rich shelters sometimes known as navigation centers as part of their efforts to respond to encampments. Efforts are needed to document this new type of emergency shelter, describe its logic model, and determine whether the existing programs are following this model. Research must then measure the outcomes of people exiting navigation centers and ultimately compare their outcomes to people placed in other types of emergency shelter or in affordable permanent housing. Housing assistance must be a key component of city responses to homeless encampments.

In all four cities, outreach workers administer assessments to enter encampment residents in the CoC coordinated entry system; however, the demand for housing assistance is high, and people in encampments may not be able to receive immediate assistance based on their prioritization. As CoCs continue to implement and refine coordinated entry to homeless assistance programs, cities and CoCs must determine how people living in encampments fit into the coordinated entry prioritization strategy. Cities and CoCs have difficult decisions to make about balancing the need for permanent housing as the solution to the homelessness of encampment residents and the need for additional shelter beds to give encampment residents an immediate place to go. Assessing that tradeoff will require cost-benefit analyses beyond the scope of the cost analysis in this study.

Cities shoulder the financial burden of encampment responses

Finally, the study provides cost estimates for the encampment response approaches of four cities. In 2019, cities spent significant amounts—between $3,393,000 and $8,557,000 annually—on encampment-related activities.[13] Those expenditures include costs related to outreach, clearance, and prevention activities, as well as emergency shelter costs and—in one city—permanent supportive housing. In all four cities, the largest funder of encampment response activities is city government.

Typically, cities are able to access very limited federal or state funding to respond to encampments because the HUD funds available for homelessness assistance through the local CoC are already dedicated to other programs or are not designated to assist people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. As a result, cities are funding many activities using their own resources. Using city funding for encampment responses may divert some funding from other, more traditional activities of city departments (e.g., trash collection, park maintenance). It also may divert city support for other types of homelessness assistance, including longer term investments in expanding permanent housing opportunities for people who experience unsheltered homelessness. To support future encampment response efforts as well as assistance for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness overall, some cities are exploring and identifying other ways to fund their activities (e.g., special assessments and taxes).

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[13] It is important to remember that this cost analysis is not a cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis but a documentation of the different types and amounts of spending by cities related to encampments.

Appendix A: Study Methodology

This appendix presents the research questions and methodology for the data collection and analysis that formed the basis for this report.

Research questions

The study's research questions address three areas of interest: understanding encampments, community responses to encampments, and costs associated with those responses.

Research Questions	Literature Review	Telephone Interviews	Site Visits
Understanding Encampments			
Factors driving the increase in unsheltered homelessness and encampments specifically?	✔	✔	
What infrastructure or state/local ordinances or policy establish or govern encampments?	✔	✔	✔
Who stays in encampments? What are common subpopulations or characteristics? Are there differences between encampments and the unsheltered population generally?	✔	✔	✔
How large are encampments? Do their characteristics vary by size?	✔	✔	
What type of social structures characterize encampments?	✔		
City Efforts to Address Encampments			
What steps are cities taking to prevent the establishment of encampments (e.g., ordinances and regulations, infrastructure, strengthening of the social safety net)?		✔	✔
How are communities responding to encampments? What are the major activities, and which stakeholders are engaged?		✔	✔
Can approaches to encampments be categorized—for example, as sanctioning, clearing, or relocating?	✔	✔	✔
How do responses to encampments relate to the broader homeless services system?	✔	✔	✔
How do responses to encampments differ across different types of communities?	✔	✔	✔
In what ways do those efforts differ from efforts to serve the unsheltered population not living in encampments?	✔	✔	✔
Costs Associated with Encampments			
What are the direct costs incurred by cities in their efforts to address encampments?			✔
How do costs differ depending on different city approaches (e.g., sanctioning, clearing, or relocating encampments)?			✔
What health and safety issues have communities encountered with people sleeping in encampments?	✔	✔	✔

Literature review

The study began with a literature review to determine what was known about encampments as of the fall of 2018 and to provide preliminary answers to the research questions, focused on understanding encampments and documenting city responses. A formal examination of the peer-reviewed literature and grey literature was augmented by nine interviews with scholars and practitioners who have knowledge of encampments. The interviewees were asked about ongoing research projects focused on the recent growth in unsheltered homelessness and encampments; the characteristics of people in encampments and the factors that lead them to congregate there; and responses of communities, including costs and effectiveness. Each interviewee was asked targeted questions about specific research projects or programs.

