

Chicago, Illinois

Community Encampment Report



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About This Report

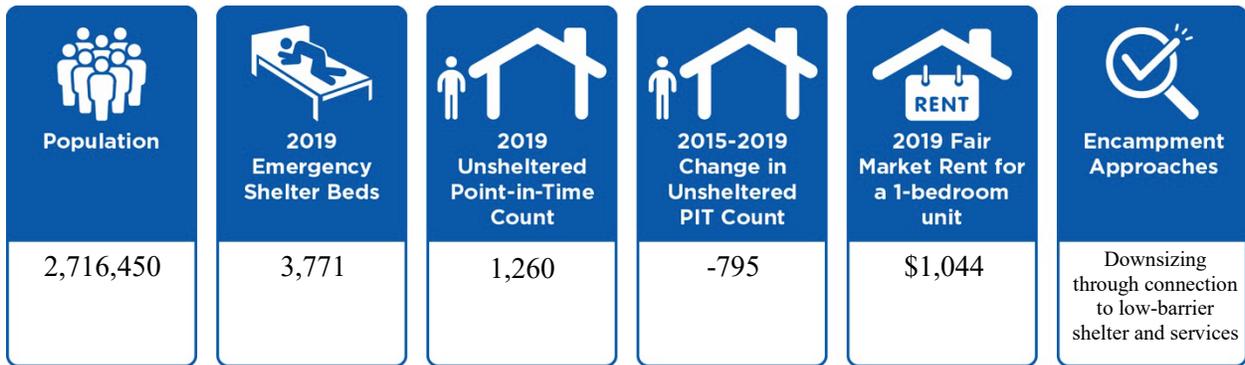
The community encampment reports are among the products of a study called *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs*. The study is sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In the fall of 2019, Abt Associates conducted site visits to four communities to collect information about each community's response to encampments and the costs associated with those responses. The study team met with stakeholders involved in encampment response, including city staff, nonprofit outreach workers, and nonprofit organizations. In each community, the study team conducted observations of encampments and interviewed two people who have lived experiences in encampment settings. In addition to this report, community encampment reports are available for Houston, Texas; San Jose, California; and Tacoma, Washington.

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Description of Chicago Encampments



Encampments in Chicago

Historically, encampments have existed across Chicago, varying in size, composition, and density depending on their location. Implementation partners in the effort to deal with encampments agree that, in recent years, the number, size, and visibility of encampments has increased—despite Chicago’s decreases in numbers of unsheltered individuals and chronic homelessness each year between 2017 and 2019. The partners attribute the increase in the number and size of encampments to several factors, including the loss of single room occupancy (SRO) programs in the city and the overall lack of affordable housing in Chicago. Another factor that some service providers said may contribute to people choosing to live in encampments is the numerous rules and requirements for people who live in the city’s emergency shelters.

In response to the growing visibility of homeless encampments in the viaducts under Lake Shore Drive in the Uptown neighborhood, in 2018 the City of Chicago created a Task Force to Reduce Homelessness. Led by the city’s Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), the task force created the city’s first official encampment response strategy, although it incorporated lessons from a pilot encampment response conducted in 2016. The goal of Chicago’s encampment response strategy is to reduce the number and size of encampments by connecting as many people as possible to shelter, permanent housing, and supportive services. The strategy established three levels of response based on the size of the encampment and the intensity of the planned effort. DFSS activates a Level 1 encampment response for encampments of 10 or more people, a Level 2 response for groups of five to nine people, and a Level 3 response for encampments of fewer than 5 people. A Level One response, the most intensive effort, provides 10 consecutive days of onsite services for encampment residents, a Level Two response provides 2 to 3 days of onsite services, and a Level Three response includes outreach effort that last about a day. In 2019, the city conducted nine Level 1 encampment responses and about 40 Level 2 responses. Overall, the city engaged 476 encampment residents during the year, conducted 182 assessments for coordinated entry, and placed 106 encampment residents in emergency shelter. Illinois law has been interpreted to

prohibit the city from clearing and closing encampments in public spaces, although some areas have been fenced off to discourage the formation of encampments.

Encampments exist across Chicago, but the largest and most visible encampments are found in three areas: (1) the sidewalks of the network of roads, side streets, and service docks on the below the ground levels of Lower Wacker Drive in the Loop, the city’s central business district; (2) a fenced-in area underneath a highway overpass on the northwest side of Chicago, and (3) under the viaducts or overpasses of Lake Shore Drive, the eight-lane expressway that runs north and south along Lake Michigan. Service providers mentioned the existence of other encampments that are not receiving as much attention because of their smaller size and lesser impact on the community. Some encampment locations vary by season. In the summer, encampments emerge on the beaches of Lake Michigan and at parks around the city. One outreach group reported seeing groups of 25 to 30 people living on a beach or in a park during the summer months. In winter, the cold and the wind from Lake Michigan makes those areas less hospitable, and residents relocate to areas that block the wind, such as the nearby viaducts of Lake Shore Drive. The below-ground levels of Lower Wacker Drive and the O’Hare airport also receive more residents during the winter months.

Description of encampments

Lower Wacker Drive encampment. Wacker Drive is in the Loop and has several levels: Upper Wacker on the street level; Lower Wacker on two below-street levels—the east- and westbound lanes of a major expressway; and a still lower network of roads used mainly by service vehicles. The Lower Wacker encampment encompasses several small groups of people staying together on both levels of Lower Wacker. Personal belongings—including umbrellas, blankets, chairs, and bicycles—occupy the expressway’s broad sidewalks on the upper level of Lower Wacker. The south side of the Lower Wacker expressway, the main area where people camp, is entirely covered overhead by Upper Wacker Drive, providing shelter from precipitation, and people are tucked away from traffic on flat slabs of concrete away from the main roadway. The north side of the expressway opens to the Chicago River, but concrete barriers are generally tall enough for people to lie down comfortably and safely next to the barriers, with the shelter of a blanket or plastic sheet to keep wind and precipitation at bay. The city does not allow tents in Lower Wacker, although some residents still have them. Other residents have air mattresses, sleeping bags and rolls, blankets, and other personal belongings.

