Minneapolis Advocates Call for Swift Action on City Homeless Camp

Inhabitants are facing mounting hepatitis A, addiction and overdose risks.

September 20, 2018 By Casey Halter

Native American health agencies and Minneapolis nonprofits are intensifying their calls for medical care and drug treatment services at a city homeless camp, where inhabitants are facing mounting hepatitis A virus (HAV), addiction and overdose risks, The Star Tribune reports.

Advocates are amping up their awareness efforts in the wake of two deaths this past week linked to the crowded site. Public health officials watching the encampment say many of its inhabitants suffer from serious illnesses and substance-use problems and live in tents within inches of one another—creating conditions rife for the spread of illnesses like hepatitis A and respiratory infections.

The camp, which is located near the Little Earth housing complex on the south side of the city, is home mostly to Native Americans. In recent weeks, the heads of several nonprofits and Native American–run organizations have expressed frustration at what they see as a slow humanitarian response by government officials to the medical needs of their community.

The camp's crisis is happening in the midst of a nationwide hepatitis A outbreak that is largely affecting homeless communities and people suffering from addiction. City officials have unveiled a tentative plan to rehouse the nearly 300 camp dwellers from the location to one or more provisional shelters before winter hits, but those plans have not yet been finalized.

However, there is hope for camp inhabitants, despite delays. Starting this week, teams of nurse practitioners and other community health workers have begun walking from tent to tent offering a range of health services—from evaluating peoples' wounds and infections to enrolling them in public health plans and filling their prescriptions for medications. State and county health agencies are also exploring ways to vaccinate inhabitants against the flu, hepatitis A and other communicable diseases before it's too late.

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