

Encampment Sweeps & Street Medicine: Reducing Harm, Protecting Health

Mar. 4, 2025



USC Street Medicine



Agenda

- 1 Introduction & Background**
- 2 The Practice Guide**
- 3 Reflections & Lessons Learned**
- 4 Q & A**

Our Panelists

Kyle Patton, MD, Shasta Community Health Centre



M.K. Orsulak, MD, MPH, UC Davis Department of Family & Community Medicine



Emma Lo, MD, Yale School of Medicine



John Culich, The Village Initiative & Care Beyond the Boulevard



Kaitlin Schwan, PhD, California Street Medicine Collaborative & USC Street Medicine



Why did we write this report?

FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT

GLORIA JOHNSON; JOHN LOGAN,
individuals, on behalf of themselves
and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

CITY OF GRANTS PASS,

Defendant-Appellant.

Nos. 20-35752
20-35881

D.C. No. 1:18-
cv-01823-CL

ORDER AND
AMENDED
OPINION

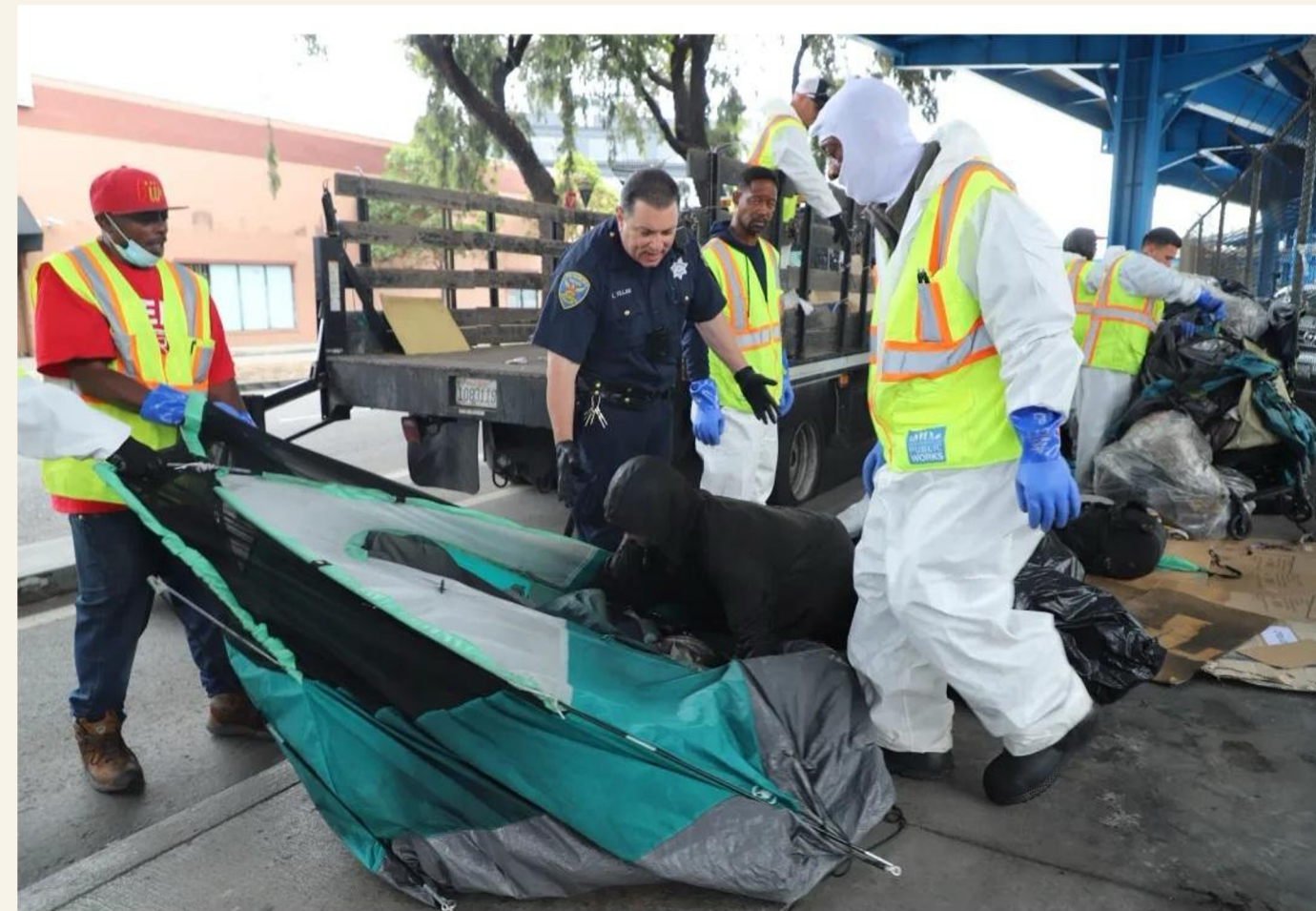
Appeal from the United States District Court
for the District of Oregon
Mark D. Clarke, Magistrate Judge, Presiding