A synthesis of the literature review and expert interviews was published in early 2019 (Cohen, Yetvin, and Khadduri 2019). The synthesis set forth a preliminary typology of responses to encampments, with

four categories: clearance with little or no support; clearance and closure with support; tolerance; and formal sanctioning.

The literature review informed the selection of sites for the study's primary data collection and the data collection protocols.

Telephone discussions with stakeholders from nine sites

In consultation with HHS, HUD, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the research team selected nine cities to participate in telephone discussions to explore the responses to homeless encampments by those cities. The nine cities were Chicago, Illinois; Fresno, California; Houston, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; Minneapolis, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington. In selecting those cities, the research team considered factors that could affect the presence, growth, and responses to encampments: geography/climate, city population, housing market affordability, trends in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and the broader overall response to homelessness by the city.

The research team conducted 39 telephone discussions, interviewing three to six stakeholders in each city. Interviewees included representatives from public agencies, homeless services providers, law enforcement, outreach teams, and other organizations involved with the community response. The interviewers used semi-structured interview guides to elicit the information needed to answer the study's research questions, with a focus on trends in encampments, the characteristics of encampment residents, and the evolution of local approaches to responding to encampments. The interviews also focused on identifying the various organizations participating in the response by the city. Respondents were asked about the availability of cost data and the willingness of the city to participate in the next phase of the study.

The study team synthesized the results of those interviews, creating descriptions of encampments in each of the nine cities and the response strategies of each city, as well as common themes across the nine cities. That synthesis formed the basis for selecting four cities for the site visits and collection of cost data.

Site Visits and Cost Data Collection at Four Cities

In consultation with HHS and HUD, the study team selected Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington. Criteria for selection of those cities included geographic diversity, varying levels of housing affordability, a variety of approaches to encampments, and potential for findings that could be helpful for other communities across the country that are responding to encampments.

While on site in each city, two members of the study team—

- Met with fiscal staff at government and other organizations involved in responding to encampments to review their expenditures related to encampment responses. The site visitors inventoried the activities that contributed to encampment costs for each city, with each implementing partner and collected data costs associated with each activity.

- Conducted in-person interviews with key implementation partners working to address homeless encampments. Discussion topics included the drivers of unsheltered homelessness in the city; details of the response strategy and its implementation; and the way in which the strategy related to local ordinances, litigation, and public reactions to encampments.

- Observed local encampments and interviewed two people with lived experiences in encampment settings. The study team accompanied outreach workers to encampment locations, where outreach workers identified people willing to be interviewed for 15 to 20 minutes. Interviewers asked individuals a range of questions relating to their decision to stay in the encampment location,

interactions with other encampment residents, and availability and interest in services provided to encampment residents.

Analysis and reporting

The study team used the results of the interviews with nine cities and the site visits to four cities to produce five reports: this overall final report summarizing the findings of the study and four community reports, one covering each of the four cities that were the major focus of the study: Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma.[14] To produce each report, the study team reviewed the information collected through interviews and supporting documents and synthesized that information, using a common topical structure for each of the community reports. In many cases, the study team had to ask interviewees followup questions to fill in missing information. The study team then produced this summary report, synthesizing the information on the four focus cities and, in some cases, adding observations about the other five cities for which telephone interviews were conducted.

Estimating the cost of encampment responses

Each of the community reports and this final report includes a section providing estimates of the costs of city responses to encampments.

Because the cost data came from a number of different sources with varying formats and levels of detail, the study team used a combination of three different approaches to analyzing the data: (1) a budget approach, (2) a full-time equivalent (FTE) approach, and (3) an activity-based approach. Whenever possible, the analysis was based on implementation partners' budgets (or a line item in the budget) or a financial report for the encampment-related activity. If the cost data covered a different period than FY 2019 (such as calendar year 2019), then the analysis prorated or extrapolated the budget data to create an estimate for FY 2019.

In a number of cases, implementer budgets combined activities related to encampment residents and homelessness generally. In those cases, implementers were asked to estimate the share of the cost specifically relating to homeless people residing in encampments. For example, a homeless outreach team may work primarily with people in encampments but also provide services to homeless people staying elsewhere.

Alternatives to the budget approach

The financial records provided by implementation partners sometimes were not useful for the analysis because the budget for encampment response activities did not appear in specific budget line items. For example, city departments providing trash removal services for encampment residents did not have specific budgets that separated the costs of this service from other trash removal services. In those cases, the study team conducted interviews with department or organization leadership and asked them to describe all of the encampment-related activities they conduct in as much detail as possible. Based on that information, the study team then used either the FTE or activity-based costing approach to analyze the data.