Definition of Encampment

The City of Chicago does not have an official definition of an encampment; however, DFSS, local homeless service providers, and other social service agencies define an *encampment* as including the following components: a gathering of three or more individuals in a single space not meant for human habitation, for a regular period of time, with personal belongings, structures to protect themselves from the elements, and a sense of community or social structure.

In 2018, DFSS conducted four Level 1 encampment responses at the Lower Wacker site. The first response was in an area on the upper level of Lower Wacker around 200 N. Columbus Drive with about 15 residents. The second was in an area in lower-Lower Wacker known as the “Triangle,” with as many as 45 residents. The city fenced off the Triangle and offered all residents shelter and access to supportive services. In both cases, although some people accepted assistance, most residents relocated to other locations in Lower Wacker or to other encampments across the city. DFSS also executed a Level 1 encampment response at an area of Lower Wacker between Columbus Drive and Stetson Avenue and another at scattered encampments in various locations on Lower Wacker. In October 2019, DFSS reported that 186 residents remained in Lower Wacker Drive encampments.

Belmont and Kedzie encampment. The Belmont and Kedzie encampment is under a highway overpass at the intersection of Belmont and Kedzie Avenues in Northwest Chicago, about a block or two from the closest Blue Line “L” stop (Chicago’s elevated train system) and a block from a bus stop. It sits on Chicago Department of Transportation land and has dumpsters for residents to use for trash disposal,

which the Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation empties weekly. The encampment is on a triangle of land and is fenced in on all sides; the entrance to the encampment has a padlock. A designated encampment leader has a key to lock the encampment nightly. An encampment has existed in this area for at least the past decade, although residents have changed the location in response to city efforts to displace them. The encampment was originally on a sidewalk underneath the Kennedy Expressway, but the city added concrete fillers between the highway support beams and then added fencing in an attempt to stop people from sleeping there. As a result, residents moved to a more inconspicuous location directly underneath the Kennedy Expressway. The number of residents fluctuates, but usually at least 10 residents are there at a given time. The encampment usually has at least 20 tents—as some residents have more than one—and several communal tents. Residents created dining and restroom tents and strung blankets over the fences that surround the encampment, likely both for privacy and to control the noise from the traffic that surrounds them. The encampment also has a stock of general supplies, including wooden pallets, grills, rocking chairs, and crates to store belongings. Many encampment residents work during the day, relying on fellow encampment residents to watch their belongings.

Living in the Belmont and Kedzie Encampment

A former resident of the Belmont and Kedzie encampment said she had been living on the streets off and on since 2005. She came to the encampment when she could no longer live with family or friends. Her boyfriend at the time had his own tent in the encampment, so she came to stay with him. She described the residents of the encampment as “family,” where “everyone would help each other out,” including sharing food and supplies and helping out if someone gets sick.



Belmont and Kedzie encampment, October 15, 2019.

Lake Shore Drive Viaducts encampment. In Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood near Lake Michigan, a series of encampments exist underneath three major Lake Shore Drive overpass tunnels, known as viaducts. Each viaduct has a main road running through it and concrete barriers on either side of the road that separate the road from a wide sidewalk path underneath the tunnel. Although the viaducts are at least a quarter of a mile apart, the city considers them a single encampment. Residents of the encampments set up tents on the concrete sidewalks on both sides of the road, covering the length of each viaduct. The city piloted its first encampment response in 2016. Before the 2016 response, about 75 people lived in the three viaducts; after the city’s response, all 75 left the encampment, and nearly all moved into permanent housing. As of late 2019, another encampment with between 5 and 10 people is present in one viaduct at this location.

Ruble/Desplaines/Dan Ryan/Taylor encampment. Located on a grassy, sloping triangle right next to a highway entrance, this encampment is surrounded by heavy brush on all other sides. The encampment consists mainly of tents, with a few inflatable mattresses and personal belongings outside. The encampment started with just two or three people at a time, but by the time the city initiated a Level 1

response, in February 2019, between 50 and 70 residents lived in the encampment. Immediately after the response, only 8 residents remained, but by October 2019, the encampment had grown back to at least 50 people.

CTA Red Line “L” encampment. Rather than a physical gathering with tents, “L” individuals ride the Red Line of the Chicago Transit Authority’s (CTA’s) “L” to stay warm and sheltered from the elements. The Red Line operates 24 hours a day, so people do not have to leave the train cars—or, if they do leave the train car at the end of the line, they can get right back on and avoid remaining outdoors for several hours at night. From the CTA’s perspective, people experiencing homelessness are apparent as continuous riders, those who do not exit the trains once they reach the end of the line and instead start their journeys in the opposite direction. Hundreds of people experiencing homelessness ride “L” lines continuously every day, and stakeholders report that often as many as 10 people experiencing homelessness can be found in a single “L” train car. Unlike the other encampments, stakeholders said that a shared sense of community does not exist among those who reside in the CTA train cars. Chicago conducted a 2-week encampment response on the Red Line “L” in May 2019. During the response, outreach workers engaged 300 riders.

Other encampments. Other, smaller encampments are scattered across the city, with fewer than 10 residents in each. Service providers are also aware of groups of people staying in abandoned buildings but have not yet entered those buildings to engage with residents and offer services.

