Responding to Unhoused Individuals on Campus
For campus security, public safety, and student services teams

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Why this matters

Homelessness and housing insecurity are common among college students and visible around campus boundaries. National data show big headwinds: on a single night in January 2024, an estimated **771,000 people** were unhoused in the U.S., the highest count on record since tracking began ([HUD](#)).

On campus, the burden falls heavily on technical college students and other low-income learners. A recent synthesis finds **about half** of community-college students face housing insecurity and **nearly 1 in 10** experience homelessness in a given year, which lowers persistence by **8–12 percentage points** ([Education Northwest](#)). Large multi-institution surveys similarly report **14% homelessness and 48% housing insecurity** in 2020 among respondents ([Bipartisan Policy Center](#)).

The takeaway for security: respectful engagement and smart referrals are not "extras." They are directly tied to safety, student well-being, and successful course completion.

Guiding principles

1. **Safety first, dignity always.** Treat every person as a member of the community. Separate behavior from status.
2. **Stabilize before you solve.** Use time, distance, and communication to lower intensity; address immediate risks; then offer options. [IACLEA](#) training emphasizes reading behavioral cues and using non-violent tactics before enforcement.
3. **Know the lanes.**
   o **Students:** Coordinate with student services, BIT/CARE team, financial aid, and case management. Federal policy gives unaccompanied homeless youth paths to independent FAFSA status and other supports. ([nche.ed.gov](#))
   o **Non-students/visitors:** Focus on conduct and location (e.g., restricted areas, closing hours). Offer resources first. Use trespass or exclusion only when behavior or safety requires it and when policy clearly supports it.
4. **Offer resources, not ultimatums.** A Housing-First lens reduces harm and increases stability; campuses are adapting this approach with partners ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).
5. **Document neutrally.** Capture observable behavior, offers of assistance, referrals, and outcomes. Avoid stigmatizing language.

Implementation checklist

☐ Publish a **plain-language procedure** for engaging unhoused individuals that prioritizes offers of help before enforcement.

☐ Create a **wallet-card script and resource matrix** for officers and front-desk staff.

☐ Track encounters, referrals, and outcomes in your RMS or case-management system for continuous improvement.

☐ Run **tabletop scenarios**: one student scenario and one visitor scenario, each ending in a warm handoff.

☐ Include a **post-incident debrief** habit in roll call.

>> View templates for "hand-out" resources, policies, tiered response training, and more on DMI's KB (Slab).

References:

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National Alliance to End Homelessness. **Learning Without a Home: Housing-First on Campus**. https://endhomelessness.org/blog/learning-without-a-home-will-a-housing-first-approach-work-on-campus/

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