FTE approach

An FTE approach was feasible when the implementation partner could report how many FTEs are used to conduct an encampment-related activity (for example, if one maintenance crew member spends one-half of his or her time cleaning encampments, then .5 FTE is dedicated to that activity). In addition to the number of FTEs, the study team gathered data on the salary and benefits of each FTE involved to calculate a total cost.

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[14] See Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington Community Encampment Reports.

Activity-based costing approach

When no reliable budget information was available or when the implementation partner could not estimate FTEs, the study team gathered details about the encampment-related activities and constructed a cost estimate. Using this activity-based costing approach required a detailed understanding of the activities being conducted by each implementation partner. Information that implementation partners were asked to provide included—

- Staff performing the activity.

- Annual FTE salary and fringe benefits of staff performing the activity.

- Staff hours needed per unit of activity (e.g., 2 hours per trash pickup at encampment).

- Time period over which activities occurred (e.g., calendar year 2019).

- Number of times the activity occurred during the time period (e.g., once a week).

- Any direct costs of conducting the activity (e.g., cost of trash bags).

Consider overhead in cost estimates

In general, overhead costs (other than fringe benefits of staff conducting the activities) were not included in the cost estimates. For many of the departments or organizations that implemented encampment activities, those activities represent a small portion of their work. For those implementation partners with a limited role in responding to encampments, the analysis was based on a ***marginal cost approach***. The assumption was that the encampment-related activities had no measurable effect on overhead costs such as accounting, human resources, equipment, or the cost of office space.

In two notable exceptions, the study team did not use a marginal cost approach. The cost of office space was included if it was used specifically to support encampment activities, such as providing storage for the belongings of encampment residents. In addition, some city contracts with implementing partners specifically allowed those partners to include overhead costs in their contracts for encampment-related work. In those instances, because the costs were directly incurred as a result of responding to encampments (by the city, if not by the implementing partner), overhead costs were included in the cost estimates.

Analyze funding source of activities for each stakeholder

In addition to analyzing the costs of encampment-related activities, the study team collected data on the funding source for each activity. That information permitted the analysis to identify which organization was bearing the costs of encampment-related activities in each city. It also was needed to ensure that costs were not being double counted by multiple stakeholders. For example, if a local nonprofit is responsible for conducting outreach to encampment residents but that activity is being funded by a city contract, the cost sometimes appeared in financial reports for both the city and the nonprofit.

Analyze costs of encampment response

To analyze costs of the encampment response for each site, the study team first prorated or extrapolated the cost data as needed to estimate costs for FY 2019. Then the team categorized the cost data by—

- Stakeholder type: police department, other city department, homeless services provider, independent authority, and others.

- Activity type: outreach and housing navigation; homeless outreach team; substance use program; medical assistance; financial assistance; encampment clearance; encampment prevention; shelter; permanent supportive housing; and other.

- Funding source: city government, federal government, in-kind donation, private, independent authority, and other.

- Cost type: labor and nonlabor.

- Funding type: cash and in-kind.

With costs standardized and organized within and across sites, the study team could compare costs across cities in this final report and report them in detail in the community reports.

## Appendix B: Approaches for Estimating Encampment Costs

This appendix offers communities a general approach for collecting and analyzing costs related to their local encampment response. This approach is based on the methodology used by the authors for estimating costs of encampments in Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma (outlined in Appendix A). This appendix provides a guide for how to conceptualize the analysis to meet the needs of your community, as well as instructions for collecting the data from different departments and organizations who are helping to respond to encampments. For example, it outlines the steps in the process for estimating the costs of encampments, outlines a series of questions to help communities clearly define the scope of their analysis, and provides tools and steps for collecting and analyzing cost data.

Process for estimating cost of encampments
Estimate the costs of homeless encampments requires several steps:

- Define the scope of the cost estimate.

- Inventory the activities involved in responding to encampments.

- List the stakeholders involved in responding to encampments and their activities.

- Gather the costs of activities from each stakeholder.

- Analyze the cost data.