Characteristics of people living in Chicago encampments

Across Chicago’s encampments, homeless service providers estimated that about 70 percent of residents are Black/African American, more than 70 percent are men, and most are between the ages of 35 and 65. About 80 percent of encampment residents do not have relatives or partners with them; the other 20 percent are couples, although that estimate fluctuates because couples form and break up. No families with children and very few veterans live in encampments in Chicago. Some implementation partners noted a rise over the past few years in younger adults in encampments. All partners said that the demographics of residents vary by encampment and by season and in many cases reflect the demographics of nearby neighborhoods. For example, residents of Lower Wacker are mostly African-American and tend to be younger than those in other encampments (early 20s to 40s). Residents of the Belmont and Kedzie encampment are mostly of Polish descent or Latino, and many are working. Residents of summer encampments on beaches and parks are mainly transition-age youth, ages 18 to 25.

Some of Chicago’s encampment residents have significant barriers to housing. Every encampment has some residents with substance use disorders or mental illnesses. Service providers cited alcohol, heroin, and other opioid use as the most prevalent substance use disorders. Service providers reported that drug dealers visit encampments because they can sell to a centralized group. Depression is a common mental health problem, but several service providers noted that people with serious and persistent mental illness tend not to live in encampment settings or, if they do, often stay near the outskirts of the encampment.

Implementation Partners Involved in Encampment Responses

The Mayor’s Task Force to Reduce Homelessness serves as a mechanism to help City of Chicago’s departments coordinate their services to assist people experiencing homelessness, with a special emphasis on chronically homeless encampment residents and on families with children. The task force is staffed by the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and meets quarterly.

City departments

Department of Family and Support Services

The Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) is the lead organization for the City of Chicago’s response to homelessness. DFSS uses the task force as a mechanism for coordinating with other city departments. DFSS’s homeless outreach and prevention (HOP) team activates and manages the city’s Level 1, 2, and 3 responses. DFSS staff also track and monitor the locations and populations of all the city’s encampments. DFSS staff report that the task force helps create connections and communication channels between city departments. DFSS requests participation from a task force agency during an encampment response if it is related to that agency’s operations; the departments involved then execute the response. DFSS has contracts for outreach and other services delivered by five local homeless services provider organizations to people who experience unsheltered homelessness, including those who live in encampments.

Department of Streets and Sanitation

The Department of Streets and Sanitation is a member of the task force and a key partner during encampment responses. Before a response, the department posts a notice that a cleaning will take place. The department is on site at the encampment for at least 2 days during a Level 1 response to conduct deep cleanings and remove trash, litter, and other debris. If the department determines the presence of needles or other biohazards that make the area unsafe, it provides a hazmat team. If necessary to ensure safety, the department shuts down roads around an encampment for a Level 1 response. The Department of Streets and Sanitation also removes trash from the dumpsters at the Belmont and Kedzie encampment weekly.

Chicago Police Department

The Chicago Police Department is a member of the task force and has designated Crisis Intervention Teams and Homeless Outreach Teams in certain areas of the city. Crisis Intervention Teams are made up of certified members who have completed a 40-hour training course that includes how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to interact, intervene, and de-escalate situations with individuals experiencing a crisis and possibly who require psychiatric evaluation. Homeless Outreach Teams operate in specified sections of the city and are familiar with individuals experiencing homelessness in the area. The Homeless Outreach Team establishes relationships with residents of the encampments and can link interested individuals with food, medical care, shelter, and housing programs. If DFSS activates a Level 1 encampment response in areas that have a Crisis Intervention or Homeless Outreach Team, the team joins the response and helps engage residents, which is helpful because encampment residents often are familiar with the officers. If DFSS calls a Level 1 response in an area without either team, the police still join the response but will not as readily engage encampment residents. The Chicago Police Department also responds to calls related to fights or other disturbances at encampments.

Department of Public Health

The Chicago Department of Public Health contracts with Heartland Alliance Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center that serves vulnerable populations—including individuals experiencing homelessness—to provide medical care and outreach during encampment responses. The department is also a member of the task force. Outside formal encampment responses, the Department of Public Health does not provide services to residents of homeless encampments.

Transit Authority

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is a member of the task force and participated in the Level 1 encampment response on Chicago “L’s” Red Line. Separately, CTA also has two security teams at either end of both of the city’s 24-hour “L” lines in an attempt to prevent continuous riding or congregating in subway stations.

Department of Law

DFSS informs the Chicago Department of Law when it activates a Level 1 encampment response. If advocates for people experiencing homelessness sue the city, either during a Level 1 encampment response or during other outreach efforts, the department is ready to respond.

Fire/EMS Department

The Chicago Fire Department plays a supporting role in responding to homelessness encampments. Emergency medical services (EMS) responds to emergency calls to assist medically vulnerable residents. Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) go to the encampment, triage the resident, and transport him or her to the hospital if needed. On a few occasions, the fire department removed large numbers of propane tanks that had accumulated in the larger Chicago encampments.

Other agencies

Encampments where DFSS activates a Level 1 response often are on Chicago Department of Transportation and Illinois Department of Transportation property. The Chicago Park District and Illinois Department of Transportation participate in an encampment response if the encampment is on their property. If DFSS requests support to access encampments on the banks of the Chicago River, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District joins the encampment response. The Department of Aviation, a member of the task force, also funds outreach activities to people experiencing homelessness at O’Hare Airport.

Homeless services providers

The city contracts with several service provider organizations both to participate in the Level 1 and 2 responses and to provide ongoing outreach and services to encampment residents. Although Chicago’s Continuum of Care (CoC), led by the nonprofit organization All Chicago, does not participate in formal encampment responses, DFSS coordinates with All Chicago and uses information from the CoC to inform the work at encampments.

