

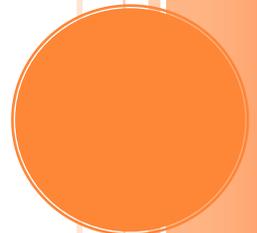
# POLICY BRIEF:

## *Outreach/Engagement- Encampments/Street Homeless*

There has been a substantial increase in the number of homeless encampments and homeless persons living on the streets of Los Angeles County. Based on the last homeless count conducted by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority in January 2015, the total number of street homeless in the County, excluding the Cities of Glendale, Long Beach, and Pasadena, is 28,948. Of the 28,948 living on the streets, over 9,000 are believed to be living in homeless encampments along river beds, freeway overpasses, and other hidden locations around the County.

There are multiple government and community-based agencies that conduct outreach and engagement to homeless people on the streets and in encampments with the objective of connecting the homeless people they encounter to supportive services, shelter, and/or housing. These multiple outreach and engagement efforts are not currently coordinated to form an effective, countywide system.

10/15/2015



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County departments, including the Departments of Health Services (DHS), Mental Health (DMH), Public Health (DPH), Public Social Services (DPSS), Probation, and Sheriff, as well as community-based organizations, and some cities in Los Angeles County, including the City of Los Angeles, have resources and services vital to helping homeless individuals move off the street and regain their health and residential stability. Each of these departments, agencies, and cities currently offer important services that have contributed to thousands of people recovering from homelessness. There are many success stories of departments and agencies working together to help homeless individuals receive the case management, supportive services, and shelter they need as they transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

Despite all of the government and community outreach efforts, the current resources and level of coordination are insufficient to achieve the desired result of reducing the number of people living on the streets in Los Angeles County. The challenge is to move from a collection of programs built on top of one another over the last 30 years to a countywide street engagement strategy capable of systematically addressing the needs of street-based residents on a regional basis.

Historically, government engagement with unsheltered county residents has swung dramatically between two extremes – heavy enforcement with little tolerance for the needs of people living on the street to little enforcement where encampments proliferate. At either extreme, not enough has been done to help people get off the street, into services, and obtain a form of housing that meets the person where they are with what they are ready for, e.g., permanent housing, bridge housing, or shelter.

Recently, the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a statement of interest arguing that making it a crime for people who are homeless to sleep in public places, when there is insufficient shelter space in a city, unconstitutionally punishes them for being homeless. The statement of interest was filed in federal district court in Idaho in *Bell v. City of Boise et al.*, a case brought by homeless plaintiffs who were convicted under Boise ordinances criminalizing sleeping or camping in public.

In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has designated two points of the 2015 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for Continuum of Care (CoC) that demonstrate implementation of specific strategies that

prevent criminalization of homelessness. If these types of strategies are not demonstrated in a NOFA application, the application stands to receive a reduced award. This signals that HUD considers this to be an issue of national importance.

In this regard, there are four ordinances in the City of Los Angeles that have been the subject of recent litigation or controversy:

- L.A. Municipal Code Section 56.11 which seeks to regulate property that can be stored on the street.
- L.A. Municipal Code Section 41.18(d) which prohibited people from sleeping on the street and resulted in a litigated agreement that this Section will not be enforced during the hours of 9 pm to 6 am.
- L.A. Municipal Code Section 63.44 which prohibited homeless people from sleeping in City parks.
- L.A. Municipal Code Section 85.02 which limited the ability of people to sleep in their cars and resulted in litigation that stopped the ordinance from being enforced.

## Key Issues

- The lack of outreach coordination may result in too few outreach resources in some neighborhoods and for some populations and duplicative resources in other neighborhoods and for other populations.
- Dramatic increase in the number of people living in vehicles negatively impacts the people living in their vehicles and raises concerns for their housed neighbors.
- Differing rules about what property people are allowed to have on the street and in encampments and what the consequences are for violating them.
- Insufficient resources for engaging homeless people on the streets, and in rivers, flood channels, and other hidden locations, and inconsistent policies and procedures for the distribution of responsibility.
- Inconsistent policies across jurisdictions that can push homeless people into neighboring cities and/or unincorporated areas of the County.
- Barriers to entering shelter, including hours of operation, eligibility for entry, stipulations for participation, lack of safety for vulnerable populations, and location, and the limited amount of personal property a person can bring into the shelter.
- On a daily basis, many local government agencies interact with homeless people, but often do not have the expertise or resources to do so effectively. There is no shared or coordinated strategy for engaging homeless people and connecting them to services and housing.
- Community residents and volunteers are passionate about wanting to help homeless people, but do not always know how to engage in a constructive way.
- Too frequently intoxicated homeless people are taken to the emergency room where it takes hours and medical resources, when they really need time and a safe place to become sober.