Although the process is laid out in steps, it likely will involve revisiting some steps. For example, you may learn while going through the process of identifying the activities being conducted by each stakeholder that the original list of activities was incomplete or that stakeholders have been left off the list.
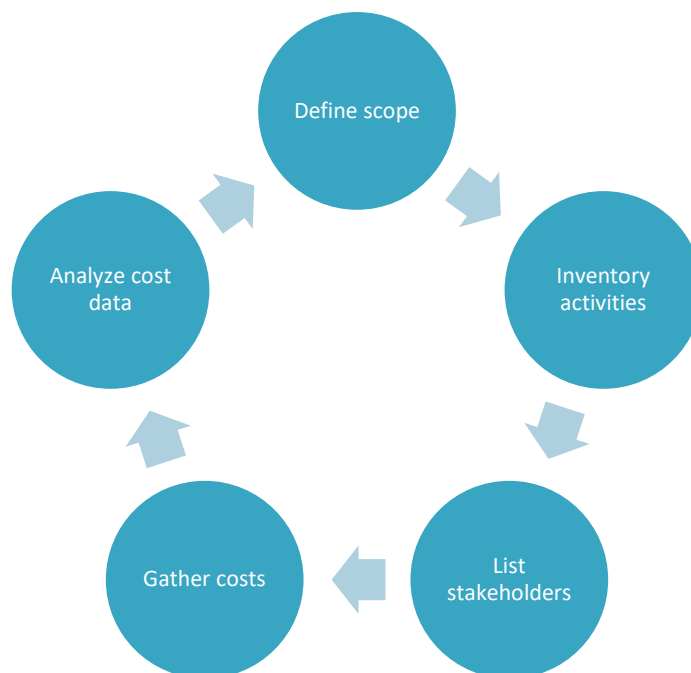
Define the purpose and scope of the cost estimate

The first step in planning a cost estimate is to delineate the purpose the estimate is intended to serve, how it will be used, and who will use it. Answering those questions will help to define the cost estimate and ensure that it serves the purposes for which it is intended.

These questions include—

- What is an encampment in your community?

- Who will use the cost estimate in your community?

- What will it be used for?

- What costs are relevant? Which should be ignored?

- What time period should costs cover?

- What geography is most relevant (e.g., within city or county boundaries? including an entire metropolitan area?)?

Those questions and their implications are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Establish a shared definition of encampment

An important component of the scope of the analysis is a clear definition of what constitutes an *encampment*. The use of the word varies from place to place. For example, in some places, it refers to even a single temporary occupied structure; in others, it refers only to groups of structures; in others still, it may include people sleeping in vehicles. The definition itself is not as important for the purposes of the analysis as that the definition is shared by all the stakeholders within the community so that the term is understood consistently.

Use the purpose of the cost estimate to define the relevant geography and funding sources

In estimating costs of encampments, it is important to clearly define the audience and the purpose for the cost estimate. This information will help determine the scope of the exercise. For example, if the cost estimate is primarily for use in determining how to most effectively use city resources, then costs counted should exclude those spent outside city limits. Some stakeholders and contracts may cover geographic areas outside the city; in those cases, the share of costs spent outside the city should not be included. Likewise, the cost data collection should focus primarily on city resources. Although understanding federal, state, and county costs and how those affect the use of city resources may be helpful, those costs are not central to the estimate.

If the cost estimate is intended to broadly capture all costs related to responding to encampments— perhaps so that costs can be compared with other homeless service approaches, such as rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing—then costs to all entities should be included.

In estimating the costs of responding to encampments, it is also important to select an appropriate time period from which to collect cost data. If the purpose of the analysis is to understand all spending on encampments over the previous 5 years, then that entire period is relevant, and cost data should be collected for that entire period. On the other hand, if the analysis is intended to provide a representative annual cost of responding to encampments, then costs from several years ago may not accurately depict the current level of response for the city. Also worth noting is that the older cost data are, the harder they may be to obtain. Cost information often is lost or is difficult to access, and people who understand and can explain the data often have moved on to other positions.

Inventory activities involved in responding to encampments

The types of activities involved in responding to encampments vary from place to place; however, on the basis of experience with encampments in several cities, the study team has outlined some typical costs of encampments in Exhibit B-1. The categories of costs involved include cleanup/sanitation and encampment prevention, services provided to sanctioned encampments, emergency responders to encampments, response coordination, social services (provided at the encampment), and other community services and supports specifically for or related to encampment residents.

Exhibit B-1. Typical costs of responding to encampments

Encampment costs	
Clean-up/sanitation/prevention	***Sanctioning through formal policies with support for residents***
• Trash removal • Hazardous waste removal • Dumpsters • Transportation (resident relocation) • Other cleanup efforts • GIS applications/technology • Encampment prevention, such as fence construction and repair • Temporary shelters erected for encampment residents	• Structure/tents • Permitting • Supportive services • Transportation • Operation/utilities • Hygiene facilities • Food
Emergency responders (to calls from encampments)	***Response coordination***
• Fire • Police • EMT • Public health officials • Park rangers	• Staff time for encampment response meetings • Developing ordinances/response to lawsuits • Declaration of public emergencies • Hotline/311/website
Social services (at the encampment)	***Other community services/supports available (specifically for or related to encampment residents)***
• Outreach • Case management • Medical (planned, not emergency) • Mental health • Substance use treatment • Housing navigation • Other social services	• Tents/sleeping pods • Information kiosks • Hotline • Storage of personal belongings • Toilets/showers • Transportation • Other services/supports