Haymarket

Haymarket is a social service organization that provides substance use and behavioral health treatment. The organization primarily serves people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and ex-offenders from the South and West Side communities of Chicago. The organization also provides outreach and housing navigation services for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Chicago. In addition, Haymarket operates a 24-hour outreach program based at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport. Haymarket staff assist individuals and groups experiencing homelessness who seek shelter in the O’Hare terminals, parking structure, and public transit passages that connect to the airport. During an encampment response, Haymarket’s service team connects interested encampment residents to detoxification services or substance use treatment programs. The service team also conducts coordinated entry assessments. If an encampment resident gets matched to

Haymarket’s O’Hare Outreach

Outside the city’s formal encampment responses, since 1992 Haymarket has provided around-the-clock outreach at the O’Hare Airport. In recent years, the O’Hare outreach program, which is funded by the Chicago Department of Aviation, has begun to integrate into the larger service system. Outreach providers walk through the terminals and parking ramps and engage individuals to conduct coordinated entry assessments, connect them with other support services, or take them to a shelter. They are also beginning to offer housing navigation services and to connect people with other service providers to offer low-threshold medical care, clothing, and other supplies. Outreach providers engage an average of 25 to 30 people a day, but Haymarket reported that the number drops in the summer and increases in the winter.

housing as a result of the assessment, Haymarket staff then provide housing navigation services, including helping them obtain personal documentation, lend assistance in scheduling appointments, and provide a warm handoff to housing providers. Haymarket provides continued substance use treatment to any interested encampment resident after the official encampment response has ended.

Featherfist

Featherfist is a social service organization that provides an array of services and resources and is contracted to provide outreach services to encampment residents. Featherfist operates two response teams—a daytime team and a nighttime team—that visit encampments across the city of Chicago daily to establish relationships with residents and provide connections to supportive services for interested individuals. Nightly, one outreach team visits encampments across Chicago to follow up on the work of daytime outreach teams and to collect demographic information, which they share with DFSS and the daytime team. During an encampment response, Featherfist conducts coordinated entry assessments and connects interested residents to supportive services.

Heartland Alliance Health

As a Federally Qualified Health Center, Heartland Alliance Health provides comprehensive health care for underserved populations in Chicago, including people experiencing homelessness. Heartland's 10-person outreach team visits encampments across Chicago once or twice a week to provide supportive services, including providing basic onsite medical care, ensuring access to needed prescription medications, and making referrals to shelters for people willing to go there. During a formal encampment response, Heartland Alliance Health provides a medical team and members from their outreach team. The medical team staffs the DFSS mobile medical unit and offers an examination that covers an individual's physical and mental health needs. Depending on symptoms, Heartland can offer medications and supplies to address common illnesses and can also write prescriptions and make referrals to other medical providers. If a person needs care beyond what Heartland can offer in the mobile unit and is willing to seek follow-up care, the medical team schedules an appointment at a Heartland clinic. Heartland also creates or updates medical records. Outreach team members accompany the medical team to encourage people they already know to use the medical services.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army's Mobile Feeding and Outreach program delivers meals to three encampments in Chicago 365 days a year as part of its normal delivery route. Two outreach team members accompany the mobile unit and try to engage encampment residents during the meal and provide a connection to supportive services or shelters. During an encampment response, the Salvation Army conducts its standard meal and outreach services but stays on site for a longer duration.

Thresholds

Thresholds is a mental health organization that provides outreach and referrals to psychiatric care to people across Chicago with serious mental illnesses who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including people living in homeless encampments. During an encampment response, Threshold's outreach team works specifically with people who have mental health challenges and tries to connect them with the organization's mental health treatment program. If any resident experiences a psychiatric crisis during an encampment response, Threshold engages the person and de-escalates the situation.

Franciscan Outreach

Franciscan Outreach operates Chicago's only low-barrier emergency shelter, the Pilsen shelter, a 40-bed facility in the Pilsen neighborhood. Opened to support the city's encampment responses, the shelter guarantees a bed for every person living in an encampment during a Level 1 response. Only people coming directly from that encampment can enter the shelter during that period. During an encampment response, DFSS provides transportation to the shelter. Although many elements of this shelter make it a more attractive option than any other Chicago shelter—for example, no curfew, a harm-reduction

approach to serving people battling addiction, their ability to house residents' pets and keep couples together—Pilsen's lack of proximity to many of Chicago's largest encampments may deter encampment residents from going there. The shelter provides case management and supportive services to people staying there, including a dedicated case manager, mental health treatment, medical care, substance use disorder treatment, legal assistance, employment training opportunities, and connections to housing.

Description of Response to Encampments in Chicago

Encampment response strategy

Mayor Rahm Emmanuel created the Mayor’s Task Force to Reduce Homelessness in early 2018—at least in part (according to some service providers) in response to an alderman’s complaint about the Lake Shore Viaducts encampment. Before the establishment of the task force, the city’s response to encampments was largely driven by complaints and the observations of DFSS staff as they moved about the city. Now, DFSS and its implementation partners provide outreach more strategically as part of the formal, three-tiered encampment response strategy. Whether an encampment receives the more intensive Level 1 response, a less intensive Level 2 response, or a “business as usual” Level 3 response is determined by the number of people living in the encampment and funding available for the fiscal year.¹ DFSS does not require residents of an encampment to relocate during or after an encampment response. Although DFSS does not clear and close encampments during a formal response, the city’s goal is to reduce the number of encampments of 10 or more people.

Outside the formal Level 1 and Level 2 responses, outreach teams from DFSS and its service provider partners visit the encampments regularly to provide outreach and referrals to supportive services. A central goal for service providers is to assess all encampment residents for coordinated entry, through which people experiencing homelessness in the city are prioritized for and matched with permanent housing resources based on their level of need. Without such outreach, many people experiencing unsheltered homelessness would not receive an assessment for housing assistance.