Argued and Submitted December 6, 2021
San Francisco, California

Filed September 28, 2022
Amended July 5, 2023

Before: Ronald M. Gould and Daniel P. Collins, Circuit
Judges, and Roslyn O. Silver,* District Judge.

* The Honorable Roslyn O. Silver, United States District Judge for the
District of Arizona, sitting by designation.



San Francisco officials remove a homeless person's
tent and belongings July 20 as "aggressive" sweeps
begin. | Justin Katigbak/The Standard

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

EXECUTIVE ORDER N-1-24

WHEREAS California is experiencing a homelessness crisis decades in the making, with over 180,000 people estimated to have experienced homelessness on any given night in 2023, including 123,000 people who experienced unsheltered homelessness, living in tents, trailers, and vehicles across the state; and

WHEREAS within the first year of my Administration I fast-tracked the development of shelter through Executive Order N-23-20, which directed departments to assess and facilitate the use of available state land and resources for short-term emergency homeless shelters; and

WHEREAS since the beginning of my Administration, the State has made unprecedented investments to address the homelessness crisis head on, investing more than \$24 billion across multiple state agencies and departments, including \$4.85 billion in flexible funding to local jurisdictions to prevent and reduce homelessness through Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention grants, \$1 billion in Encampment Resolution Funding to assist local jurisdictions in providing services and supports to people living in encampments, and \$3.3 billion to rapidly expand housing for persons experiencing homelessness through Homekey; and

WHEREAS the State has redoubled its commitment to holding local jurisdictions accountable to reduce homelessness, including by strengthening and enforcing requirements that local jurisdictions plan for their fair share of housing and by conditioning state homelessness funding on rigorous reporting and measurable performance metrics; and

WHEREAS it is imperative to act with urgency to address dangerous encampments, which subject unsheltered individuals living in them to extreme weather, fires, predatory and criminal activity, and widespread substance use, harming their health, safety, and well-being, and which also threaten the safety and viability of nearby businesses and neighborhoods and undermine the cleanliness and usability of parks, water supplies, and other public resources; and

WHEREAS while every jurisdiction must do more to address encampments, state and local agencies taking proactive steps to remove encampments have been stymied in those efforts by lawsuits and injunctions, leaving officials without the tools or guidance necessary to address the crisis on their streets; and

WHEREAS in September 2023, I called on the United States Supreme Court to grant review in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* to clarify that state and local officials can take reasonable actions to resolve encampments while respecting the humanity of all Californians; and

WHEREAS in June 2024 the Supreme Court overturned Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals precedent that restricted the government's authority to enforce laws regulating encampments, recognizing that jurisdictions may tailor their enforcement practices to reflect policy-driven approaches to addressing homelessness; and

WHEREAS with the threat of these types of injunctions removed, there is no longer any barrier to local governments utilizing the substantial resources

Our Methodology

- **World Café Method** - Community consultation with 250+ street medicine practitioners, lived experts, & allied professionals
- **11 Key Informant Interviews**
- **Scoping Literature Review**



NEW

Encampments Practice Guide



MITIGATING THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF ENCAMPMENT SWEEPS IN CALIFORNIA:

A PRACTICE GUIDE FOR STREET MEDICINE

FEBRUARY 2025

Kaitlin Schwan, PhD; Kyle Patton, M.D.; Catherine Weaver, M.D.;
Brian Zunner-Keating, MS, RN; Brett Feldman, PA-C; Daphne Achilles;
M.K. Orsulak, M.D.; Matthew Beare, M.D.; Corinne T. Feldman, PA-C &
Katherine Pocock, MHS, PA-C



USC Street Medicine



Street Medicine Pocket Guide

Protecting health during
encampment sweeps



Before Sweeps

1. Educate patients about street sweeps, what they can expect, & their rights.
2. Proactively develop a relocation plan with patients.
3. Plan for loss of communication.
4. Provide tools to protect critical documents, medications, & other essential resources.
5. Develop “sweep-resilient” medical treatment plans.
6. Increase harm reduction efforts.
7. Provide more basic necessities.
8. Establish communication with relevant authorities to stay informed & advocate for trauma-informed approaches.

