

SACRAMENTO COUNTY ENCAMPMENT TEAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Encampment Team?

The Encampment Team (ET) is a new County initiative to reduce the number of people living unsheltered in encampments in the unincorporated area of the County.

In the first phase beginning in January 2020, a multidisciplinary County outreach team will employ a comprehensive approach to engage individuals in the selected encampment in services that address immediate health and safety needs and facilitate the transition out of unsheltered homelessness to temporary shelter or permanent housing.

The initiative is also intended to coordinate County departments to reduce the impacts of encampments on surrounding neighborhoods and, when possible, return the public space to its intended purpose.

County staff is working with Homebase, a national technical assistance provider who has worked in other communities on encampment resolution, and Sacramento Steps Forward on planning, data collection, and evaluation in the first phase.

What are the goals of a scaled-up Encampment Team?

- Assist as many people as possible by connecting them to shelter, services and housing;
- Coordinate County outreach services to make more successful placements into shelter/permanent housing and to better connect individuals to necessary services and supports, including health and behavioral healthcare;
- Continuously improve services and services delivery to build trust, change culture on streets to engage in services, and reduce large long-term encampments; and
- Address encampments for the benefit of those residing there as well as nearby businesses and/or neighborhoods.

How was the first site selected and how will future sites be prioritized?

ET staff consulted with County departments and others to select an encampment located in the unincorporated County considering several factors, including, the number of individuals estimated at the site; the encampment's longevity; associated health, safety, and fire risks; and impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. We expect to learn from our first phase and will refine site prioritization going forward based on that experience.

Who is on the outreach team? Who else is involved?

ET Outreach is a dedicated team comprised of

- Department of Health Services (DHS) Staff Coordinator;
- Sacramento Self-Help Housing outreach navigator; and
- DHS Senior Mental Health Counselor.

ET Outreach will collaborate closely with encampment residents, neighbors, and property owners. It will also coordinate closely other County departments to connect people living in encampments to services and housing and then to close and secure the encampment, when possible.

The initiative will also receive ongoing support from County Departments, including

- Director of Homeless Initiatives,
- Department of Human Assistance,
- Department of Health Services,
- Waste Management,
- Sheriff's Department, and
- Regional Parks.

What services will be provided to persons? How is this approach different?

The ET approach is different from past efforts because it leads with intensive and persistent outreach and engagement to ensure people are supported in transitioning to shelter and housing. County departments will also coordinate more closely to support transition and encampment resolution.

ET Outreach will engage each individual to understand their immediate and longer term needs and to develop an individualized plan to identify a practical and acceptable pathway to shelter or permanent housing. Onsite services may include:

- Support with connecting to and entering shelter or permanent housing;
- Enrollment in public benefits;
- Urgent medical and psychiatric care;
- Referrals for substance use disorder treatment;
- Referrals for mental health care;
- COVID-19 education; and
- Family and community re-engagement.

ET Outreach will also encourage safe sleeping practices promoting adequate distancing, use of PPE, reduction of excess items, garbage, flammable material, and unsanitary objects.

Recognizing the trauma people living unsheltered experience on a daily basis, trauma-informed culturally relevant and gender specific services will be delivered meeting individuals where they are, using evidence-based practices.

Is there enough shelter or permanent housing?

To be successful, it is essential that there be adequate shelter opportunities in a variety of settings. Shelter options will include congregate shelter, individual units, and small home settings.

While a direct exit to permanent housing is difficult, the ET anticipates that this will be possible in some situations. Flexible one-time problem solving funds will be used in some cases.

Will the encampment be closed?

It will not always be possible to completely close an encampment and it is not the intent that individuals simply move from one place to another. The intent is to reduce the number of encampments and prevent encampments from re-forming through sustained monitoring by County departments, potential physical changes to the site, and community engagement.

What is the County doing to address encampments in general?

During the pandemic, the County's COVID-19 homelessness response team has provided material support to persons living unsheltered including sanitation and handwashing stations, water and some food delivery, trash pick-up, and medical testing. The response has also included transitioning over 1,100 persons to preventative quarantine units (for highly vulnerable) and medical isolation units (for persons testing positive) since April 2020. Work continues with participants to provide re-housing assistance into permanent housing.

To address unsanitary conditions, proactive trash management is occurring around sanitation stations and additional trash services are being implemented in the first quarter of 2021.