- There is an insufficient amount of shelter beds, bridge housing and subsidized permanent housing.
- A long-standing challenge for local government is finding a balance between the health and safety of the streets and the rights and needs of those who are forced to live on them.
- Several cities within the county have legislation that impacts street homelessness and encampments. For instance, many cities have ordinances that may disproportionately impact homeless people such as prohibition against public urination, limitations on public feeding, and prohibitions on pan handling.

## Current Efforts

### County of Los Angeles

- ✚ **Community Development Commission – Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)** - ESG provides funding to conduct outreach to engage homeless individuals and families living on the street and to increase the number, and quality, of emergency shelters for homeless individuals and families. The ESG funds also support operations of the shelters and essential services to shelter residents. Finally, the funds are used to rapidly re-house homeless individuals and families, and prevent families/individuals from becoming homeless.
- ✚ **DHS – Single Adult Model (SAM)** - SAM was recently implemented and is a multi-departmental collaborative with the vision of creating County infrastructure to assist homeless single adults in all regions of Los Angeles County. Within the SAM model, Multidisciplinary Integrated Teams (MITs) were established in every Service Planning Area in the County to engage disabled single homeless adults and work to connect them to services and permanent supportive housing.
- ✚ **DHS – Housing for Health (HFH)** - HFH has helped DHS begin to take a more active role in providing and coordinating street engagement activities in the Skid Row neighborhood. Building on the partnership that formed around Operation Healthy Streets program (which conducted activities once every two months), HFH has begun coordinating a once per week street engagement effort to test the effectiveness of a more consistent approach. DPH provides one staff member, one day per week. HFH is pursuing the goal of effectively housing the thousands of unhoused people in Skid Row.
- ✚ **DHS – HFH – C3** – HFH is currently working with governmental and community partners on an initiative called County+City+Community (C3) (the City partner is the City of Los Angeles, LAPD Central Division). C3 is a street engagement strategy that breaks up the 50 square blocks of Skid Row into four quadrants and has a 5-10 member multidisciplinary team working in each zone, including a lead officer, outreach officers, and “foot beat” officers conducting

community focused police work. The strategy also includes adding low barrier indoor environments such as stabilization housing, sobering centers and other programs that allow homeless people to recover and receive services in a welcoming environment as an alternative to treatment in the ER or arrest. The C3 strategy anticipates working with governmental and community partners to improve the built environment of the Skid Row neighborhood so that residents of Skid Row have access to amenities that other neighborhoods have such as street trees, benches, lighting, and restrooms. The goal of C3 is to consistently engage every person living on the streets of Skid Row and help them move into permanent housing and recover their health and well-being.

- ✚ **DMH – Multidisciplinary Integrated Teams (MITS)** - MITS provide outreach and engagement to the most vulnerable street-based homeless population with mental illness. The goal of the program is to assist those trying to obtain permanent housing and then support them using the evidence-based practice Critical Time Intervention to retain their housing. The MITs provide a full range of mental health and housing services.
- ✚ **DMH – Community-Based Mental Health – SB82 Mobile Triage Team** - Provide outreach and engagement to individuals who are homeless and field-based triage and assessment to determine eligibility for DMH services. Individuals who meet eligibility for DMH services are linked to on-going services, which may include housing services.
- ✚ **DMH - Veterans and Loved Ones Recovery (VALOR)** - Veterans and Loved Ones Recovery provides outreach and engagement and a full range of mental health and housing services to homeless veterans and their families. The program serves veterans regardless of formal Veterans' Administration eligibility status and military discharge.
- ✚ **DMH – Law Enforcement Team** - Law Enforcement Teams partner DMH clinicians with law enforcement officers from 19 law enforcement agencies in the County. These teams respond to calls from 911 or patrol and they may evaluate mentally ill homeless persons for danger to self or others or grave mental disability. They can also make linkages to mental health services including housing.
- ✚ **DMH – MTA Crisis Response Teams** - Metropolitan Transit Authority – Crisis Response Unit partners three DMH clinicians with Sheriff Deputies to provide crisis services, WIC 5150 evaluations, transport to acute psychiatric hospitals, and linkage to mental health services.
- ✚ **DMH - Community-Based Mental Health – Project 50 Replicas** - Target the most vulnerable homeless populations in various communities and provide

intensive services to assist them with transitioning to Permanent Supportive Housing.

