

## **Santa Barbara County COVID-19 Health and Human Services Recovery and Resiliency Strategies Overview**

Santa Barbara County's COVID-19 Health and Human Services (HHS) Recovery and Resiliency Strategies is a 3-year effort (2021-2024) designed to support and provide structure to recovery activities and address the impacts of COVID-19 on the vulnerable, under resourced and underserved within the County. The goal was to create recovery focus areas to ensure that current and future County services not only support all individuals through the current crisis, but also lift the marginalized and underserved above the pre-COVID-19 experience by confirming 1) all are prepared to quickly overcome challenges if other events or disaster were to occur; and 2) all can enjoy equitable access to services, build opportunities and thrive in the community.

### **Challenge**

During spring through summer of 2021, County Health and Human Services Department leadership convened on three occasions to assess impacts of COVID-19 on clients, as well as examine direct and emerging needs exhibited throughout the continuum of services. In order to ascertain direct and secondary impacts of COVID-19, data was gathered and each department was asked to respond to a series of questions designed to identify impacts to clients, as well as the community at large, and ultimately craft strategies to address these impacts. As a result, HHS Recovery and Resilience strategies were designed to:

- Address pressing primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 on communities,
- Integrate *Whole Community* practices to bolster individual, organizational, governmental and community cross-collaboration as vital partners in identifying assets, capacities and gaps in achieving equitable recovery and resiliency,
- Build recovery content team experts and integrate departmental efforts and monitor trends,
- Drive rapid and innovative recovery activities that can be planned, resourced, and executed; and
- Recover in a resilient state with improved equity, inclusion, livability, wellness, and economic vitality with measurable outcomes.

In order to initiate efforts and respond to community needs, programs and projects also require milestones, timelines, assignees, performance measures, and potential funding options. Full plan implementation requires strategic use of current and anticipated funding sources, and collaborative and integrated cross-departmental initiatives to maximize resources and efficiencies.

### **Solution**

In order to streamline personnel resources, leverage funding, and ensure collaboration between County Departments and community partners in the execution of recovery projects, the HHS Recovery and Resilience Strategies were created. Rather than developing department specific initiatives, this framework identifies six Recovery Focus Areas with related strategies, and ultimately integrates programs across departments in the County. A Department Head is designated as Recovery Focus Area Lead to ensure completion and the Health and Human Services Assistant County Executive Officer is charged with oversight of the effort.

The Recovery Focus Areas developed are:

- 1) Behavioral Health,
- 2) Economic Revitalization and Employment,
- 3) Community Health and Wellbeing, Organization and Technology,
- 4) Housing and Homelessness, and
- 5) Disaster Resiliency.

The HHS Recovery and Resilience Strategies were presented to the community and adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in fall of 2021. The estimated cost of all efforts was \$46M over a three-year period, inclusive of one-time capital costs. Once established, these strategies provide a framework for dedication of local funding and pursuit of other potential sources while prioritizing recovery efforts which are consistent with the focus areas.

### **Innovation**

The development of the HSS recovery strategy was a collaborative effort amongst various departments that brought together innovative ideas in a time of reemergence from the pandemic. By bringing recovery projects together in one strategic document allowed for a framework of recovery that was cohesive and united across multiple focus areas. The HSS strategy focused on innovative efforts that:

- Ensures supports to provide basic health and human needs and recovery are viewed and evaluated through an equity lens and the underserved, under-resourced and marginalized are thoughtfully engaged;
- Builds on best practices employed during COVID 19 response by incorporating them into organization processes;
- Emerges in an enhanced state of community disaster preparedness;
- Ensures coordinated, integrated accessible data is developed and gathered for decision making;
- Coordinates departmental efforts, leverage shared resources, talents, skills and abilities; and
- Diversifies, integrates and maximizes funding opportunities to address recovery efforts and longer-term resiliency.

### **Results**

As of June 30, 2022, over 25 projects have been initiated based on the HHS recovery and resilience strategies. Dedicated funding of over \$35M has been allocated comprised of American Rescue Plan Act funds (ARPA), state grants such as Homekey, and other local and grant funds. Initial year performance results include the development of over 76 shelter beds serving households experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Additionally, over 676 encampment sites were observed, 59 of which were resolved and 52% of resolved encampment residents identified accepted alternate shelter or housing. A mental health needs assessment was conducted by the County's Department of Behavioral Wellness with survey responses from over 5,000 community members. The mental health needs assessment found, consistent with current national mental health and substance use findings, that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health symptoms and substance use have increased. More specifically, approximately 61% of survey participants reported worse mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, participants

reported experiencing an increased level of anxiety and depression symptoms. This feedback will be used to guide mental health services.

### **Replicability**

The collaborative approach of creating focus area strategies that are aligned amongst various County Departments and community partners is a model that is replicable. Utilizing a community impact view with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens has created enhanced partnerships and solutions that can be shared with other Counties and jurisdictions.

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### **Additional Materials**

- 1. Presentation on HHS Resilience and Recovery Plan**
- 2. Attachment Summary of HHS Resilience and Recover Plan**