Ongoing and one-time costs of encampments

Most of the costs listed in Exhibit B-1 are ***ongoing costs*** of responding to encampments. In addition to those routine costs, which typically persist over multiple years, communities may also incur unusual or ***one-time costs*** in responding to encampments, including the following:

- Creating a low-barrier shelter specifically for encampment residents (but not operating the shelter, which is an ongoing cost).

- Passing an encampment-related ordinance.

- Implementing an emergency declaration related to encampments.

- Conducting a large-scale, one-time encampment clearance.

- Responding to a lawsuit related to encampments (unless the litigation process is lengthy, covering a period of several years, in which case it may be considered an ongoing cost).

- Designing sanctioned encampments.

The reason for distinguishing between one-time and ongoing costs is to properly account for the costs of responding to encampments. For example, if part of the purpose of the cost estimate is to project the resources needed to respond to encampments in the future, then a large, one-time cost should not be included in those projections (because it is not likely to be repeated). On the other hand, if the purpose is to understand what the full costs of responding to encampments in the city has been over the past 1 or more years, then one-time costs should be included.

Excluding costs not specific to encampments

A key challenge in estimating the costs of encampments is differentiating them from the costs of providing services to people experiencing homelessness more generally. Although the broader cost of homelessness is an important topic, this analysis will be of most use if it clearly identifies costs related to encampments. In the cost analysis, include the costs of services if they are offered to people *because they are in encampments* and not simply because they are experiencing homelessness. Similarly, if people use a service more frequently or with more intensity *because they reside in encampments*, the cost of those services should be included in the analysis.

Exhibit B-2 displays examples of cost categories for the homelessness service system and other public systems with which people experiencing homelessness may interact on a regular basis. Those costs should generally *not* be included in the cost of encampments. For example, the costs of long-established emergency shelters are attributable to homelessness, not to encampments specifically; however, if a new shelter opened in response to a recent increase in encampments in a community or if an existing shelter expanded capacity for the same reason, then those costs would be attributed to the rise of encampments and included in the cost estimate.

Exhibit B-2. Costs related to homelessness generally

Homeless service system costs: Housing intervention and supportive services *Examples of costs related to homelessness*	Costs of public systems that interact with the homeless service system *Examples of costs related to homelessness*
• Coordinated entry • Emergency shelter • Bridge/interim housing • Transitional housing • Rapid rehousing • Permanent supportive housing • Group housing • Stabilization rooms • Prevention • Case management • Linkages to other supportive/community services	*Health Care* • Mental health • Emergency room visits • Rehabilitation services • Recuperative care • Inpatient services *Criminal Justice* • Arrests • Incarceration • Other criminal justice system costs

Likewise, costs of other public systems—such as health care and criminal justice—should be included only when there is reason to believe that those living in encampments make more extensive use of those systems than do unsheltered homeless people overall.

Even with that distinction in mind, separating the costs of homelessness and the costs of encampments is likely to be challenging. Stakeholders may serve both encampment residents and people experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness, and their budgets or financial reports may not indicate the specific population being served. Helping those stakeholders understand that distinction—and to estimate as closely as possible how much of their work is specific to assisting people living in encampment settings—will be important.

Exhibit B-3 presents a template for inventorying the activities involved in responding to encampments. As a first step, you should complete the table, identifying the stakeholders involved in each encampment activity (enter "N/A" if the activity is not part of the city response to encampments), and list a primary contact for each stakeholder. The table should be periodically revised during the cost data collection process to update it with any additional information collected.

