



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Public Health
Department No.: 041
For Agenda Of: June 6, 2023
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Time:
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Mouhanad Hammami, Director
Director(s) Public Health Department (805) 681-5102
Contact Info: Dana Gamble, Deputy Director (805) 681-5171
SUBJECT: Report from Homeless Death Review Team

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: Risk Management

As to form: No

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: No

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file a report from the Homeless Death Review Team on deaths of homeless persons in Santa Barbara County for the period January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019 and January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020); and
- b) Determine that the above action is not a "Project" within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA Guidelines, since the action consists of organizational or administrative activities of the government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text: This item is on the agenda to provide the Board with an update on Homeless Deaths in Santa Barbara County. The Homeless Death Review Team (HDRT) was created by County staff in 2008 to review homeless deaths and their causes, explore means to avert similar deaths and, where available, compile statistical data to identify trends. A report on the deaths of homeless persons has been provided to the Board of Supervisors on a regular basis since data began to be collected and analyzed in 2009. The current report includes data from calendar year's 2019 and 2020 with comparative data from 2015 through 2018.

Background:

Responding to citizens' and community advocates' concerns about deaths among homeless people in Santa Barbara County, it was determined that a better understanding was needed of the extent and circumstances of these deaths. To that end, the HDRT was formed to review and analyze these deaths in order to develop strategies to better assist this population.

The HDRT has conducted systematic reviews of the deaths of homeless persons who died beginning on January 1, 2019. Reports have been organized on a calendar year basis to promote comparisons across years. This is the eighth Santa Barbara County (SBC) homeless death review team (HDRT) report. It contains data on the number of deaths among people experiencing homelessness in the County for calendar years 2019 and 2020. The definition of homelessness for the purposes of these analyses is the definition from the Federal Bureau of Primary Health Care. Data from multiple sources, including County departments (Public Health Department, Behavioral Wellness, Sheriff/Corner, Social Services, Community Services and Public Administrator/Public Guardian/Veterans' Services), was combined with data from community-based organizations (homeless services providers, hospitals) to obtain a more complete picture for each individual. The reviews were focused on answering the following questions:

- What are the characteristics and trends in the deaths of homeless individuals in Santa Barbara County?
- What are the recommendations to improve care and reduce preventable premature deaths within the homeless population?

The HDRT identified 66 persons experiencing homelessness who died in Santa Barbara County in 2019, and 77 persons experiencing homelessness who died in 2020. This compares to 41 deaths in 2018, 44 deaths in and 2017, and 44 deaths in 2016.

Based on the 2019 and 2020 data, as well as data from previous reports and an understanding of the service area, several themes are apparent:

- Trends remain comparatively consistent however as identified in previous reports, substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) remains the most prevalent health condition identified in homeless individuals who died in 2019 and 2020, but the increase in deaths with substance abuse has almost doubled from 47% in 2016 to 81% in 2020.
- In 2019, 21 out of the 66, or 32%, and in 2020, 21 out of the 77, or 27% of the deaths occurred outdoors. The remaining individuals, 45/66 in 2019 and 56/77 in 2020 died indoors. Of these indoor deaths, 28 (2019) and 25 (2020) died in a hospital or care facility. The percentage of outdoor deaths was lower in 2019 and 2020 than noted in the 2017 and 2018 reports and overall a lower percentage of outdoor deaths since 2016.
- Although more deaths occurred in the winters of 2019 and 2020, since reviewing homeless deaths in 2009, there is an overall even distribution of deaths seasonally when compared over the years.
- No deaths were attributed to the weather in 2019 or 2020. In other words, no hypothermia, hyperthermia, or dehydration-related causes was listed as a cause of death for any of the 2019/2020 decedents.
- Multiple agencies in Santa Barbara County work together to address challenges and to provide lifesaving/life prolonging services, i.e., housing, drug treatment, medical care, employment resources, etc. These interventions require intense coordination across organizations that is inherently complicated and the numbers of those in need outnumber the supply available.

Of the 143 cases in 2019 and 2020, the leading cause of death was due to drug/alcohol abuse or overdose and cardiovascular disease. These individuals died prematurely with average age of death being 54 years, compared to 76 years in the housed population for 2019 and 2020.

The tardiness of the HDRT report is primarily due to the necessities of response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The HDRT is led by the Public Health Department (PHD) and coordinates with over 12 different agencies and a team of over 30 members. Every agency and team members work have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic required all departments and external agencies to prioritize all tasks in order to sustain life. The 2021/2022 report is anticipated to be completed by early fall of 2023 and we will return to a normal scheduling of the HDRT for the 2023 report.

Performance Measure:

N/A

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: N/A

Fiscal Analysis:

There are no fiscal or facilities impacts to accepting this report and reviewing the recommendations.

Key Contract Risks:

N/A

Special Instructions:

Please return one (1) certified electronic Minute Order to PHDGROUPContractsUnit@sbcpd.org

Attachments:

- A. Homeless Death Review Team Report

Authored by:

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