

Encampment Services Team

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



What are encampments?

Homeless encampments take a variety of forms, including groups living under freeway overpasses, sleeping in parks, or living on sidewalks. Encampments include those living with nothing more than sleeping mats, within makeshift cardboard configurations, or in tents.

An encampment is not:

- Gatherings of individuals during the day that have not set up an abode
- Individual(s) that sleep at a location but have not set up living quarters and take their belongings when they leave
- Moveable belongings such as a shopping cart or stroller
- Panhandlers (please note that not all panhandlers are experiencing homelessness)
- General trash left on public space

What is the Encampment Services Team (EST) and who is on this team?

The EST is a collaborative, inter-agency, multidisciplinary outreach team that engages individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness where they are to develop trust, address immediate needs, and provide supportive linkages to interim shelter or permanent housing. The EST will primarily act as a “front door” to many needed behavioral health services, including mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment, as well as benefits enrollment, support with acquiring required documentation for shelter and housing placements, referrals to healthcare providers, and connections to other basic needs like water and sanitation services.

The EST staff directly working in encampments include:

- Mental Health Counselors
- Behavioral Health Peer Specialists
- Contracted Outreach Navigators

The team will also receive ongoing support from and will collaborate where appropriate with other County departments including the Office of Homeless Initiatives (OHI), Waste Management (DWMR), and contracted water and sanitation service providers.

What is the goal of the EST?

Through an outreach approach that emphasizes the importance of building trust and rapport with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the EST aims to:

- Connect individuals to shelter, housing and supportive services and
- Support the County’s broader efforts to reduce the health, sanitation, and safety issues associated with living unsheltered that affects all Sacramento residents.

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

The EST approach is different from past efforts because it leads with intensive and sustained outreach and engagement to ensure people are supported in transitioning to shelter and housing.

EST outreach will engage each individual where they currently reside 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, but are not limited to:

- Support with connecting to and entering shelter or permanent housing;
- Enrollment in public benefits (CalFresh, CalWorks, etc.);
- Health screenings, preventative vaccinations and urgent medical care;
- Referrals to CalAim or other healthcare plans and providers;
- Referrals for substance use treatment services;
- Referrals to mental health providers and services;
- Supporting the coordination of water delivery and sanitation services

It is important to note that the EST is **not** designed for crisis response. The County has other outreach teams and partners that specifically respond to crises and emergency situations.

How will sites be prioritized?

Encampments located in the unincorporated County are prioritized considering several factors, including: the size of the encampment (including the estimated number of occupants and the number of structures); the percentage of highly vulnerable individuals residing in the encampment; the encampment's longevity; and any associated public health, safety or sanitation issues that impact all Sacramento residents, regardless of housed status.

Will encampments be closed?

The intent of the broader County encampment coordination effort is to reduce the number of encampments through sustained monitoring by County departments, potential physical changes to the site, and ongoing engagement. The County understands the community's frustration with the return of encampments; however, the County is working within the legal constraints that require adequate notice and due process prior to resolving encampments. In addition, enforcing public space usage through citations and enforcement has proven to be both ineffective and to increase peoples' barriers to employment and housing, thereby exacerbating the problem. The key to supporting people on a pathway out of homelessness is through building a **strong and trusting relationship** over time.

To successfully reduce the size of encampments in the long-run, it is essential that the County also continues to prioritize investments in a variety of interim shelter and permanent housing opportunities that meet the unique needs of individuals and families.

If there are services and shelter available, why do some people refuse them?

While everyone is different and reasons for rejecting shelter vary, it is not uncommon for some people to reject services. People can decline offers of housing and shelter for a number of reasons, and mental health can play a role in some instances. Outreach workers cannot force people to accept shelter or housing, however, they have many tools to help motivate and encourage people to move, the most important of which is **building a strong and trusting relationship**. Individuals may choose to not go into shelter for a number of reasons including:

- Unwillingness/inability to go to shelter (reasons for this can range from previous bad experience, desire to live outdoors, perception of shelter as being a dirty place, no pet policies in shelters or homes, lack of reliable transportation, etc.)
- Current encampment location provides protection from natural elements
- Encampment provides a sense of community and safety
- Individual(s) feel a connection to the surrounding neighborhood
- Mental health condition may hinder them from accepting services