Exhibit B-3: Inventory of ongoing activities

Activity	Stakeholders Involved in Activity *(List all. Indicate N/A if the activity is not part of your city's response to encampments)*	Primary Contact for Each Stakeholder
Emergency response to encampments		
Fire		
Law enforcement		
Emergency medical (EMT)		
Public health incidents		
Other (specify)		
Cleanup/sanitation/prevention		
Trash removal		
Hazardous waste removal		
Dumpsters		
Property storage		
Transportation (for resident relocation)		
GIS applications/technology		
Other cleanup efforts (specify)		
Encampment prevention		
Temporary shelters erected for encampment residents (e.g., low-barrier shelters)		
Social services (provided at encampments)		
Outreach		
Medical services (planned, not emergency)		
Mental health services		
Substance use treatment		
Housing navigation		
Case management		
Crisis response		
Other (specify)		
Other community services/supports available		
Storage of personal belongings		
Information kiosks		
Toilets/showers		
Tents/sleeping pods		
Transportation from encampment to other services		
Other available support (specify)		
Encampment coordination		
Park/public land management		
Staff time for task force meetings		
Developing ordinances/response to lawsuits		
Hotline/311		
Other (specify)		

List the stakeholders involved in your city's response to encampments

Responding to encampments involves a variety of stakeholders, including a number of city agencies, homeless services providers, and other community organizations. A thorough estimate of the costs involved in responding to encampments requires a comprehensive list of the stakeholders active in your community. Those stakeholders may include the following:

- *City officials and departments*, which could include a mayor's office liaison, the fire department, police department, neighborhood services, environmental services, public works, parks department, and others

  - Mayor's office liaison

  - Fire department

  - Police department

  - Human services department

  - Sanitation department

  - Neighborhood services

  - Environmental services

  - Public works

  - Parks and recreation department

- *Other government or quasi-governmental agencies* within the scope of your cost estimate, such as county officials or departments, public utilities, and the state Department of Transportation

- *Nonprofit agencies,* such as homeless services providers or general social service organizations

- The local *Continuum of Care (CoC)*

- *Businesses or business associations*

- *Neighborhood or resident groups*

- *Faith-based groups,* such as churches and faith-based coalitions

- *Other*

Exhibit B-4 presents a template for surveying the stakeholders involved in responding to encampments. This table will assist in understanding the relevant stakeholder activities. Note that there is some overlap between Exhibits B-3 and B-4. Exhibit B-3 should be used as a starting point for identifying which stakeholders are involved in which activities. The survey in Exhibit B-4 should be distributed to each stakeholder identified previously to verify the activities in which each is involved. This process will

ensure that you have a complete list of activities and stakeholders involved in your city's response to encampments.

Exhibit B-4: Survey of stakeholders

Stakeholder Name and Contact Information:	
Activity	**Is Your Organization Involved in the Activity?** *(Y/N)*
Emergency responses	
Fire	
Law enforcement	
Emergency medical	
Public health incidents	
Other types of crisis (please specify)	
Cleanup/sanitation/prevention	
Trash removal	
Hazardous waste removal	
Dumpsters—providing and emptying	
Property storage	
Transportation (for resident relocation)	
GIS applications/technology	
Other cleanup efforts (specify)	
Encampment prevention	
Temporary shelters erected for encampment residents (e.g., low-barrier shelters)	
Social services (provided at encampments)	
Outreach	
Medical services (planned, not emergency)	
Mental health services	
Substance use treatment	
Case management	
Housing navigation support	
Crisis response	
Other (specify)	
Other community services/supports available	
Lockers/day storage	
Information kiosks	
Toilets/showers	
Tents/sleeping pods	
Transportation from encampment to other services	
Other available support (specify)	
Encampment coordination	
Park/public land management	
Staff time for task force meetings	
Hotline/311	
Other (specify)	

Gather costs of activities from each stakeholder

Unless your city's response to encampments is highly centralized and cost information is well documented and organized, it is likely that you will need to gather the costs of activities related to encampments from each stakeholder. There are three approaches to collect this data depending on the type of cost information available: (1) a budget approach, (2) a full-time equivalent (FTE) approach, or (3) an activity-based costing approach. The budget approach is preferable; the FTE approach and the activity-based costing approach are alternatives to this approach if budget or financial information is not available. This section describes each of these approaches.

Budget approach

Some stakeholders will have a budget (or a line item in the budget) or a financial report for the encampment-related activities in which they are involved. In those cases, this information is typically the best source for understanding the costs of their activities. Whether or not a stakeholder has readily available financial information will most likely depend on how focused the overall organization is on encampments. For example, a police department may have a homeless outreach team that dedicates a significant share of its efforts to those living in encampments. A budget or financial report that provides the needed cost information is likely available for the team.

On the other hand, a public works department that collects trash as needed from encampments most likely does not have a specialized team or resources specifically for encampments. One of the other cost data collection and analysis approaches is most likely needed.

Exhibits B-5 and B-6 provide a template for the budget approach to gathering cost data. Each stakeholder should have a separate spreadsheet that includes the name of the stakeholder, the name and contact information of the person providing the cost information, the source of the information (e.g., FY 2018 budget), and the dates covered by the cost information recorded. The budget or financial report may include both staff costs and the cost of materials in a single line item, in which case all costs should be reported using the template in Exhibit B-5. If the costs of materials are reported separately, then use Exhibit B-6 to capture those costs.