During Sweeps - Key Considerations

1. Presence or non-presence during sweeps
2. Engaging (or not) with law enforcement and officials
3. Advocacy for patients: when and how?
4. Providing medical & mental health support
5. Logistical support: to what extent?

After Sweeps

1. Locate displaced patients as quickly as possible.
2. Replenish critical survival supplies, including medications & harm reduction supplies.
3. Reestablish medical treatment plans & replace lost medications.
4. Re-establish trust & support patients to process trauma and grief.

NEW

Encampments Pocket Guide



Street Medicine Pocket Guide

Protecting health during encampment sweeps



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After Sweeps

1. Locate displaced patients as quickly as possible.
2. Replenish critical survival supplies, including food, water, & harm reduction supplies.
3. Reestablish medical treatment plans & replace lost medications.
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Health Consequence

1. Loss of Personal Belongings Critical to Survival



Medications



IDs + Vital Documents



Survival Supplies



Phones

“If you want to design an epidemic, repeatedly taking medications away from an entire vulnerable population would be an ideal way to start.”

– Dr. Ricky Bluthenthal, 2024 6th Annual California Street Medicine Symposium

Strategies for Care

1. Loss of Personal Belongings Critical to Survival

- Assessing access and the provision of basic need items (ie. food, water, tarps)
- Storage of medications and critical documents
- Developing “street-resilient” treatment plans



Health Consequence

2. Increased Health Risks & Disruption of Care



Exacerbation of Health Challenges



Disrupted Care Continuity



Environmental Hazards



Extreme Weather



Strategies for Care

2. Increased Health Risks & Disruption of Care

- Maintain communication with relevant authorities and stay informed about upcoming sweeps.
- Proactively develop a relocation plan with patients.
 - Triage vulnerability
 - Problem solve relocation and assess safety
 - Plan for loss of communication
- Located displaced patients
 - Expand and adapt outreach efforts
 - Increase internal and interagency communication
 - Utilize fixed sites and establish communication lines to SM teams



Health Consequence

3. Disruption of Community and Vulnerability to Violence



Heightened Vulnerability to Violence



Loss of Pets



Alienation & Dehumanization



Health Care and Housing Engagement Difficulty



Strategies for Care

3. Disruption of Community and Vulnerability to Violence

- Assess and predetermine the role of street medicine on the day of a sweep
- Identify and mitigate acute crisis
- Avoid unfulfilled promises



Strategies for Care

Pets & Sweeps

- Include animal supplies (ie food, collars/leashes) in distributed items
- Problem solve shelter solutions with animals in mind
- Support patients in navigating the animal shelter system

