

Impact of Encampment Sweeps on People Experiencing Homelessness

December 2022

The [full issue brief](#) describes the impact of sweeps on encampment residents and local communities, provides recommendations for more constructively responding to unsheltered homelessness, and offers additional resources that demonstrate the harms of forced evictions in unsheltered settings.

Factors that Drive Encampments

- Not every community has a full-time shelter, it may not have beds available, it may have restrictive rules and other barriers that prohibit many from entering, or it may have banned others for prior rule violations.
- While some shelters are well-run and fully resourced, others can be unsafe.
- People experiencing homelessness may have no choice but to live in an encampment, or the encampment may offer advantages that area shelters do not.

Sweeps Damage Health, Well-being, and Connections to Care

- Destroy items needed for survival
- Cause trauma and worsen mental health conditions
- Destroy life-saving medications and medical equipment
- Sever connections to care
- Undermine trust in service providers

Sweeps Compromise Personal Safety and Civic Trust

- Increase arrests and assaults of residents
- Contribute to drug overdoses
- Push residents into more dangerous, isolated environments
- Cause widespread fear
- Increase hostile interactions with the police
- Disproportionately impact BIPOC groups and people with disabilities
- Violate rights
- Contribute to stigma

Sweeps Undermine Paths to Housing and Financial Stability

- Destroy vital records
- Prevent gainful employment
- Create criminal records
- Jeopardize housing opportunities
- Sever connections with community
- Damage hope

Sweeps Create Unnecessary Costs for Local Communities

- Cost millions of dollars
- Divert money from solutions such as housing
- Increase incarceration costs
- Undermine population health goals

Recommendations: H.E.L.P.S.

Rather than sweep encampments, local jurisdictions should implement strategies that focus on constructive solutions to end homelessness using a H.E.L.P.S. framework:

<p>H</p>	<p>House People: Housing is the solution to homelessness. Without it, forcibly displaced people still require shelter from the elements, and will only improvise new encampments to meet basic human needs. Officials should reallocate funds previously used for sweeps to low-income affordable and/or supportive housing options for encampment residents. Preserve personal autonomy and decision-making and do not force encampment residents into shelters.</p> <p>Importantly, shelters are <u>not</u> housing.</p>
<p>E</p>	<p>Earn Trust: Officials should involve encampment residents in all decisions that affect their safety and well-being, and engage them in inclusive community spaces free of stigma and fear. Communities should prioritize housing and demonstrate how they are meeting community needs. Providers can advocate against sweeps, and develop safety and continuity of care plans with their clients so if there is a sweep, they have a path back to treatment and a trusting relationship.</p>
<p>L</p>	<p>Limit Police: Law enforcement should not be used to clear encampments, and homelessness should not be criminalized. Minor offenses should not be used as a reason to remove someone from their residence. Law enforcement should partner with residents (and service providers, if appropriate) on conflict resolution practices and receive training on trauma-informed approaches. Take steps to use mobile crisis teams before resorting to police involvement and use 988 for mental health emergencies instead of 911.</p>
<p>P</p>	<p>Prevent Sweeps: Stop encampment sweeps because they create severe harm, are counterproductive, and victimize vulnerable people who are trying to survive. Do not remove residents' property. These actions disrupt connections to care, compromise safety and civic trust, undermine paths to independence, and create unnecessary costs for local communities.</p> <p>Sweeps do not end homelessness.</p>
<p>S</p>	<p>Support Service Interventions: Ensure health care and other services providers are able to maintain access and deliver care in encampments. Adopt a street medicine approach to meet people where they are and engage them in care. Do not ask them to participate in forcible relocations, or mandate they engage in treatment (or other services) as a condition of shelter/housing. Provide encampments with public restrooms, mobile showers, period products, handwashing stations, pest control, trash cans, and regular municipal trash pick-up to maintain a healthy environment. Provide access to drinking water and allow food distribution. Providers can keep copies of vital information such as birth certificates, identification documents, and Social Security cards in patient records so copies are available in case they are destroyed.</p>