Using the financial information available, fill out the table, including a description of the activity, the total encampment-related spending, and the time period over which the spending occurred. Use the "total cost" column to make any needed adjustments to project or interpolate costs to cover the entire time period of the analysis. For example, if the public utility has only costs available for the past 6 months, then a reasonable estimate of costs for the entire year would probably be double that amount. As discussed above, be sure to identify during interviews whether the spending reported is typical and ongoing or whether it is a one-time or unusual cost. Any projections for future spending or necessary assumptions about past spending should be based on expenditures considered typical and ongoing.

The funding source column is needed to ensure that costs are not being double counted. For example, if a local nonprofit is responsible for outreach to residents of encampments but that activity is being funded with a contract with the city, the cost may appear in the financial reports of both the city's and the nonprofit's financial reports. It is important to count each cost only once.

The "share of activity relating to homeless residing in encampments" column is important when financial information includes other activities as well. For example, a homeless outreach team may primarily work with people in encampments but also provide services to homeless people residing elsewhere. In those cases, ask the point of contact to provide an estimate of the share of the work that is specifically related to homeless encampments.

An example entry for the budget approach is in italics in the first line of each exhibit.

Exhibit B-5: Budget Approach to Cost Data—Labor Costs

Name of Program/Stakeholder:

Program Point of Contact (Name, Phone, Email):

Source of Data (e.g., FY 2018 Budget):

Date of Costs (e.g., FY 2018):

Labor Costs

Activity	Detailed Description of Activity	Total Encampment-Related Budget or Spending	Time Period Over Which Activities Occurred	Total Cost, Date (e.g., 2018)	Funding Source(s)	Percentage of Activity Related to Homeless Residing in Encampments	Notes
Clearing encampments	*Identifying, reporting, coordinating encampment response on public utility property*	*$10,000*	*2018*	*$10,000*	*Public utility*	*100%*	
Total				**$10,000**			

Exhibit B-6: Budget Approach to Cost Data—Cost of Materials
  Cost of Materials

Item	Total Expenditures	Total Cost, Date	Funding Source(s)	Notes
Fencing	$8,000	$ 8,000	*Public utility*	
Totals		**$8,000**		

Alternatives to the budget approach

For stakeholders focused primarily on work unrelated to encampments, financial records such as budgets or expenditures may not be particularly informative, unless the budget for activities related to encampments appear in specific line items. As noted above, a public works department's budget is unlikely to specify costs of trash collection from encampments. In these cases, interviews with department leadership and staff members may provide the most accurate information on encampment-related costs. This information will be used with the FTE or activity-based costing approach.

FTE approach

When collecting cost data for analysis using the FTE approach or the activity-based costing approach, ask stakeholders to describe all of the encampment-related activities they conduct in as much detail as possible.

The FTE approach should be used when the stakeholder knows how many FTEs are used to conduct encampment-related activities. For example, if one maintenance crew member spends half of his or her time cleaning encampments, then there are .5 FTEs dedicated to that activity. In addition to the number of FTEs, you will need to gather data on the salary and benefits of the FTEs involved. To get the total cost annual of each activity, multiply the number of FTEs by the hourly wages and benefits by 2,080 (the number of working hours in a year, assuming that activities occurred over an entire year).

Exhibit B-7 provides a template for collecting FTE-based cost data. An example entry for the FTE approach is in italics in the first line of the exhibit.

Exhibit B-7: FTE Approach to Cost Data – Labor Costs
  Name of Program/Stakeholder:

  Program Point of Contact (Name, Phone, Email):

  Date of Costs (e.g., FY 2018):

Labor Costs

Activity	Detailed Description of Activity	# FTEs	Staff Performing Activity (Name/Initials/ Staff Title)	Hourly Salary and Fringe Benefits	Time Period Over Which Activities Occurred (in years)	Total Cost, Date (# FTEs*hrly cost*time period)*2080	Funding Source(s)	Share of Activity Related Encampments	Notes
Clearing encampments	*Identifying, reporting, coordinating encampment response on public utility property*	*0.1*	*Maintenance crews*	*$ 60*	*1*	*$12,480*	*Public utility*	*100%*	
Totals						**$12,480**			

Activity-based costing approach

Using the activity-based costing approach requires a very detailed understanding of the activities being conducted by each stakeholder. In-depth interviews with each stakeholder are necessary to gather data that are as accurate as possible. This approach should be used when there is no reliable budget or other financial information available, and when the stakeholder cannot estimate the share of an FTE needed to conduct activities. As suggested by the name, this approach involves gathering details about the activities being conducted and building up a cost estimate based on those details.

