

FAQ: State of Emergency on Homelessness

The City of Seattle, like many other cities across the country, is facing a homelessness crisis. The region's current needs outweigh shelter capacity, leaving too many seniors, families and individuals sleeping on the street. More than 45 individuals have died while homeless on Seattle streets in 2015 alone. The 2015 One Night Count found 3,772 individuals living outside and unsheltered in King County, a 21 percent increase over 2014. Youth homelessness is also growing rapidly, our Seattle classrooms have nearly 3,000 students without stable housing or shelter.

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Why are you declaring a state of emergency and what exactly does this entail?

By declaring a state of emergency on homelessness, the City will have more administrative authority and flexibility in contracting for services and allocating resources in response to the homelessness crisis. With this authority, the City is able to deploy critical resources more quickly to those in need, including specific action to address Seattle schoolchildren experiencing homelessness. The City will also call on state and federal partners to intervene and provide additional investments in the support systems that have been defunded or simply underfunded to meet the growing level of need. Addressing this crisis requires all levels of government to come together and find solutions. Simply allocating additional City resources will not produce the long-term solutions we need. As we work to assess and measure our local crisis, and outline next steps, we will continue to strengthen our ability to seamlessly work with our regional, state, and federal partners.

How will this one-time investment of \$5 million be allocated?

Mayor Murray and the Seattle City Council will invest new one-time funding for homelessness crisis intervention and prevention services. This investment will include, but will not be limited to:

- Flexible funds to quickly move people through the emergency shelter system into stable housing so that their experience is rare, brief, and one-time (i.e., diversion, rapid rehousing, mediation, security or utility deposits, utility or rent payments, moving cost assistance, and transportation assistance);
- Outreach for health and safety services to individuals living outside and in vehicles, including sanitation services and hazardous material containers and removal;
- Operational dollars to support a mobile van that will provide behavioral health services to people living in unauthorized encampments;
- Resources to support additional capacity for data collection and analysis that will strengthen our ability to benchmark and track success, and ensure delivery of quality, effective services;
- A Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT) that will provide on-the-ground response, including mental health and substance abuse services, for people living unsheltered in encampments; and
- 100 new shelter beds to address gaps in continuum (i.e., people with pets, couples, etc.).

How many new shelter beds will this funding provide?

This new funding will provide 100 new shelter beds. The City of Seattle currently funds 1,600 shelter beds, with 100 additional beds already scheduled to open in Uptown. This is in addition to the three newly authorized transitional tent encampments that will serve up to 300 individuals.

How is the City paying for this new investment?

The \$5 million investment is funded from the proceeds of the sale of excess property located on Myers Way South.

How is the City working with state and federal governments to address this issue?

Seattle cannot address the homelessness crisis alone. Long-term solutions require commitments and support from our state and federal government partners. The Mayor has been working with King County, Washington state, and the federal government on ways in which we can jointly address this crisis. The City is asking our partners to extend and increase their support to provide immediate and long-term assistance, including:

Washington State

- **Allocate additional resources** for mental health and substance abuse disorder treatment;
- **Set Medicaid rates for inpatient treatment** at an amount that is sufficient to provide effective treatment;
- **Identify state-owned property** to host authorized encampments, vehicle parking, emergency shelter, and housing;
- **Allocate intervention and other resources** to address the public health and safety crisis associated with unauthorized encampments on state property along I-5, I-90, and SR-99, including implementing physical changes to those areas to minimize ongoing and long-term public health and safety risks.
- **Increase the amount and expand allowable support services** in the Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG), including Housing and Essential Needs Program and stabilize funding for CHG;
- **Restore the Housing Trust Fund (HTF)** to pre-recession levels; and
- **Authorize additional financing tools** to expand affordable housing and ensure affordability and protections for tenants.

Federal

- **Increase affordable housing**, including capital and operating funding for permanent housing for the homeless and extremely low-income residents, and rental assistance and voucher programs;
- **Increase funding for homeless support services** for all populations, including funding for mental and behavioral health, chemical dependency, employment and family support services;
- **Extend the terms of the existing Moving to Work** agreements with public housing authorities to allow for a continuance of critical flexibility to meet local and unique housing and supportive service needs; and
- **Approve Washington's Medicaid waiver request**, which includes creating a supportive housing benefit that would allow the use of Medicaid funds to pay for support services delivered in permanent supportive housing.

