



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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PRESS RELEASE

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COUNTY LAUNCHES FOCUSED INTERVENTION TEAM

The County of Santa Cruz and partner cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville are pleased to announce the launch of Focused Intervention Team pilot program.

The FIT program addresses frequent users of public services by identifying serial offenders who are change-averse, with a demonstrated track record of disruptive and criminal behavior in local downtowns and other urban areas. Comprised of members of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office and Health Services Agency, FIT teams work closely with other local law enforcement agencies to improve public safety and deliver needed behavioral health and other services to address root causes of behavior.

"I applaud Sheriff Hart for developing a program to create accountability for a few offenders who can cause so much impact to the community," Board Chair Ryan Coonerty said. "By deploying the team first in the City of Santa Cruz where there are the most impacts, I'm hopeful that we will see significant increased public safety."

The FIT program was among the critical needs identified by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors is asking voters to approve Measure G, a November 2018 ½-cent sales tax measure approved by two-thirds of County voters.

The six-member FIT team is comprised of deputies and behavioral health experts who will address offenders demonstrating high rates of recidivism and resistance to change. Through high-frequency contacts (including in a custody setting) and evidence-based practices such as motivational interviewing, trauma-informed counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy, the County and partners hope to reduce public impacts and improve outcomes for FIT participants. FIT participants will also be connected to wraparound services including medical and food benefits, housing navigations services and more.



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"This team of clinicians and law enforcement is going to focus on those people involved with criminal behavior and act in a way that scares people," Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart said. "Our community and our visitors deserve better. Law abiding community members must be allowed to visit local businesses and open spaces without being fearful of the actions of a small number of people who refuse treatment and help."

As part of the initial phase of program development, FIT team members have met and conferred with law enforcement partners throughout Santa Cruz County. Program assessment including outcome measurements will be conducted by Watsonville-based Applied Survey Research.

"The Santa Cruz Police view interagency collaboration as essential to problem-solving chronic offenders. I welcome the assistance of the Sheriff's FIT team in helping us hold recalcitrant offenders accountable and them providing the bed space to make this happen," Santa Cruz Police Chief Andy Mills said.

"Our officers are committed to helping those in crisis and the Focused Intervention Team (FIT) will broaden their ability to provide proper support," Watsonville Police Chief David Honda said. "The County of Santa Cruz continues to lead in its efforts to provide multiple layers of care to its mental health community. The Watsonville Police Department is excited about the increasingly positive partnerships and we look forward to seeing the success of the team."

"The Behavioral Health Division of the Health Services Agency looks forward to being an active member of the team and bringing expertise around behavioral health issues to ensure that individuals who face the daily struggles of mental illness and substance use disorders are connected with the treatment services they need," said Erik Riera, Santa Cruz County Director of Behavioral Health Services. "The FIT program will expand our work with law enforcement agencies to provide behavioral health consultation directly in the field with our public safety officers."