

OAKLAND, CA
Mayor Libby Schaaf

Responding to Homelessness in Oakland

Homelessness is considered the most pressing issue in the city of Oakland. Between 2015-17, the homeless population grew by over 25 percent, jumping from 2,191 in 2015 to 2,761 in January 2017. California now accounts for 25 percent of the nation's homeless population and just under 70 percent of those who are living unsheltered in the U.S. Skyrocketing housing costs, a housing inventory deficit, and a decrease in state and federal funding for housing are contributing forces.

In the past decade, the Bay Area region, including cities like Oakland, San Francisco, San Jose, Marin County and the Silicon Valley, added one unit of housing for every eight jobs created, and very little of the housing built was subsidized sufficiently to help the people who needed it most. Meanwhile, as the homeless population has risen in local jurisdictions, the federal government has decreased its financial support for emergency shelter strategies and, in 2011, state government eliminated redevelopment area tax increment funding – the primary funding source cities used to build affordable housing. The trickle-down impact of this crisis is that West Coast cities are currently facing an encampment crisis. The City of Oakland is working to solve it in a unique way.

Encampment Management Team

One of the City's first steps was to create an inter-departmental encampment management team (EMT) that includes a representative from every City department that is involved in encampment response; included are Human Services, Public Works, Police, Fire, Transportation, City Administration and representation from County Environmental Health. The EMT meets bi-weekly to develop and evaluate strategies related to homeless encampments with a holistic approach. It's also bringing together corporate and philanthropic partners, including leaders in the health care sector, who understand that housing is central to a person's health and well-being. As the crisis began to escalate over the past two years, two unique strategies were launched.

Community Cabin Program

A rapid response emergency intervention aimed at getting people off the street, into services, and on a path to permanent housing, the Community Cabin pilot program, launched in 2018, has proven to be an effective and compassionate intervention focused on increasing homeless people's health, stability, dignity, and safety. With service providers intensively working with the people to help end their unsheltered status, a 68 percent positive outcome rate has been experienced to date. Each Cabin Community serves up to 40 homeless people at a location at one time and about 80 people annually. These short-term sites lasting only 12-18 months in any one location. Once the outdoor shelter opens in an area, a "no camping" zone is enforced in the surrounding area – a concept that has proven crucial to garnering neighborhood support, rather than opposition.

Oakland now has a total of three cabin communities with four more on the way, and one that has already wrapped up successfully after 12 months of operation. Each includes:

- 20 cabins (two people per unit);
- Basic hygiene services such as porta-potties, hand-washing stations, access to mobile shower facilities and routine garbage service;
- 24/7 site security, ability to have pets, and limited storage for possessions;

- Two meals a day (breakfast and dinner);
- Counseling services, e.g., housing navigation and linkage to health, mental health, and addiction recovery service.

Private donations covered much of the initial infrastructure costs of getting three managed sites up and running in 2018 and the Oakland City Council has voted to approve public funding to support three additional sites in areas where encampments were proving harmful for those residing in them and housed in the surrounding area. Of the more than 200 formerly homeless people who have opted to enter the first three cabin communities, 70 percent have successfully transitioned into permanent housing. Once the additional four cabin community sites open, Oakland will have capacity to provide emergency shelter and services to up to 320 people per year.

Keep Oakland Housed

Oakland's second strategy is a three-prong emergency approach which provides residents with legal representation, flexible emergency financial assistance, and supportive services to help them remain in their homes. While the City was focusing on rapid re-housing and services for the already-homeless, the number of unsheltered people kept growing. To reduce the inflow of people to the streets, a coalition of community partners and funders, including Kaiser Permanente, the San Francisco Foundation in partnership with the City of Oakland and various nonprofits launched Keep Oakland Housed (KOH) to prevent residents from losing their housing.

In 2018, the San Francisco Foundation, with a major contribution from Kaiser Permanente, provided \$9 million in funding to launch KOH. Subsequently, more than \$3 million more has been raised. In partnership with the City of Oakland, KOH will be implemented by three nonprofit agencies – Bay Area Community Services, Catholic Charities of the East Bay, and East Bay Community Law Center. Services will include emergency financial assistance, legal representation for those facing eviction, and housing/case management services. (More information is available at KeepOaklandHoused.org.) Oakland residents obtain information about KOH's critical emergency services by calling the Alameda County homelessness referral line (211), by accessing the online site, and through multilingual materials that are distributed by each partner agency. Services are available to all Oakland residents having a household income at or below 50 percent of the area median income who are experiencing a housing crisis, with priority given to extremely low-income households. Legal representation is provided to tenants with an active eviction lawsuit.

The KOH coordinators have partnered with Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a formal evaluation of the program's performance. What is known now is that, from July through December 2018, KOH provided legal and financial help to 473 households at risk of eviction, allowing them to keep their homes, get an extension before moving out, or secure money for relocation.

Additional information is available from Joanne Karchmer, Deputy Chief of Staff/Legislative Director, Office of Mayor Libby Schaaf, at JKarchmer@oaklandca.gov or 510-238-7439.