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POINT-IN-TIME COUNT SHOWS POSITIVE TRENDS

Disparities emerge; housing costs continuing obstacle in resolving homelessness

The Santa Cruz County Housing for Health Partnership is pleased to announce the results of the 2023 Point-in-Time Census (PIT Count), showing a 21.5 percent decline in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

"While the numbers show the lowest levels of homelessness since the PIT Count was first conducted and reflects our efforts to prioritize housing, we still have a long way to go," said Robert Ratner, director of the Santa Cruz County Housing for Health Division. "Addressing homelessness in Santa Cruz County requires long-term, systemic change, but we are heading in the right direction."

The federally designated PIT Count provides a snapshot of homelessness in communities throughout the U.S. The Santa Cruz County count was conducted under challenging winter conditions, and officials cautioned that despite improvements, 1 in every 146 Santa Cruz County residents still do not have access to housing.

Conducted on February 23, 2023, the PIT Count shows 79 percent of people experiencing homelessness at that time were unsheltered. Of those, nearly half slept in vehicles. Sixty-five percent of families experiencing homelessness had shelter, but nearly all unaccompanied minors and transition-age youth (adults less than 24 years old) were living on the streets.

Local homelessness disproportionately impacts persons of color, with 44 percent of those surveyed identifying as Hispanic or Latino, while homelessness among other races was also higher than the general population. More than two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness were male.

Three in ten had some form of employment. Of the unemployed, more than half are looking for work. Nearly a quarter have been in the foster care system.

All local cities saw declines in the number of people experiencing homelessness except Watsonville, which saw a 15 percent increase. Unfortunately, the number of homeless families with children increased, as did the numbers of K-12 students experiencing homelessness.

Seventy-five percent were County residents when they became homeless. Nearly half reported substance abuse issues, while more than one-third reported psychiatric/emotional conditions or post-traumatic stress disorder. One-third have a physical disability.

The Housing for Health Partnership is committed to moving as many formerly homeless individuals into housing as possible. Following the closure of the COVID-19 sheltering system – the largest and longest sheltering operation in County history – the County and partners, including the Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County, have moved more than 600 individuals into permanent supportive housing.

Furthermore, the County is working with community partners to secure Project Homekey and other grants to increase the community's capacity to provide housing and other residential options for formerly homeless individuals and families. Those grants include a recent \$10.1 million Behavioral Health Bridge Housing award to build a 34-unit housing development to serve homeless adults with behavioral health challenges, as well as a partnership with the County of Monterey and the City of Watsonville to safely move individuals out of the Pajaro River channel and into housing.

The County is also committed to improving behavioral health services and will soon have access to 100 new supportive units through projects already underway, and is building a new Children's Crisis Stabilization Center to provide 24 crisis stabilization and long-term care beds for youth.

With Santa Cruz County now the least affordable rental market in the U.S. and studies showing homelessness spikes wherever housing prices outpace incomes, the Housing for Health Division also supports structural change in the form of policies to help develop additional housing opportunities for residents, such as the County's Sustainability Update and Housing Element.

For a full version of the report, visit <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. Visit the Housing for Health Partnership [online](#), on [Facebook](#) or on [Instagram](#).