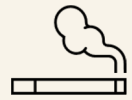


Health Consequence

4. Trauma and Escalation of Mental Health and Substance Use Challenges



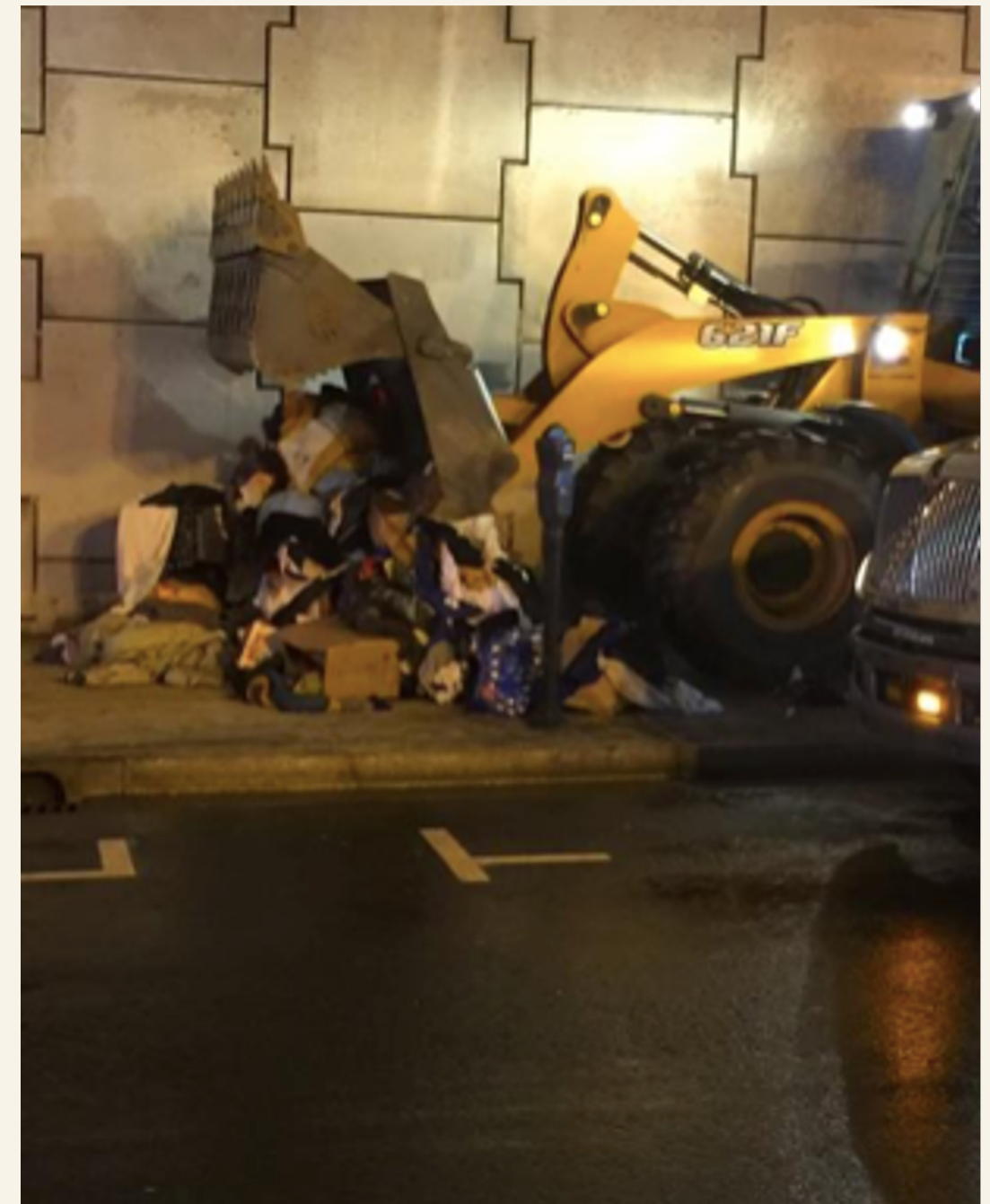
Psychological Trauma and Mental Health Decline



Exacerbation of Substance Use



Undermining Housing and Service Efforts



Strategies for Care

4. Trauma and Escalation of Mental Health and Substance Use Challenges

- Advocate for trauma informed approaches
- Increase harm reduction education and safe use material distribution
- Maintain positive regards and provide emotional support

DECAMPMENT REPORT CARD

Based on National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada

This tool is for tent city residents to grade the government's decampment plan. Assign a grade to each question; then decide on the overall grade at the end. Bullet points are to assist you in grading, but you are welcome to consider other factors. A final "Report Card" will be issued to government actors after answers have been collected. For questions concerning this tool see the bottom of the back page.

Are the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples being respected?

A B C D E F

- Officials recognize Indigenous peoples' right to create and organize shelter and housing in ways that incorporate their lived histories, cultures and experiences.
- Officials are genuinely working with Indigenous residents to find appropriate, culturally-safe, long-term housing, and do not force people into housing via eviction from encampment.
- Officials consult with Indigenous encampment residents to get informed consent before making any decisions, including eviction.
- Police are not present when officials engage with Indigenous encampment residents.
- Officials recognize that Indigenous peoples have high rates of homelessness and poverty.

Is there meaningful engagement with and leadership by encampment residents?

A B C D E F

- Officials engage in ongoing and meaningful engagement with residents that act as resident leaders.
- Encampment leaders are empowered to make decisions about actions that affect them, including through resident-led meetings and processes.

