



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

## PRESS RELEASE

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### BOARD TAKES ACTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

The County of Santa Cruz remains committed to reducing homelessness at the local level, and has taken several steps recently to reduce homelessness and improve conditions for the local homeless population.

Under leadership of the Board of Supervisors, the County's commitment to addressing homelessness is absolute, including hiring the County's first-ever Homeless Services Coordinator to coordinate services and assure the effective allocation of limited resources. In December, the Board has taken numerous steps to address homelessness, including increasing the availability of substance use treatment, expanding outreach to homeless persons, hiring additional mental health specialists, increasing housing and medical services and supporting additional housing for very low-income residents.

"Homelessness is a complex issue impacting communities across California, particularly Santa Cruz County and other coastal communities," Homeless Services Coordinator Rayne Marr said. "We are working diligently on many levels to address homelessness. We have increased winter shelter beds and are working closely with our partners in the cities – particularly the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville – and in the community to address the problem."

With winter's arrival and the presence of a large encampment in the San Lorenzo Park benchlands area, in the last two weeks alone the Board has:

- Approved an agreement with the State Department of Health Care Services for an expansion of drug treatment services available to Medi-Cal patients in Santa Cruz County, including early intervention, outpatient services, short-term residential treatment up to 90 days, case management, recovery maintenance services and more. This program is estimated to more than



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double the number of Santa Cruz County Medi-Cal patients seeking drug treatment. Substance use disorder is a contributing factor to homelessness for many individuals.

- Based on recommendations from a CSUMB evaluation team, redesigned the Bob Lee Community Partnership for Accountability, Connection and Treatment (PACT) and Serial Inebriate Program (SIP) to create the Santa Cruz Homeless Outreach, Proactive Engagement, and Services (HOPEs) Team. The program provides expanded services to homeless persons in downtown Santa Cruz and elsewhere, brings all homeless outreach efforts under one umbrella, establishes a new collaborative court called the Bob Lee PACT Court, and includes a new full-time senior mental health specialist, public health nurse and program manager. As approved by the Board, the program is pending support from the City of Santa Cruz.
- Approved the hiring of two full-time positions in the Behavioral Health Division to support the County-run Mobile Emergency Response Team (MERT). The MERT is a groundbreaking program that embeds mental health specialists with law enforcement agencies to help diffuse confrontations and better protect both the public and law enforcement officers. The staffing additions allow MERT to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many of the calls to MERT specialists involve homeless individuals.
- Accepted an update on implementation of the Whole Person Care program, a \$20 million program that benefits up to 1,000 County residents who suffer mental illness and/or substance use disorder, have multiple chronic health conditions and repeated hospitalizations, involvement with the criminal justice system and are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Through this program, the County has already begun issuing contracts to local community-based organizations to expand services and support the mission of the Whole Person Care program.
- Accepted \$600,000 in grants sought and obtained by the Health Services Agency to provide additional public health nurses at County clinics in Watsonville and Santa Cruz to provide intensive case management for medically complex Medi-Cal patients, including homeless persons.
- Approved a \$100,000 agreement with the Recuperative Care Center, a 12-bed, 24-hour medical shelter for adults recently discharged from the hospital and who are homeless, to provide medical services through the County-run Homeless Persons Health Project.
- Approved spending \$250,000 to continue providing intoxication recovery services for up to 10 adults at the Recovery Center, which is operated by



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Janus of Santa Cruz. The City of Santa Cruz contributed \$40,000 toward this project.

- Authorized continued negotiations on a Gender Specific Transitional Housing contract to assist recently incarcerated women who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Authorized the Department of Human Services to apply for the State's Housing and Disability Advocacy Program, which assists homeless individuals with one or more disabling conditions obtain benefits and housing. If approved, services would include outreach, case management, advocacy and housing assistance, including temporary rent subsidies. HSD has requested \$721,277 in HDAP funds, and would provide and equal amount in matching funds, for a total program of \$ 1.4 million.
- Authorized an exclusive negotiating agreement with MidPen Housing to develop a mixed-use project near 17th Avenue and Capitola Road, which would include low-income housing. If feasible, the County is expected to make a significant financial contribution toward the project, which is located on land owned by the County's former redevelopment agency, and the Board authorized a \$315,000 loan to develop preliminary designs.
- Applied for two Medi-Cal Capacity Grant applications that, if approved, would supply additional medical equipment to the Watsonville Health Center and the Homeless Persons Health Project.
- Heard an update on County efforts to locate a suitable site for a Day Services Center in partnership with the City of Santa Cruz. The County and City of Santa Cruz have met multiple times to discuss the project, and County staff are in the process of outreach to building owners at several potential sites in the City of Santa Cruz.

Beyond these measures, the County has taken additional steps to address local homelessness in recent months, and oversees a variety of programs related to homelessness. It is also the convening agency for the Homeless Action Partnership, a multijurisdictional council comprised of local governments and community groups that administers approximately \$2.5 million in annual McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funds.