



19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively, based on (USICH) 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments



Background

On May 1, 2024, the Imperial Valley Continuum of Care Council (IVCCC) adopted the 7 Principles for Addressing Encampments by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Recognizing homelessness is a complex social problem, communities continue to build political and public will and mobilize the resources necessary to providing housing and services to end homelessness. Addressing encampments and ending unsheltered homelessness will require a system-wide, coordinated effort to promote healthy and safe communities where all can live in dignity. Effective practices have emerged from communities that successfully address unsheltered homelessness and move people from encampments into housing and support. Based on these efforts, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness' [7 Principles for Addressing Encampments](#) provides best practice guidance to support communities as we develop and implement a comprehensive response to encampments.

Updated Guidance

USICH published the [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) as an update and expansion of the “7 Principles for Addressing Encampments”. These strategies focus on 6 main categories based on equity, collaboration, data and evidence, crisis response, housing and support, and prevention. The 19 Strategies are:

- **Strategy 1: Engage Encampment Residents in Efforts to Develop Solutions**
Identify an encampment resident spokesperson to facilitate communication between encampment residents and public response teams. Foster resident discussion and transparent engagement. Ensure information is accessible to those with literacy and/or language barriers and build relationships that demonstrate concern for the welfare of people living in encampments.
- **Strategy 2: Address Unique Needs of People With Chronic and Acute Health Conditions**
Work with outreach and housing teams with health components to evaluate encampment residents' wellbeing. Create a comprehensive community response to address the health needs of encampment residents. Meet individuals at encampments to assess and provide referrals for linkage to appropriate services.
- **Strategy 3: encampment Cross-Agency, Multi-Sector Response**
Identify key organizations and decision makers and establish communications strategy for engaging with external stakeholders. Align protocols to address gaps in the multi-sector response. Implement a “housing command center” approach that responds to homelessness like a natural disaster and outline financial and physical resources needed, and budget to plan accordingly.
- **Strategy 4: Empower Outreach Teams and Health Providers to Lead the Effort**
Identify a lead point of contact for the encampment, such as an outreach worker. Ensure cross-team coordination and information-sharing to prevent duplication of efforts. Provide teams with direct access to place people in shelters, treatment, and housing. Ensure access



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to outreach workers who can address language and cultural barriers. Decide if, when, and how law enforcement will be involved.

- **Strategy 5: Prioritize Closure Based on Health and Safety Factors**
Define “encampment” for clarity in decision-making and maintain an updated encampment map. Create a protocol to define and address an encampment considered imminently at risk. Review and examine local ordinances and laws. Adopt protocols to protect data and privacy of encampments and their residents. Evaluate health and safety of people living in encampments, including environmental health and physical safety factors.
- **Strategy 6: Engage Neighboring Residents and Businesses**
Educate the community about homelessness and encampments. Engage with nearby residents and businesses to learn about their needs and relationships with the encampments, share ways they can help, and inform on plans to address encampments.
- **Strategy 7: Collect and Share Qualitative and Quantitative Data**
Assess and record individual needs and develop a by-name list of encampment residents. Create a coordinated map of encampments to identify coverage and gaps. Evaluate effectiveness of hardware equipment and software systems.
- **Strategy 8: Track Shelter and Housing Availability**
Create a centralized database of bed and unit availability and measure real-time. Track the type of interventions needed and known barriers to housing. Equip outreach workers and housing navigators with mobile devices to access the centralized database.
- **Strategy 9: Track Status of People Housed and Yet to Be Housed**
Work with appropriate systems to track progress on housing placements, produce daily and weekly progress reports, and to stay connected with people who move between encampments.
- **Strategy 10: Address Basic Needs and Provide Health Care**
Deploy outreach, street medicine, mobile medical and veterinary teams to encampments. Ensure access to healthy food and preparation materials, accessibility to basic hygiene, and opioid-reversal medication.
- **Strategy 11: Conduct Comprehensive, Coordinated, and Ongoing Housing-Focused Outreach**
Conduct outreach regularly and consistently. Provide outreach and referral services that are person-centered, trauma-informed, voluntary, housing-focused, and “low-barrier”. Train staff and volunteers on psychological first aid, outreach and engagement, motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed practices. Ensure outreach teams are integrated with the larger homelessness system of care and Coordinated Entry process.
- **Strategy 12: Provide Storage**
Provide storage of personal belongings for an amount of time that aligns to the typical waiting time to get placed into permanent housing. Label and photograph belongings, maintain records of owner and case manager. Develop a storage protocol where encampment residents are aware of requirements to access their belongings and set expectations on what can and cannot be stored.



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- **Strategy 13: Ensure Access to Housing and Services**
Discuss housing and service options with encampment residents. Determine funding sources and collaborate with agencies responsible for these to connect with Coordinated Entry. Minimize requirements that create barriers and coordinate transportation from encampments to housing and services. Partner with local pet shelters for temporary pet placement when shelters cannot accommodate pets.
- **Strategy 14: Ensure Interim Strategies Promote Dignity, Respect, and Pathways to Permanent Housing**
Provide safe and sanitary conditions. Provide adequate on-site services to connect people to supportive services. Train staff and protect privacy to ensure services are person-centered, trauma-informed, and based on harm reduction strategies. Engage people living in encampments to ensure personal choice and voluntary services
- **Strategy 15: Develop Pathways to Permanent Housing and Support**
Coordinate closely with the Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System, public housing authorities, and non-profit housing owners to ensure a variety of low-barrier housing options. Coordinate access to public and private affordable housing and link to basic start-up services for people moving into permanent housing. Develop and coordinate local landlord education, engagement, and incentive programs to remove barriers.
- **Strategy 16: Ensure Encampments Are Closed Humanely**
Create timelines for planning, outreach, engagement, notice, closure and site restoration. Ensure presence of health providers and support workers to address potential traumatic responses during encampment closure, ensuring encampment residents are aware workers are not part of the closure.
- **Strategy 17: Expand Affordable Housing**
Create an active inventory of all affordable housing units in your community, including new units in the development pipeline, existing units that may become available, and loss of units. Develop realistic data-supported projections of the number of affordable and supportive housing units your community needs. Leverage existing federally funded housing programs and address barriers to ensure access for people transitioning out of homelessness.
- **Strategy 18: Interrupt Pipelines Into Homelessness**
Use administrative data to assess the degree to which people experiencing homelessness are currently interacting with these systems and to identify opportunities for intervention. Assess and strengthen discharge planning protocols. Engage state and local corrections agencies, child welfare agencies, hospitals, and other public systems that may serve people experiencing homelessness.
- **Strategy 19: Build and Strengthen Safety Nets**
Create a homelessness prevention committee or working group that includes people who have experienced homelessness and a wide range of federal, state, local, and private programs that may serve low-income households broadly. Map out existing prevention resources and assess the demographics, characteristics, and location of people at risk of or entering the homelessness response system. Take proactive steps to address disparities.