

County of Santa Clara
Office of the County Executive
70 West Hedding Street, East Wing 11th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110
(408) 299-5119
www.sccgov.org



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Contact: Gwendolyn Mitchell/Laurel Anderson
Office of Public Affairs
(408) 299-5119

Marjorie Matthews
Office of Affordable Housing
(408) 441-4254

County Creating Task Force to End Chronic Homelessness

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— The County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors has approved the formation of a task force to develop a 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness in Santa Clara County. The task force will focus on four areas, including obtaining an accurate count of the chronically homeless population; discharge planning to prevent homelessness; outreach to and engagement of chronically homeless people; permanent housing with supportive services; and access to mainstream benefits and employment.

The task force members will include: two members of the Board of Supervisors, elected officials or designated representatives from each of the 15 cities and towns, and representatives from Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System, Department of Correction, Social Services Agencies, Office of the Sheriff, Office of Affordable Housing, City of San Jose Homeless Coordinator, Chair of Santa Clara County Collaborative, and someone who is or has been homeless.

The action was strongly supported by the Santa Clara County Collaborative on Affordable Housing and Homeless Issues - over 100 organizations that provide shelter and/or services to the homeless population. The 10-year plan will build on the existing 5-Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan, developed by the Collaborative, with special emphasis on solutions to chronic homelessness. The final draft of the 10-year plan will be presented to the Board of Supervisors in April 2005.

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“Over the years, millions of dollars have been allocated to provide temporary shelter and other services for the homeless,” said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chair of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “This will be a more focused effort with the objective of addressing core issues that lead to chronic homelessness.”

Although the chronically homeless, "street people" who do not live in shelters or accept counseling, comprise only 10 percent of the homeless population nationwide, it is estimated that they use 50 percent of the resources expended on homelessness. Investing in an effort to end chronic homelessness will reduce the costly expenses of emergency room visits and incarceration in local jails.

“This plan will establish a framework for ending homelessness in Santa Clara County,” said Marjorie Matthews, Director of the Office of Affordable Housing. “It will demonstrate our commitment to end homelessness and align the county for federal funding next spring.”

The County has asked the cities to assist with conducting an accurate count of the homeless population by next February. This comprehensive assessment, along with what has been learned through the Collaborative, will serve as the basis for developing a blueprint for addressing the problem, and create a collective commitment to end homelessness in 10 years. The effort will strengthen the County’s competitive position to acquire targeted federal funds in the spring of 2005.

“Living on the streets can be devastating,” said District 2 Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “This effort will be designed to identify how to bridge the gaps that hinder individuals from becoming productive contributors to society.”

The County has successfully implemented several initiatives including: the launch of the County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) which allows for a single shared confidential database of homeless services; and the allocation of more than \$10 million to 14 new affordable housing projects. The new 10-year plan will allow the County to continue its leadership in addressing and ultimately ending homelessness in the region.

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