

HEAT Team (Homeless Engagement Assessment and Triage)

Homeless outreach teams embedded within police departments, often referred to as **Homeless Outreach Teams** are specialized units that combine the resources and expertise of law enforcement with social services to address issues related to homelessness. These teams aim to improve the way police respond to homeless individuals, focusing on providing support and services rather than solely enforcement.

In Kansas City our team is referred to as the HEAT Team

Key Activities of HEAT

1. Crisis Intervention:

- Respond to calls involving homeless individuals who may be in crisis, such as those experiencing mental health issues, substance use disorders, or other emergencies.
- De-escalate situations and connect individuals with the appropriate mental health or substance use treatment services.

2. Resource Connection:

- Provide information and referrals to shelters, food services, medical care, mental health services, substance use treatment, and other essential resources.
- Assist individuals in obtaining identification, enrolling in benefits programs, and accessing housing resources.

3. Outreach and Engagement:

- Conduct proactive outreach in areas where homeless individuals are known to gather, such as encampments, parks, or public spaces.
- Build trust with homeless individuals over time to encourage them to accept services and move toward stable housing.

4. Encampment Resolution:

- Work with local governments and community partners to coordinate the resolution of homeless encampments, ensuring that the process is humane

and that individuals are offered shelter and services before any enforcement action is taken.

- Address public health and safety concerns while ensuring that the rights of homeless individuals are respected.

5. Case Management:

- Partner with social workers or case managers to create individualized service plans for homeless individuals, focusing on long-term solutions such as permanent housing and supportive services.
- Follow up with individuals to ensure continuity of care and to adjust service plans as needed.

6. Training and Collaboration:

- Train other law enforcement officers in crisis intervention and trauma-informed care to improve interactions with homeless individuals.
- Collaborate with local nonprofits, healthcare providers, and other community organizations to ensure a comprehensive approach to homelessness.

7. Diversion from the Criminal Justice System:

- Work to divert homeless individuals from the criminal justice system by offering alternatives to arrest, such as connecting them to treatment programs or shelters.
- Address low-level offenses, such as loitering or trespassing, with a focus on connecting individuals to services rather than penalizing them.

Examples of Homeless Outreach Teams:

- **Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Homeless Outreach and Proactive Engagement (HOPE) Team:** This team engages with homeless individuals on the streets of Los Angeles, offering services and assistance while working to prevent unnecessary arrests.
- **San Diego Police Department (SDPD) Homeless Outreach Team:** SDPD's HOT focuses on reducing homelessness through outreach, case management, and partnerships with service providers.

- **Denver Police Department Homeless Outreach Team:** Denver's team provides outreach services to homeless individuals, including helping them access shelters, medical care, and substance use treatment, while also addressing any public safety concerns.
- **Houston Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team:** The Houston Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team has been instrumental in reducing the number of homeless individuals on the streets and connecting them with long-term support services. By focusing on compassionate engagement rather than enforcement, the team helps to reduce the burden on the criminal justice system and creates more sustainable solutions for homelessness in Houston.

This model of embedding homeless outreach teams within law enforcement has become a key part of city's broader strategy to address homelessness, demonstrating the importance of collaboration between police, service providers, and the community.

These teams represent a more compassionate and effective approach to addressing homelessness within the community by recognizing that homelessness is not merely a law enforcement issue but a complex social challenge that requires a multifaceted response.