- A *Level 1 response* is for encampments with 10 or more people and aims to connect encampment residents to the low-barrier Pilsen shelter, permanent housing, medical care, and supportive services. During the four or five Level 1 responses that occur each year, DFSS, other city departments, and all five homeless services agencies provide 10 consecutive days of onsite services. Services include coordinated entry assessments, medical care screenings and treatment, mental health and substance use treatment, and transport to other, more specialized treatment. DFSS also provides residents with hygiene kits, access to showers, and bus farecards. DFSS offers all encampment residents the opportunity to enter the Pilsen shelter. All service providers are present for at least the first week of a response but may taper off, depending on the services that residents seem to need and are willing to accept. Residents who do not wish to leave the encampment or engage with services are allowed to remain in the encampment. After a formal encampment response, the DFSS HOP team and Featherfist nighttime outreach team continue to engage the people who remain in the encampment.
- A *Level 2 response* is for encampments of five to nine people. For a Level 2 response, DFSS coordinates with a subset of service agencies—depending on the location and needs of the encampment residents—to provide 2 to 3 days of onsite services. Although the engagements are similar to a Level 1 response, Level 2 responses offer a shorter period of engagement, with fewer service providers on site. DFSS reported activating a Level 2 for communities who may not have the same level of established trust and rapport with the city and may therefore be less likely to engage with service providers or services. DFSS activates approximately 40 Level 2 responses each year. After a Level 2 response, the HOP team and Featherfist nighttime team visit the encampment residents indefinitely but less frequently than for a Level 1 response.

¹ Currently, DFSS conducts citywide counts of encampment residents once a year. Moving forward, DFSS plans to conduct this count twice a year, map where encampments are located across the city, and see how the numbers change seasonally.

- A *Level 3 response* is for encampments with fewer than five people. DFSS considers a Level 3 response to be “business as usual” outreach to small groups of people staying in unsheltered locations. The DFSS HOP team or a service agency visits the encampment to ensure that residents know about available services and to provide referrals and transportation to supportive services. DFSS conducts Level 3 responses every day. Outreach teams increase the frequency of their visits to encampments as residents express interest in assistance and connection with available services.

DFSS plans which encampments will receive a Level 1 response about a year in advance so that it can set priorities for the use of the department’s resources. In addition to considering the size of the encampment, priority is given to encampments that generate more public complaints or complaints from elected officials and to encampments in which outreach workers have developed relationships with residents. Even if an encampment has grown to 10 or more people, DFSS will not activate a Level 1 response before sufficient outreach has been undertaken. A Level 2 response can be extended and, in some sense, become a Level 1 response if the encampment residents are interested in receiving services and are heavily engaging with outreach providers.

For the past few years DFSS has conducted biannual counts in areas of Chicago with the highest density of unsheltered homeless people to validate the number from Chicago’s point-in-time count. DFSS recently completed a citywide scan by neighborhood to identify and triage encampments for Level 1 to 3 responses and to help ensure that all encampment residents are being engaged by outreach teams and connected to available services. Beginning in 2020, DFSS plans to conduct those scans twice a year.

At the start of a Level 1 response, DFSS distributes to the partners a list of the encampment residents the staff know by name, collects paperwork from the other city agencies, and distributes information forms that DFSS uses to track in more detail who receives which services during the response. Two vans are present at a response: the DFSS medical van used by the Heartland medical team and the Salvation Army food van. The Department of Streets and Sanitation usually arrives on the first and last day of an encampment response to clean the area, including confirming that conditions are sanitary and that no hazardous materials are at the site. During the cleanings, DFSS staff ensure that personal possessions are safeguarded and not disposed of.

During each day of an encampment response, DFSS and the service providers conduct coordinated entry assessments and talk to encampment residents about available supportive services, including the low-barrier shelter. Anyone who wants to go to a treatment facility or the low-barrier shelter or who needs to go to the hospital is taken there immediately. After the encampment response, Haymarket provides housing navigation services to encampment residents for whom they conducted coordinated entry assessments and who, as a result, eventually received a referral to some type of housing.

At the end of each encampment response, the DFSS HOP team collects the information forms about the services provided to each encampment resident and writes a report for the DFSS Commissioner. The organizations participating in a response used to meet to debrief after every response, but that practice has become less common because all groups have a firm understanding of their roles.

Steps to activate a Level 1 response

1. The DFSS HOP team sends proposed dates and locations to the DFSS Commissioner for approval. The list may change during the year.
2. DFSS confirms the availability of beds in Pilsen shelter. Franciscan Outreach keeps DFSS informed of the availability of beds.
3. Two weeks before the response, DFSS sends an email to city agencies and homeless services providers confirming their participation and that they have the necessary supplies.
4. The Streets and Sanitation Department posts notices about an upcoming deep cleaning at the encampment 24 hours in advance.

Although a bed in the Pilsen shelter is available for each encampment resident, only one or two Level 1 responses have filled the shelter. Because Pilsen guarantees a one-to-one bed opening for all encampment residents before a Level 1 response, the shelter often has vacant beds during those days. In addition to the location of the shelter, service providers said that encampment residents do not believe they will receive permanent housing after leaving Pilsen, so they do not want to go there temporarily only to move back to an encampment after a few months. According to Pilsen staff, about 50 percent of those who come to the shelter move to a subsidized permanent housing destination. Of the other half, some return to the encampment, some leave without notifying staff of their destination, and some move in with family or friends.

The city has conducted nine Level 1 responses since 2018; so far, they have reduced the size of the encampments only modestly. In the city's most recent Level 1 response, at the Belmont and Kedzie encampment in October 2019, only four of the encampment's 16 residents chose to relocate to the Pilsen shelter, and the other 12 people elected to remain in the encampment. More than 150 residents remained in encampments on Lower Wacker Drive after the city conducted four separate Level 1 encampment responses. After the 75 residents of the encampments under Lake Shore Drive relocated to permanent housing in 2016, new people arrived to take their place. In addition to the formal responses, the city's Department of Streets and Sanitation conducts weekly cleanings of the Lower Wacker Drive encampment. Notices of a cleaning are posted 7 days in advance, and DFSS staff are on site to ensure that personal belongings are safeguarded. The Illinois Department of Transportation is likely to begin participating in cleaning efforts for encampments on its property.

