



Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness

Statement on Encampments

Ending homelessness means people are housed in healthy, safe environments, and protected from the elements and unsanitary and other potentially life-threatening conditions. The Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness, which operates as the regional Continuum of Care (CoC), supports solutions to ending homelessness using a housing first approach. The CoC's strategic priorities are to increase access to permanent housing resources, reduce the number of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and decrease the overall average length of time a person is homeless. The CoC understands limited housing resources, including limits on emergency shelter space, and systemic and situational barriers may lead to the establishment of, or increase in, encampments. There are various reasons a person may stay in an encampment, and the CoC supports an individual's choice in determining solutions to ending their homelessness.

Health and safety concerns may arise at an encampment that pose significant risks to individuals and the community when unsanitary and blighting conditions exist. The CoC works to connect individuals experiencing homelessness, including those staying in encampments, to housing resources through coordinated, trauma-informed engagement, care, and referral services. This is done in partnership with agencies that conduct street outreach with persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Street outreach staff build relationships and rapport with unsheltered individuals in an effort to better meet their unique needs. Outreach providers engage closely with community partners and systems to ensure unsheltered individuals are prioritized for housing resources as they become available, while developing individualized housing plans to facilitate long-term housing stability.

The CoC is committed to actively engaging with area municipalities to respond to the needs of persons living in encampments. The CoC stands ready to partner with municipalities to provide its expertise in trauma-informed care, leveraging connections to persons with lived homeless experience, and providing safe, timely, appropriate, and community resource-affiliated engagement and referral services for persons experiencing homelessness before the clearance and closure of an encampment.

The CoC serves as a bridge between our neighbors experiencing homelessness and local municipal public safety services, social service providers, and health agencies to support continuation of services to homeless individuals, safeguard established relationships, and ensure services are not paused or severed due to displacement.