- ✚ **DMH - Assisted Outpatient Treatment LA** - Provides extensive outreach and engagement to persons with serious mental illness including those who are homeless and who have a history of unwillingness to participate in treatment. Many of the referrals are from law enforcement and families of homeless adults with serious mental illness, a history of incarceration, involuntary hospitalization, and/or serious deterioration.
- ✚ **DMH - Community-Based Mental Health – Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME)** - HOME offers outreach, engagement, mental health screening, assessment, street counseling, case management, and linkage to health/mental health and social services to mentally ill homeless individuals and their families.
- ✚ **DMH – LAC+USC Street to Home Project** - This project provides outreach and permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless mentally ill individuals living on or in close proximity to the campus of LAC+USC Medical Center. The contracted mental health provider also operates the Psychiatric Urgent Care Center across the street from LAC+USC. This Urgent Care Center serves as a staging facility to connect participants with housing and immediate services such as co-occurring mental health and substances abuse treatment. There is a minimum of two staff on each team dedicated to conducting outreach and engagement activities.
- ✚ **DPH – Substance Abuse Prevention and Control – Homeless Encampment Project** - The Homeless Encampment Project (HEP) provides substance use disorder (SUD) outreach, referrals and treatment services to individuals living in homeless encampments in the San Gabriel Valley, Spring Street and Skid Row areas. The HEP teams coordinate with other County departments and agencies, including DMH, DPSS, Sheriff, and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA).
- ✚ **Chief Executive Office/Sheriff Department/LAHSA - Homeless Encampment Outreach Initiative** - The initiative was launched in late 2011 with the goal of engaging and addressing the needs of homeless individuals living in homeless encampments in the unincorporated area and cities which contract with the Sheriff Department for law enforcement patrol and to connect them to services including health and mental health treatment, drug and alcohol treatment, benefits advocacy, shelter, and housing.

## City of Los Angeles

- # **LAPD Innovations with ERT** - LAPD received an innovations grant to fund LAHSA ERT members to focus outreach efforts on frequent users of the criminal justice system either as victims, perpetrators or both. These frequent users will be targeted for getting off the street and into services and housing.
- # **Operation Healthy Streets (OHS)** - Operation Healthy Streets (OHS) Maintenance Protocol (Phase III) is a means for cleaning the streets and sidewalks of Skid Row inhabited by street homeless. There are two types of scheduled cleaning implemented by the City. Spot cleaning is a one-day operation to clean all the streets in the designated Skid Row Area. Trash, debris, human waste, and other abandoned materials/waste are collected and sent to disposal. OHS teams work around homeless encampments while flushing, vacuuming, and sanitizing the sidewalks and streets. Streets are swept as a final polishing measure.

Comprehensive cleaning is a seven-day operation that involves temporarily removing the homeless and their property from the sidewalks so that the street and sidewalks can be thoroughly cleaned. Postings notifying the public of the pending cleanings are placed in conspicuous locations on the streets days before the cleaning events. On the scheduled cleaning days, trash, debris, human waste, and other abandoned materials are collected and sent to disposal. Health hazard determinations are performed on unattended items. Items determined to be health hazards are sent to the proper disposal facility. Non-hazardous items are sent to a 90-day facility. Items are photographed and documented. Streets and sidewalks are thoroughly flushed, vacuumed, and sanitized.

- # **Clean Streets Initiative (CSI)** - Modeled after OHS, the CSI is a partnership between the Mayor's office, Street Services and Council District 1. Launched in November 2014, CSI has two teams that cleanup illegal dumping and encampments. Each team handles about 8 cleanup requests per day and together cover about 320 cleanup requests per month. In addition, each Council District gets one dedicated day per month where they select sites for a cleanup team. About 50% of the cleanup visits involve a homeless person. There are about 900 sites on the request list waiting to be cleaned up. 55% involve the presence of a homeless person.

## Other Local Efforts

- # **LAHSA - Coordinated Entry System** - CES is the local implementation of a Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandate to create a coordinated assessment and housing placement system for the homeless. Since the implementation of CES in 2013 nearly 1,000 people were placed in housing through December 2014. The County has committed to providing 30 new reserved crisis housing beds as bridge housing for homeless clients awaiting

housing placement through CES. CES outreach workers survey homeless individuals they engage on the streets, at shelters, institutions, events, e.g., homeless connect events, using the VI-SPDAT, a comprehensive survey tool, to identify a potential client's services needs and the type of housing best suited for a given client. In addition to LAHSA, United Way Home for Good contract agencies and other CBOs across the County currently participate in CES. All data is captured and stored on LAHSA's Homeless Management Information System.