Changes to the homeless system in response to encampments

According to implementation partners, the city's new homeless response approach helped identify gaps in the homeless system overall. Partners recognized the need for more accessible shelter, and DFSS leveraged an existing contract with Franciscan Outreach to open the low-barrier Pilsen shelter. Thus far, Chicago's overall shelter system has not responded to the rise of encampments—either by changing shelter policies or by adding shelter beds, and Pilsen remains the only low-barrier shelter in the city. Implementation partners did not report a capacity issue in any shelter in Chicago, and all partners reported interest in opening another low-barrier shelter in a different area of Chicago; however, securing the special permits needed for that facility and finding available resources to operate another shelter has not been feasible.

Although Chicago's Continuum of Care, All Chicago, does not formally participate in encampment responses, DFSS coordinates with it to ensure that encampment residents can access housing assistance. During formal encampment responses, DFSS and the outreach organizations now assess every interested encampment resident for coordinated entry, and that information is entered into All Chicago's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) as well as into the coordinated entry system. In March 2019, All Chicago changed the protocol for matching people on the coordinated entry by-name list to permanent housing resources by beginning to take the length of time a person has experienced homelessness into account. Any experience of unsheltered homelessness is a tiebreaker. Before that protocol change, many of the most highly vulnerable people who had experienced homelessness the longest were not being housed because the coordinated entry system gave higher priority to the date of their assessment. In addition, permanent supportive housing (PSH) resources in Chicago are now reserved for individuals with a disability who have experienced homelessness for more than 2 years. Encampment implementation partners report that more encampment residents are being matched with permanent housing resources since that change took effect.

Public Response to Encampments

Public reactions

Although encampments are not new in Chicago, many implementation partners reported that encampments are growing and becoming increasingly visible to the public. Some implementation partners reported that they believed that the encampment responses were driven by alderman complaints and local political pressure to make the city seem to be doing something to address encampments. They suggested that the reason many encampment Level 1 responses occur on the northern, more affluent side of Chicago is the high public and political pressure to respond to encampments there.

DFSS stresses that the goal of the city’s encampment response strategy is not to tear down and clear encampments but rather to connect residents to supportive services.

Despite the generally negative public and political reaction to encampments, Chicagoans also support encampment residents by donating supplies, most notably during extreme weather events and around the holiday season. For example, during the polar vortex in 2019—during which Chicago experienced its coldest days in 34 years and temperatures reached -23° F with wind chills dipping below -50° F²—the community provided additional warm clothing, blankets, sleeping bags, cases of water, and other supplies to people living in encampments. An individual rented out an entire hotel for residents of an encampment.

State laws and city codes

Chicago’s response to encampments is shaped by Illinois law and the City of Chicago code.

Illinois Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act: In 2013, the state of Illinois enacted the Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act. This law ensures that people experiencing homelessness can “use and move freely in public spaces, including but not limited to public sidewalks, public parks, public transportation, and public buildings, in the same manner as any other person without discrimination on the basis of his or her housing status.”³

Storage of Goods on Public Ways: Chicago’s municipal code restricts the use of public rights-of-way for personal use. The code says that “no person shall use any public way for the storage of personal property, goods, wares or merchandise of any kind. Nor shall any person place or cause to be placed in or upon any public way, any barrel, box, hogshead, crate, package or other obstruction of any kind, or permit the same to remain thereon longer than is necessary to convey such article to or from the premises abutting on such sidewalk.”⁴

Support for Residents of Encampments

Although encampment responses are typically driven by negative public or political reactions, the Belmont and Kedzie encampment has the firm support of its two local aldermen. The encampment is located on fenced-in property underneath a highway, and an alderman gave them a lock and key so the residents can control their space. On the first day of the encampment response at Belmont and Kedzie, the aldermen showed up to voice their support for the encampment and make sure that residents were not displaced if they did not want to leave.

² <https://www.weather.gov/lot/RecordColdJan2019>

³ <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=3517&ChapterID=64>

⁴ [http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Illinois/chicago_il/title10streetspublicwaysparksairportsand/chapter10-28structuresonandunderpublicwa?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0\\$vid=amlegal:chicago_il\\$anc=JD_10-28-070](http://library.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Illinois/chicago_il/title10streetspublicwaysparksairportsand/chapter10-28structuresonandunderpublicwa?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:chicago_il$anc=JD_10-28-070)

In 2015, a group of people living in the Lower Wacker Drive encampment sued the city after their tents and other personal possessions were removed. Their settlement, known as the Bryant Agreement, outlines the city’s off-street weekly cleaning schedule for the Lower Wacker Drive encampment, as well as periodic deep cleanings. It also defines the “portable personal possessions” that encampment residents are allowed to keep.⁵ Although the Bryant agreement expired in December 2019, the city does not plan to change its approach for responding to encampments.

⁵ Bryant Settlement Agreement and Release.

https://law.alumni.northwestern.edu/s/1479/images/gid4/editor_documents/bryant_settlement_agreement.pdf?gid=4&pgid=61&sessionid=434fe0a9-6549-42dd-b396-aa60de03a1de&cc=1.

Encampment Costs in Chicago

This section summarizes the costs associated with the city’s response, including overall spending, spending across stakeholders, spending by type of activity, and spending by source of funding.⁶ Chicago expends significant resources to implement the city’s encampment response, even though it does not include the cost of expanding the supply of permanent and deeply affordable housing.

Overall spending

Based on the data we collected, we estimate that the total cost of Chicago’s encampment response for one year⁷ was \$3.6 million (in 2019 dollars). To put that in context, the expenditure amounted to \$1.31 per resident of Chicago and \$2,835 per unsheltered person in HUD’s 2019 point-in-time (PIT) count (see Exhibit 1). This is *not* the cost per encampment resident, as the unsheltered count includes people staying by themselves rather than in groups or in locations with tents or other structures.

