

PAJARO VALLEY HEALTHCARE DISTRICT

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Nonprofit Established to Promote Community-Led Healthcare Services *Goal is to preserve and improve health care services for the greater Pajaro Valley community*

(Watsonville, CA) — Four local agencies have teamed up to form the Pajaro Valley Healthcare District Project (PVHDP), a new nonprofit to advocate for community-led healthcare services in this region. The four originating board members are designees from Santa Cruz County, City of Watsonville, Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley and Salud Para La Gente.

PVHDP's mission is "to ensure the communities we serve have the high quality and sustainable healthcare services they need by placing local healthcare resources in the hands of the people." PVHDP will pursue creating a local healthcare district as an avenue to allow for community-driven healthcare services.

Healthcare districts are a type of special district in California — that is, local government entities that are legally separate from counties and cities. Special districts are governed by locally elected five-member boards. Healthcare districts can engage in a variety of health-related activities. Forty-three of the state's 73 healthcare districts operate hospitals, mostly in rural areas.

A healthcare district would allow for a stronger local voice in addressing the healthcare needs of the community. A district can provide and increase essential community health services and is directly accountable at the community level. The founders of PVHDP share a deep commitment to Watsonville Community Hospital and healthcare services throughout the region.

To that end, PVHDP's goal of creating a local healthcare district includes exploring local, community ownership of the Watsonville Community Hospital after 21 years of for-profit corporate ownership. These stakeholders know their community — they live here and have deep roots here, and that has motivated them to explore whether community-led ownership will provide more consistent management and oversight.

PVHDP leadership recently met with the Watsonville Community Hospital regarding working collaboratively to examine the possibility of community governance and ownership. The not-for-profit organization is considering two possible ways of forming a healthcare district. The first would be to create a new entity, defining the geography we intend to serve. The second would be to have this defined geography become annexed by an existing healthcare district. Both of these actions could be accomplished through a local ballot initiative process. The creation of a new entity could also be accomplished through state legislation.

"It's important to note that the PVHDP Board is hopeful that this new partnership will ensure long-term financial and administrative stability at the hospital, which will support the delivery of vital, quality healthcare to everyone who lives and works in this community for years to come," said Mimi Hall, chair of the PVHDP Board of Directors, who will remain on the board after her departure as the County Health Services Agency Director.

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