- Residents are given enough time to consider information provided by government and to give their direction.
- There is a clear resident-approved process to challenge decisions, propose alternatives, and articulated demands and priorities.
- Officials ensure resources are available to support full participation in decision-making, including Indigenous cultural supports, literacy supports, translation, mobility supports, PPE, food, and access to information.
- Residents are provided with independent legal advice, information concerning human rights, and the specific rights of Indigenous peoples.


Are there prohibitions of forced evictions of encampments?

A B C D E F

- Officials have declared an end to all forced evictions and ban harassment, intimidation, or threatening of people living outside, which includes ensuring police, fire services, bylaw officers, and other agents of the state only engage and respond using a trauma informed, culturally safe and harm-reduction approach.
- Officials supply access to safe drinking water hygiene sanitation, food, harm reduction supplies, waste management, electricity and heat.
- Government actors protect and respect belongings and privacy, including personal property and tents.


Reestablishing Treatment & Care

- Reassess and modify treatment based on pt's current lived environment
 - HOUSED BEDS tool
- Reinitiate meds and reschedule missed appointments
- Reconnect with services (ie. housing, food, healthcare)



HOUSED BEDS
Taking a history on a person experiencing unsheltered homelessness

H Homelessness history
O Outreach engagement
U Utilization
S Salary/income
E Eat
D Drink
B Bathroom
E Encampment
D Daily routine
S Substance use



Health Consequence

5. Loss of Life

Sweeps are harmful and contribute to early death.

- **Mortality rates** for people living in shelters are **10x** than those of housed individuals.
- Unsheltered individuals face an even greater risk, with mortality rates **3x** than those in shelter.
- Involuntary displacement could lead to a **15.6% to 24.4%** increase in **deaths** among unhoused individuals over a decade



Strategies for Care

5. Loss of Life

- Harm reduction approach
- Acknowledge secondary trauma in staff and develop processes for mitigating burnout
- Setting appropriate interventional goals/expectations



Reflections & Lessons Learned





MR. AL
IF NOT HERE THEN WHERE?!





OPINION > COMMENTARY

Opinion: Medical providers and researchers call to end CT homeless encampment displacements



A tent set up at a homeless encampment near Prospect St. in Bristol on Tuesday, July 16, 2024. (Aaron Flaum/Hartford Courant)

SALE! 25¢ for your first 3 months

NEWS

Unhoused activists call for New Haven to stop doing sweeps in the city

By **Mark Zaretsky**, Staff Writer

Updated May 15, 2024 5:33 p.m.



Homeless people and members of U-ACT meet to decide whether to pitch tents on the New Haven Green on May 15, 2024.



General Assembly **Raised Bill No. 7033**

January Session, 2025 LCO No. 4944

04944 _____ HSG

Referred to Committee on HOUSING

Introduced by: (HSG)

AN ACT PROHIBITING A MUNICIPALITY FROM IMPOSING ANY PENALTY ON HOMELESS PERSONS FOR PERFORMING LIFE-SUSTAINING ACTIVITIES ON PUBLIC LAND.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2025) (a) As used in this section:

- (1) "Homeless person" has the same meaning as provided in 42 USC 11302, as amended from time to time;
- (2) "Motor vehicle" has the same meaning as provided in section 14-1 of the general statutes;
- (3) "Public land" means any property that is owned or leased, in whole or in part, by any state or local government entity or any property upon which there is an easement for public use and that is held open to the public, or any federal land where local law enforcement has jurisdiction to enforce local laws, including, but not limited to, plazas, courtyards, parking lots, sidewalks, public transportation facilities and services, public buildings, shopping centers, underpasses and lands adjacent to roadways and parks;
- (4) "Recreational vehicle" has the same meaning as provided in section 14-1 of the general statutes;
- (5) "Life sustaining activities" includes, but is not limited to, moving, resting, sitting, standing, lying down, sleeping, protecting oneself from the elements, eating, drinking and storing such personal property as needed to safely shelter oneself; and
- (6) "Adequate alternative indoor space" means a space that is legally and physically accessible to an individual and that does not require such individual to sacrifice any other personal right afforded to such individual under federal, state or local law.

(b) No municipality may enact any ordinance and no individual may take any action that infringes upon the right of homeless persons to use public spaces without



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Thank you for joining us!

Questions or want to chat more?

Contact: Dr. Kaitlin Schwan, USC Street Medicine
kaitlin.schwan@med.usc.edu



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