The total cost estimates include the cost of operating the Pilsen low-barrier shelter, which specifically serves people leaving encampment settings.⁸ It does not include the cost of stays for encampment residents at other shelters in Chicago. This total cost also does not include costs associated with housing interventions to which encampment residents may be referred, beyond the costs of outreach and housing navigation.

Exhibit 1. Total estimated spending on Chicago’s encampment response in FY 2019

Total spending on encampment activities	Population of Chicago	Cost per capita	Unsheltered homeless per 2019 PIT	Cost per unsheltered homeless in 2019 PIT
\$ 3,571,938	2,716,450	\$1.31	1,260	\$2,835

Spending by encampment response activity

This estimate includes outreach, housing navigation,⁹ operating the Pilsen low-barrier shelter, health care for encampment residents, and encampment services and supports. No data on the costs of police responses to disturbances at encampments were available, so those costs are not included. We did,

⁶ For details on the methodology used to gather and analyze these costs, please see the methodology discussion in Appendix A of the study’s final report, *City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost*.

⁷ The City of Chicago’s FY 2019 was from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019. Cost data were collected in November 2019, so some data were estimated through the end of 2019 based on partial 2019 data. Most of Chicago’s stakeholders reported data for the same period. A few stakeholders reported data from slightly different periods. In all cases, we have included costs for only the most recent year available.

⁸ No cash costs were reported for starting up the Pilsen shelter because the homeless service provider that operates the shelter reopened a building that had previously been used as a shelter and still had all the equipment in place. Supplies needed to open the shelter were all donated, including items such as bunk beds, mattresses, computers, furniture for the office and community area, kitchen equipment, and food.

⁹ Housing navigation is shown separately from outreach because specific organizations and people are designated for this work and because it is a fairly significant cost in Chicago.

however, estimate costs for the Chicago Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Team¹⁰ and encampment-related costs from the Department of Streets and Sanitation, which conducts the city’s encampment cleanups and empties city-provided dumpsters weekly at two encampments.¹¹

Of the roughly \$3.6 million in reported spending on responding to encampments, about \$3.1 million was for labor and roughly \$500,000 was for nonlabor costs (Exhibit 2). Labor costs were primarily associated with staff and contractors conducting outreach and engagement, housing navigation, and operating the low-barrier shelter.¹² Outreach and engagement costs are reported separately for O’Hare Airport encampment efforts and more traditional encampments because O’Hare is unique, and efforts there constitute a large share of costs in Chicago.

Nonlabor costs included the costs of vehicle operation and maintenance, food and related supplies, medical supplies, hygiene kits, and clothing for encampment residents and facility expenses for the low-barrier shelter.

Exhibit 2. Total estimated spending on responding to encampments in FY 2019

	Labor	Nonlabor Costs	Total
Outreach and engagement	\$ 695,397	\$ 336,284	\$ 1,031,681
Homeless Outreach Team	\$ 931,104	-	\$ 931,104
O’Hare Airport outreach	\$ 607,016	\$ 42,984	\$ 650,000
Housing navigation	\$ 415,729	\$ 13,081	\$ 428,810
Low-barrier shelter	\$ 212,316	\$ 84,663	\$ 296,979
Encampment cleanups	\$ 140,000	-	\$ 140,000
Encampment supports	\$ 22,869	\$ 37,195	\$ 60,064
Provision of health care to encampment residents	\$ 29,970	\$ 3,330	\$ 33,300
Financial assistance	\$ 7,000	-	\$ 7,000
Total	\$ 3,054,401	\$ 517,537	\$ 3,571,938

Outreach and engagement accounted for the largest share of spending (Exhibit 3). Together, outreach at O’Hare and at more traditional encampments made up 37 percent of reported expenditures. The Homeless Outreach Team accounted for the next-largest share of spending, at 26 percent of the total. Housing navigation—which could also be considered a type of outreach—represented 12 percent of total spending. This was followed by the costs of operating the Pilsen low-barrier shelter (8 percent). The city expended relatively minimal resources on the remaining categories of encampment-response activities. Encampment services/supports, which include mobile feeding services and food for encampment

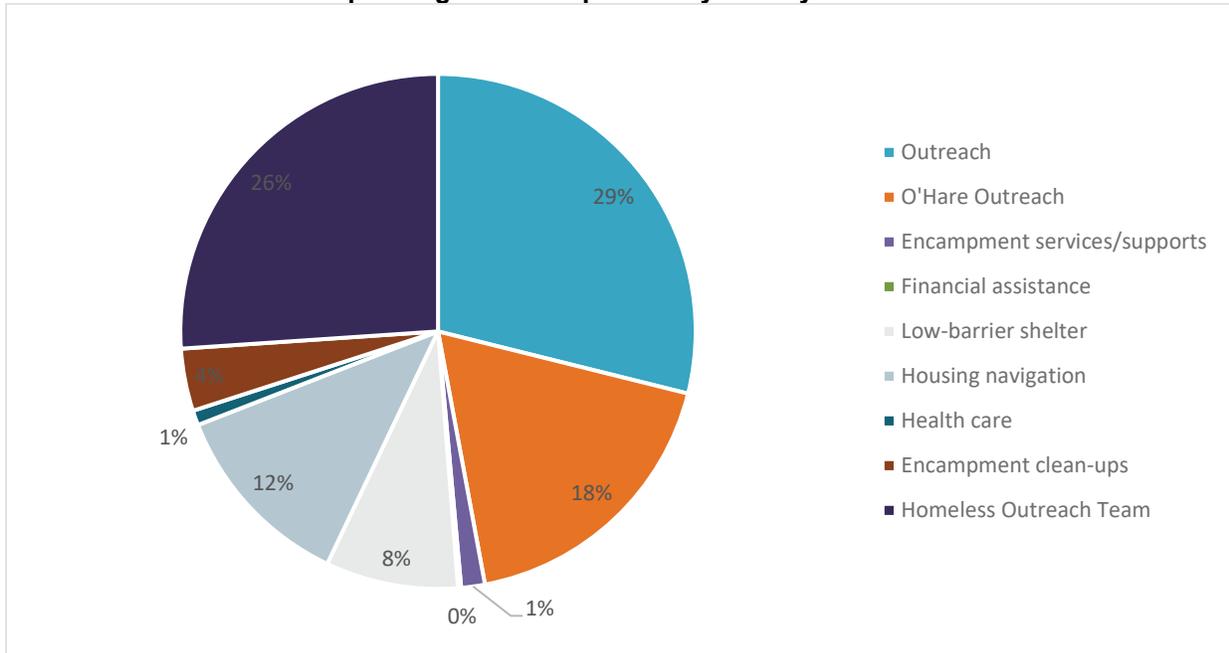
¹⁰ On the basis of information from Chicago DFSS staff members and other sources, we estimate that the HOT consists of two teams with four officers per team. We applied this level of staffing to estimated salary and benefits for a relatively new officer. Because we used salaries at the low end of the pay scale, actual costs could be substantially higher depending on the seniority of the officers on the HOT.

