

Santa Barbara County Encampment Response Strategy Program

Overview

The Encampment Response Strategy Program is a 3-year effort (2021-2024) with the goal of resolving 45 homeless encampments, by relying on a system of care which includes providing shelter and increasing the number of interim housing beds, leveraging long-term rental subsidies and enhanced housing navigation to create a pathway to housing, and supportive services to expand outreach and engagement, and then once community members are housed, to remain engaged with support services to keep people housed. This multi-pronged strategy has proven to resolve the unhealthy and unsafe conditions that unsheltered homeless persons are exposed to. Additional benefits include a reduction in the risk of fire, environmental impacts, and compromised public spaces.

Challenge

Unsheltered homelessness in Santa Barbara County rose 37% (from 893 to 1,223 persons) between the 2017 and 2020 Point In Time (PIT) Counts. The 2022 PIT showed that 1,373 unhoused persons were unsheltered. The increase in unsheltered homeless was due in part to the reduction in shelter capacity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent legal decisions and public health guidance from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention did not support initiating encampment clean-up activities without a well thought out plan to include ample time for engagement, planning for housing options, storage of personal items. In 2020 County Fire reported 401 non-fire emergency medical service calls, and 47 fire-related calls, with 21 encampment inspected by County Fire. Discussions with service providers on encampment engagement and response processes was incorporated into a regional Phase II Community Action Plan to address Homelessness (2021). A draft encampment response protocol was reviewed by service providers, County departments, and by elected leaders representing County supervisorial districts, and the eight incorporated cities in Santa Barbara County during a July 2021 Elected Leaders Forum.

Solution

The County's Encampment Resolution Strategy is a 3-year effort (2021-2024) with the goal of resolving 45 encampments of varying size and impact. The approved encampment resolution Strategy relies on an effective system of care that has as its ultimate aim providing shelter, housing and services to meet the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. Progress also increased the access to shelter, with the County's acquisition of a 50-bed residential building in Isla Vista; relocation of 20 pallet shelter units to Unincorporated Lompoc Valley, and development of a 33-bed modular project in downtown Santa Barbara. The community was successful in receiving 276 federal Emergency Housing Vouchers, utilizing federal ARPA and State Permanent Local Housing Assistance (PLHA) to fund supportive services and case management. In 2022, the region was awarded its 3rd State Homekey grant for the acquisition of a motel in Goleta. Federal ARPA is also key in partially funding a County Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) under the

auspices of the Behavioral Wellness Department for outreach, engagement, and intensive casement. Key community providers include Good Samaritan, CityNet, New Beginnings Counsel Center (Safe Parking), Salvation Army, Transition House, Santa Barbara Rescue Mission and PATH.

Innovation

The innovation was the recognition of the role of increased partnerships and collaboration, as well as availability of unprecedented State and Federal funding. The implementation of the Encampment Response Strategy occurred as a result of the fortuitous coincidence of the availability of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, and the earmarking of \$1.48 million in ARPA for FY 21/22. County staff applied for competitive California's Encampment Resolution Funding (CERF) grant program in December 2021, and the County was subsequently awarded \$2.5 million in February 2022. Other innovations included the use of Fulcrum mapping software, the engagement of philanthropic partners, including the San Francisco-based DignityMoves, the strategic use of federal HUD Emergency Housing Vouchers, and award of State Homekey funding to increase the availability of interim housing beds.

Results

As of March 31, 2022, 60 encampments in 8 primary clusters have been removed, including actions by Cal Trans and the cities. Partnerships with cities, Caltrans, and community partners such as Heal the Ocean, gave gathered data via surveys, and mapping. The County adopted the use of Fulcrum mapping software to document encampment sites, data about each location, and document interactions with inhabitants. Health the Ocean documented a reduction of 102 camps in February 2021 to 55 camps in August 2021, with the number of inhabitants decreasing from 260 to 125.

Replicability

The recognition by the State of California of the effectiveness of County's encampment response protocol and approval of State CERF funding demonstrated the recognition of the scalability and replicability of the County's Encampment Response model.

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Additional Materials [see if there is anything else you want to add; Eva or somebody will need to help add hyperlinks to where these documents are on a public access site]

- 1. Encampment Response 6-months status report**
- 2. Encampment Response Protocol**
- 3. Phase II Plan to Address Homelessness Annual Report**