How much money was allocated to homelessness support services prior to declaring a state of emergency and why do we need to spend more?

The City of Seattle invests more than \$40 million in homelessness services annually, yet the problem remains so large that the number of our neighbors lacking access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is unacceptably high. We have seen a drastic increase in the number of people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, including single adults, youth, families, domestic violence survivors, older adults, and veterans. Current homelessness support services spending is broken into three categories:

- **Intervention services** – emergency shelter, transitional housing, meal programs, etc.;
- **Permanent housing** – permanent and transitional homes for homeless families and individuals in our community (a total of 4,346 to date), and beds in supportive housing or other supportive services; and
- **Prevention** – rental assistance, eviction prevention, housing stability services for seniors, etc.

Since taking office, Mayor Ed Murray has added nearly \$3 million in homelessness services funding, including investments for 24-hour shelter services, new youth shelter space on Capitol Hill, a shelter for families and children in North Seattle, a new shelter on City-owned property in Uptown, day and hygiene centers, and rapid rehousing. Collectively, the King County region spends \$180 million to serve families and individuals at-risk of or experiencing homelessness – providing 8,337 units of permanent housing countywide.

What are we doing to help people exit homelessness?

The causes of homelessness are complex and the City invests in a broad array of support services to meet the diverse needs of individuals and families. City-funded support services include, but are not limited to: progressive case management, housing search and navigation, employment assistance services, rapid rehousing programs, and permanent supportive housing programs. Additionally, the City invests in emergency shelter to help people in times of crisis exit homelessness by offering a safe place to stay.

What kind of funding is available for families experiencing homelessness?

The City invests approximately \$6.5 million annually to support families with children experiencing homelessness. We do this through investments in emergency shelter, transitional housing, day and hygiene services, diversion programs, rapid rehousing, and permanent housing. Families at risk of homelessness can also access our homelessness prevention and rental assistance programs.

What is being done about unauthorized encampments on public property?

The City and state are piloting a new approach to provide more outreach and support services, and a faster response to unauthorized homeless encampments on public property. The new Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Teams (MDOT) will ensure that services are available to all encampment residents who will accept them. The City will also more quickly address encampment sites that pose an inherent risk to encampment residents because of their location (e.g., next to a freeway or on busy streets), or are a public health risk due to accumulation of hazardous material and debris. In these circumstances, we will deploy outreach workers, medical professionals, crisis-certified Seattle police officers, and clean-up crews to quickly respond and connect individuals at these sites to shelter and services.

What is being done about car camping?

Seattle has seen a dramatic growth in vehicular residency in the past five years. There are an estimated 776 people living in their cars in Seattle and King County, according to the 2015 One Night Count.

The City has continued to make dedicated resources available for the Road to Housing program, which provides outreach and navigation services to people living in vehicles with the goal of transitioning them into a permanent home. Building on the Road to Housing program, the City is asking our county and state partners to identify public property that could be used for vehicle camping in the short-term and how we can direct supportive services to these locations.

Additionally, when the new Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Teams (MDOT) are fully operational, they will connect vehicle residents with outreach, services, medical care, and alternative options for shelter. Where there are reports of significant criminal activity or public health issues, the MDOT will have the ability to respond to unsafe vehicle encampment sites.

How do I report a problem encampment site?

Seattle's Customer Service Bureau (CSB) works with city, county, and state agencies to coordinate unauthorized encampment response. Please report unauthorized encampment sites to CSB at 206-684-2489 or online at <http://www.seattle.gov/customer-service-bureau>. CSB will coordinate cleanup and outreach services with the appropriate agency.

What can community members do to help?

Addressing homelessness requires the shared commitment, responsibility, and compassion of all of us. Everyone can get involved by donating time, money, and other resources. To find out how you can help in Seattle and King County, visit <http://allhomekc.org/get-involved/>.