¹¹ Four Level 1 responses to encampments took place over the course of 12 months (September 2018 through August 2019). On the basis of costs reported by other cities for a large encampment cleanup, we estimate that each response involved about \$35,000 in cleanup costs. We did not assume any other costs for the Department of Streets and Sanitation. If the department is involved in Level 2 and Level 3 responses, then encampment cleanup costs could be substantially higher.

¹² The value of meals donated to encampments is not included; those data were not available.

residents, made up 1 percent of spending. City-funded health care provided to encampment residents on site was also 1 percent. Financial assistance to encampment residents, in the form of bus passes, was less than 1 percent.

Exhibit 3. Total estimated spending on encampments by activity in FY 2019



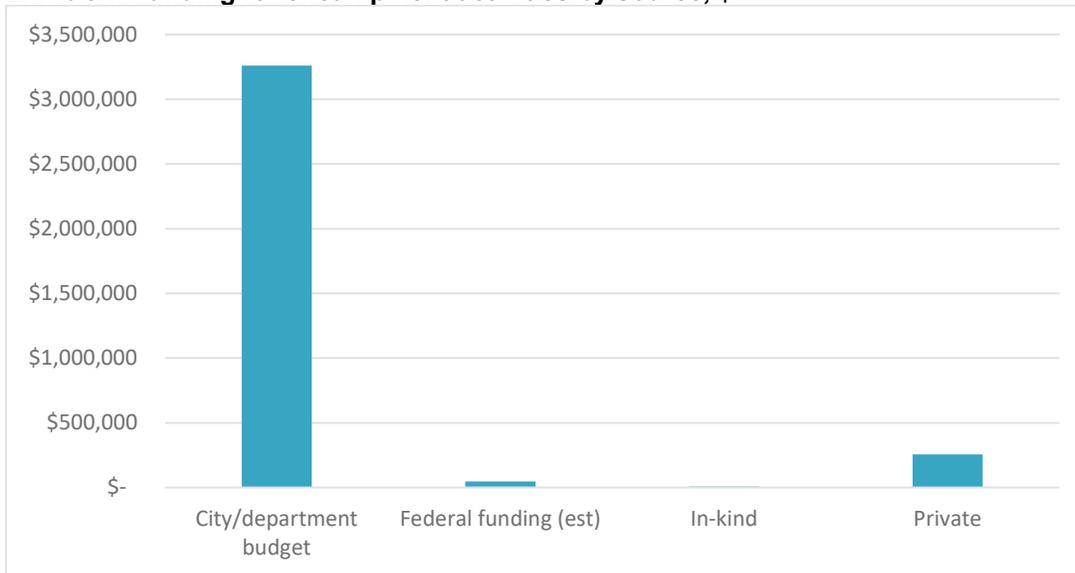
Activities by implementation partners

At least 11 different organizations participated in Chicago’s response to encampments during FY 2019, either as implementers or funders. Those organizations included city departments (the Department of Family and Support Services [DFSS], the Chicago Police Department, the Department of Streets and Sanitation, and the Chicago Department of Aviation, which funded the O’Hare outreach) and seven homeless services providers. City departments incurred about 35 percent of the expenses related to encampment activities, at about \$1.3 million. Homeless services providers incurred the remaining 65 percent of expenditures (about \$2.3 million). The participating implementation partners in Chicago’s encampment response were not necessarily the same entities that funded these efforts (costs by funder are shown in Exhibit 4).

Funding for encampment activities

Exhibit 4 shows funding for encampment activities by funding source. Although the City of Chicago did not directly conduct most encampment-related activities, it is by far the largest funder of the encampment response, spending almost \$3.3 million, or about 91 percent of the total. Another 7 percent of funding came from private cash donations. A small number of in-kind donations were reported (amounting to less than 1 percent); they included supplies, furniture, dishes, and food for the low-barrier shelter. The remaining 1 percent of funding came from the federal government in programs allocated through the city government.

Exhibit 4. Funding for encampment activities by source, \$



Estimating emergency medical response costs

We were not able to collect data from the Chicago Fire Department on the costs of responses to emergency calls from encampments. Costs per response in Chicago average almost \$500, but we have no information on how many times the Chicago Fire Department responded to a call. To provide some insight into what that cost might be, we estimated the number of calls based on data from Houston and San Jose. In San Jose, which has the largest per-capita unsheltered population of the four sites, nearly 6 percent of all EMS responses are to encampments. In Houston, where a far smaller percentage of the population is unsheltered, the share of calls to encampments is less than 1 percent. To estimate costs for the City of Chicago, we averaged those two rates, for a cost of about \$2.7 million.

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