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## **POINT-IN-TIME CENSUS SHOWS PROGRESS AMONG VULNERABLE GROUPS, SLIGHT OVERALL INCREASE**

*Housing scarcity, cost significant obstacles to resolving homelessness*

Santa Cruz County's biannual Point-In-Time Count provides an overview of homelessness over time in Santa Cruz County. The Count results in a conservative estimate of the numbers of people and households experiencing homelessness on a single night and also provides demographic, health, economic, housing, and other information about those in our community currently living without a stable home.

The 2022 PIT Count demonstrates progress in addressing family and youth homelessness locally. Compared with 2019 data, the 2022 data shows a 59 percent decrease in overall homelessness among families and a 94 percent decrease in unsheltered homelessness among families. Significant resource investments and collaborations focused on serving these populations coupled with more community support and private-market housing options for these groups likely contributed to these declines.

Overall, the 2022 PIT Count results show a small 6 percent increase in the numbers of people living without a home in Santa Cruz County since 2019, the last year the PIT Count was conducted. The data shows an estimated 2,299 people experienced homelessness at the time of the count, including 1,774 who were unsheltered.

However, the 2022 count data shows statistically significant increases in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness who self-report substance use disorders (1,073) and serious mental illness (818). Furthermore, the numbers of veterans experiencing homelessness more than doubled from 2019. Resource and eligibility limitations for serving these populations, limited housing-focused outreach, stigma associated with behavioral health conditions, and closures or reductions in residential capacity during the pandemic may have contributed to these increases. Behavioral health treatment efficacy is limited when people do not have stable living environments. Deeper and sustained investments, cross-system collaboration, and community support for serving these populations are needed to shift these trends.

“The 2022 PIT Count shows significant progress in addressing homelessness among families and youth,” said Robert Ratner, director of the County of Santa Cruz Housing for Health Division. “However, there have been significant increases in homelessness among seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. The lack of affordable housing remains the biggest barrier to preventing and ending homelessness in the community. We have more work to do to meet the objectives set forth in our Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz shared framework to ensure all residents have stable, safe, and healthy places to live.”

Inadequate local housing supply and related high housing costs, especially for renters, continue to be both a significant contributor to homelessness and an inhibitor to reducing the numbers of persons experiencing homelessness. Current data shows that just 65 percent of homeless individuals with subsidized housing vouchers have been able to find a home, and Santa Cruz County overall remains behind on capacity targets for housing in key areas, including very low-income affordable housing. A recent report released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition ranks Santa Cruz County as the second most expensive rental market in the country and the least affordable for average local renters. Through Project Homekey and other efforts, the County and local cities are pursuing additional options to increase housing affordability.

In the Bay Area, homelessness is up 9 percent. This includes San Francisco (down 3.5 percent), Santa Clara County (up 3 percent), Alameda County (up 22 percent), Contra Costa County (up 35 percent) and others. Homelessness in Monterey County declined 15.5 percent and in San Benito increased 21 percent since the most recent PIT Count.

PIT Count methodology is known to undercount the number of people experiencing homelessness and excludes people experiencing homelessness staying in institutional settings, those in temporary situations, and those living in unsafe or overcrowded spaces. The count likely undercounts unsheltered people on a single night due to challenges locating people in hidden areas or situations.

On Tuesday, Director Ratner will present a high-level summary of the PIT Count to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors during its regularly scheduled meeting. Once available, the full Point-in-Time Count report will be posted on the Housing for Health Partnership website, at <https://housingforhealthpartnership.org/>.

*The Housing for Health 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 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 H4H Partnership.*