Begin by asking stakeholders to describe all of the encampment-related activities they conduct in as much detail as possible. Ask stakeholders to be specific, and ask probing questions to be sure the information they report covers all of the following information:

Then, for each activity (e.g., response to encampment), ask them to estimate how often the activity occurs and what the cost is.

For example:

- Any direct costs (e.g., trash bags)

- Units of activity provided per period (e.g., two trash collections)

- Period (e.g., weekly, monthly) (e.g., two emergency responses per week)

- Staff hours needed per unit of activity (e.g., 2 hours per trash collection)

- Staff performing activity (names or initials)

- Annual FTE salary and fringe benefits of staff performing activity

- Time period over which activities occurred (e.g., calendar year 2018)

Exhibits B-8 and B-9 provide a template for collecting FTE-based cost data (labor cost in Exhibit B-8; cost of materials in Exhibit B-9). An example entry for the activity-based costing approach is in italics in the first line of the exhibits.

Exhibit B-8: Activity-Based Costing Approach to Cost Data—Labor Costs

Labor Costs

Activity	Detailed Description of Activity	Period (e.g., weekly, monthly)	Units of Activity Provided per Period	Staff Hours Needed per Unit of Activity	Staff Performing Activity (Name/ Initials/ Staff Title)	Hourly Salary and Fringe Benefits	Time Period Over Which Activities Occurred	Total Hours (units x hrs/unit x # periods in year)	Total Cost (total hours x hrly costs)	Funding Source(s)	Share of Activity Related to Homeless Residing in Encampments	Notes
Clearing encampments	Identifying, reporting, coordinating encampment response on public utility property	Monthly	1	10	Maintenance crews	$ 60	One year	120	$7,200	Public utility	100%	
Total									$7,200			

Exhibit B-9: Activity-Based Costing Approach to Cost Data—Cost of Materials

Cost of Materials

Item	Number of Items Purchased Over the Period	Cost per Item	Period (e.g., per month, per week)	Time Period Over Which Expenditures Occurred	Total Cost, Date	Funding Source(s)	Notes
Fencing	1,000 feet of fencing	$8/foot	Per year	2018	$ 8,000	Public utility	
Total					$8,000		

Analyze costs

With cost data collected, the final steps are to analyze the costs of your encampment response. This activity primarily involves organizing, categorizing the cost information, and determining how to present it based on the purpose of the analysis. Analysis involves the following steps:

- *Ensure that costs cover a consistent period of time.* Although data that cover an identical time period are preferable, stakeholders may have provided data from varying time periods. If time periods vary, cost data must be prorated or extrapolated as needed to estimate costs for the selected time period.

- *Identify useful dimensions of analysis.* The methods used to categorize and present the data will depend on the questions the analysis is intended to answer. If the question is only about the total amount that stakeholders in the city spent during the selected period, then analysis simply involves adding up costs from each of the stakeholders. More likely, you will also want to answer questions about how much was spent on each type of activity, who the funders were, and how much was spent by each stakeholder or type of stakeholder within the city, among other questions.

- *Categorize costs appropriately to answer the questions the analysis is intended to address.* Sorting costs into the appropriate category is more art than science and can be the most challenging aspect of the analysis. Categories should be defined carefully but should also be flexible enough to encapsulate multiple activities and stakeholders. A very fine-grained analysis—such as one that reports on 15 or more categories of activities—can overwhelm consumers of the information with too much detail to be absorbed. At least for an initial analysis, information should be aggregated into no more than about 10 categories.

As noted above, you may want to categorize costs in a number of different ways:

- Costs by type of implementer (e.g., police department, other city department, homeless services provider, independent authority, other).

- Costs by activity (e.g., outreach and housing navigation; homeless outreach team; substance use program; medical assistance; financial assistance; encampment clearance; encampment prevention; shelter; permanent supportive housing; other).

- Costs by funding source (e.g., city government, federal government, in-kind donation, private, independent authority, other).

- Costs by type (e.g., labor and nonlabor).

- Funding by type (e.g., cash and in-kind).

With costs organized into categories, the information can be presented to answer the questions of interest. Bar charts, pie charts, and other graphical displays can present the information in ways that consumers can easily grasp and absorb. Presentations can include total costs, costs by activity type, costs by implementing partner, funding sources for costs, and types of costs.

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