



Heading Home Hennepin Encampment Response Protocol Draft

Purpose of Protocol

To establish coordinated and consistent procedures for responding to homeless encampments that recognize the vulnerability and limited options of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness and the risks posed by encampments.

Foundational Principles / Statements

1. Everyone experiencing unsheltered homelessness is vulnerable and deserving of being treated with dignity and respect and in accordance with their rights
2. Every effort must be made to connect people to housing, shelter and services but there is not sufficient housing and shelter for everyone experiencing homelessness at present
3. Encampments represent a serious health and safety risk – particularly for those staying within the encampment – and do not represent a dignified form of shelter.

Health and safety risks

While all encampment pose risks, they do not all pose the same level of risk. Risk factors will be considered in determining the urgency of encampment removal, including but not limited to:

- Presence of especially vulnerable people within the encampment (children, youth, women seniors, people with disabilities)
- Proximity of the encampment to further vulnerable people in the local community
- Dangers posed by physical location (proximity to traffic, unsafe structures)
- Environmental hazards (fires, used needles)
- Health hazards (disease, infestations)
- Extreme weather (precipitation, very high and low temperatures)
- Reports of violence, trafficking and other criminal and anti-social behavior
- Size and duration, including build-up of trash and waste.

Assessing risk and establishing timelines

The key parties involved in assessing risk and coordinating a response will be law enforcement, the landowner and street outreach, informed by direct engagement with those in the encampment.

The level of risk present at a site, along with the impact of the encampment on intended use of the site, will dictate the amount of flexibility allowable in responding and the amount of time given before occupants are required to relocate.

Law enforcement will act as the central point of contact, coordinate with the other parties and establish the timeline for encampment removal. It is critical that this timeline gives people advance notice whenever possible (where risks do not demand immediate removal) and is clearly and consistently communicated to all parties.

If risks increase significantly, expedited removal may be required. There may also be instances where risks are reduced and other factors come to light (an imminent housing placement) that lead to agreement on additional time. Communication with all parties remains key throughout.

Service response to encampments

The following are the priorities to be addressed by street outreach prior to encampment removal:

- Advising on the planned timing of the scheduled removal and implications, seeking translation or other means of communication where required to assist with comprehension
- Avoiding loss of ID and other critical documents through digital storage or other means
- Checking for referrals to housing and other programs and helping make connections
- Connecting to a shelter reservation through the Adult Shelter Connect (there are an average of 80+ beds available for reservation each morning and more opening up through the after-hours service in the evening providing new opportunities to connect people to shelter daily)
- Discussing alternatives to shelter (i.e. family, friends) and advising on transport options
- Discussing storage needs and options where they exist
- Ensuring contact information is up-to-date.

Throughout the engagement period, street outreach will advise on harm and risk minimization and connect to appropriate services wherever possible.

Additional considerations

- **Common messaging:** using the foundational principles of this document as a starting point, common talking points should be developed and shared with all Heading Home Hennepin stakeholders for use in public discourse around encampments.
- **Channel for community support:** well-meaning support can increase health risks at encampments if not channeled accordingly. During the Hiawatha-Franklin encampment a website was set up to try and channel contributions through the Metropolitan Urban Indian Director (MUID) led-agencies so they were responsive to actual community needs.
- **Resource development:** while increasing the availability of housing and shelter is key, lack of transportation and storage can be barriers to relocation from encampments.

This draft document developed by Hennepin County (Office to End Homelessness) with input from City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Police Department, Minnesota Department of Transport, Downtown Improvement District, American Indian Community Development Corporation, St Stephen's Human Services, People Inc., and Youthlink.