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NEW COUNTYWIDE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS ANNOUNCED FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN EARLY 2020

*ACTIONS APPROVED BY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS FOLLOWING SYSTEMWIDE
REVIEW AND FOCUS ON EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES*

SANTA CRUZ, CA – The Homeless Action Partnership, a collaboration of the County of Santa Cruz and each city within the county, along with local homelessness service providers, today announced specific actions to improve the community’s response to the crisis of homelessness.

With approval by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and based on the work of the nationally recognized consulting firm Focus Strategies, which was engaged to help examine the response to homelessness in Santa Cruz County, the following will be implemented countywide in early 2020:

- 1) Retooling of the Smart Path coordinated entry program—a system to assess homeless individuals and refer them to the most appropriate services—with a goal of more quickly moving vulnerable people into services in order to reduce the number of people who are homeless.
- 2) Implementation of systematic diversion strategies to enable homeless individuals or those facing homelessness to utilize existing resources and networks to avoid becoming homeless.
- 3) Revision of existing shelter strategies to maximize effectiveness and accessibility of housing resources, designed to more quickly move people from shelters into permanent housing, as well as increase the efficiency of shelters to serve more clients.
- 4) Redesign of the delivery of street-level outreach to those experiencing homelessness, based on a new coordinated and standardized approach that brings together outreach teams and their funders to share information, methods and measurable outcomes.
- 5) Restructuring interagency homelessness governance to more effectively and efficiently address decision-making, planning, funding and outcomes.

“Through partnership, community input, study sessions and review by the Board of Supervisors, these strategies represent the first phase implementation of a coordinated, system-wide approach to addressing homelessness in Santa Cruz County,” said Rayne

Peréz, County of Santa Cruz Homeless Services Coordinator. “We’re committed to demonstrating improvements and tangible results through this proactive and evidence-based approach.”

Snapshot of Homelessness in Santa Cruz County

According to the 2019 Point-in-Time Count report, there are 2,167 homeless persons living in Santa Cruz County. Nearly one-third are currently employed, and three-quarters were previously housed in Santa Cruz County before becoming homeless. Thirty-nine percent reported a disabling condition impacting their ability to live independently; approximately 30 percent reported suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use disorder, and/or other psychiatric or emotional conditions; and loss of employment was the leading cause of homelessness. One in ten reported increasing rent as the cause of their homelessness, a figure that has more than doubled since the last report. The implementation of short-term recommendations will work to address the challenges of multiple populations with differing needs.

About the Work of Focus Strategies

Focus Strategies is dedicated to helping communities improve efforts to end homelessness by using local data to shape program and system design using a “systems thinking” approach, and has worked with communities across the country at all levels, including local and state government agencies and philanthropic and large non-profit organizations.

About the Homeless Action Partnership

The Homeless Action Partnership is a collaboration of the County and each city within Santa Cruz County, along with local homelessness service providers. It acts as the federally designated Continuum of Care (CoC) for Santa Cruz County and helps allocate State and federal funding to address homelessness. The County of Santa Cruz serves as lead agency for the HAP.

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