- ✦ **LAHSA - Emergency Response Teams (ERT)** - LAHSA ERTs serve all population types through initial engagement, intake and assessment through the Coordinated Entry System. This includes providing coordination and linking homeless populations to County agencies and services, crisis intervention services and housing and shelter. These services include encampment clean-up coordination with the City and County.
- ✦ **St. Joseph's Center – Vehicular Homeless Outreach Program (VHOP)** - The VHOP is designed to address vehicular homelessness targeting the Rancho Dominguez area of Los Angeles County. The program engages homeless living in recreational vehicles (RV) and other vehicles with the goal of enrolling them into case management services. Once a case manager is assigned, the case manager works to connect the individuals to a full continuum of services and to remove barriers that prevent them from accessing permanent housing.
- ✦ **Gateway Council of Governments – Gateway Connections Program with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH)]** – This program is a street-based engagement program consisting of four outreach teams comprised of staff from community-based organizations. Each is responsible for a specific area of the Gateway Cities region of the County; there is a fifth outreach team from PATH that supervises the aforementioned teams and works with them conducting outreach and engagement. The goal of the program is to connect homeless persons to a full continuum of services, shelter, bridge housing, and permanent housing. The program budget also has funding to develop permanent housing units.
- ✦ **PATH Outreach Teams** – PATH's street outreach teams provide homeless men, women, and families living on the streets with sack lunches, hygiene supplies, and referrals to housing and supportive services. Outreach workers focus on building relationships with people living on the streets, which allows them to provide trusted advice and resources, while working to help people move off the street and into homes of their own. The teams also work with local police, businesses, and concerned citizens to mediate interactions with homeless individuals and ensure that the needs of the community and the homeless are met.

## Comparative Perspective/Best Practices

In August 2015, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) published *Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments: Advancing the Dialogue*<sup>1</sup>. The document provides a framework for the development of local strategies and was developed by USICH based upon conversations with advocates, housing and service providers, and government officials across the country to highlight the most effective approaches and strategies for addressing encampments.

USICH included four key elements for community planning to provide solutions for people living in encampments:

- ✦ **Preparation and Adequate Time for Planning and Implementation:** Action plans for creating and providing housing solutions for people living in encampments should ensure that there is adequate time for strategizing, collaboration, outreach, engagement, and the identification of meaningful housing options. Adequate time is essential to achieve the primary objective of meeting the needs of each person and assisting them to end their homelessness.
- ✦ **Collaboration across Sectors and Systems:** Action plans should include collaboration between a cross-section of public and private agencies, neighbors, business owners and governmental entities, based upon where the encampment is located.
- ✦ **Performance of Intensive and Persistent Outreach and Engagement:** Action plans should involve agencies that have strong outreach experience and demonstrated skills in engaging vulnerable and unsheltered people. Effective outreach is essential for effectively connecting people with coordinated assessment systems, resources and housing options.
- ✦ **Provision of Low-Barrier Pathways to Permanent Housing:** Action plans should focus on providing people with clear, low-barrier pathways for accessing and attaining permanent housing opportunities and should not focus on relocating people to other encampment settings.

## Discussion Questions

- ✦ What roles would be most effective for community volunteers to play in assisting unsheltered people?
- ✦ What can be done to ensure consistent and coherent policies across jurisdictions with regard to unsheltered homeless people so they aren't simply pushed into neighboring jurisdictions, but instead each jurisdiction takes responsibility for helping them get off the street and into services and permanent housing as soon as possible?

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<sup>1</sup>([http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Ending\\_Homelessness\\_for\\_People\\_Living\\_in\\_Encampments\\_Aug2015.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Ending_Homelessness_for_People_Living_in_Encampments_Aug2015.pdf)).

- ✚ What policies can be enacted to ensure the decriminalization of the homeless on the streets and in encampments while addressing to maintain environmental and public health safety?
- ✚ What is the best process for developing a coordinated countywide strategy for outreach and engagement for street homeless and homeless living in encampments that would define roles and responsibilities among governmental and community-based agencies and create standardized protocols for outreach and engagement for homeless individuals, families, and youth?
- ✚ How can service contacts between homeless families/individuals and County/city departments and contractors be leveraged for purposes of engagement? What types of service contacts provide the best opportunities for engagement? With what agencies do those service contacts occur?
- ✚ There have been many instances when an outreach worker has a breakthrough and a client agrees to “go with them” to shelter or housing, but has nowhere to take the client at that time; how can we address this issue?

### Resources

- ✚ Are there dollars that LA County and/or cities are currently spending to serve homeless families/individuals which could instead be used to pay for housing and/or shelter?
- ✚ Is there additional revenue that LA County and/or cities could generate to pay for housing or shelter?

### Legislative Advocacy

Are there changes in State and/or federal law which should be pursued?

On February 27, 2015, Senator Carol Liu introduced SB 608 (the Right to Rest Act), which would stem the criminalization of homelessness. This legislation was not enacted, but could be considered for a future legislative session.

### Potential Policy Options

- ✚ Establish a coordinated county-wide strategy for outreach and engagement for street homeless and homeless living in encampments that would define roles and responsibilities among governmental and community-based agencies and create standardized protocols for outreach and engagement for homeless individuals, families, and youth.