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CENSUS OF HOMELESSNESS SHOWS DECLINE ***POINT-IN-TIME COUNT SHOWS 3.6 PERCENT DECLINE FROM 2017***

Preliminary numbers from the 2019 Point-In-Time count indicate more than 2,100 Santa Cruz County residents were homeless, including 1,700 who did not have shelter.

The total of 2,167 homeless persons represents a slight decline from 2017. Chronic and veteran homelessness in particular showed positive trends, with chronic homelessness decreasing by nearly one-third. However, youth and family homelessness showed slight increases.

"With the heartbreaking increases in homelessness in many communities across California, this is positive news. But it's not a victory," Santa Cruz County Homeless Services Coordinator Rayne Marr said. "Homelessness is unacceptably high in Santa Cruz County, with families and individuals suffering and impacts being felt throughout the community, and we hope this data marks a turning point in reducing homelessness."

Since the 2017 Point-in-Time Count, the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP) and community partners have taken many steps to improve the community's response to homelessness and expand programs to provide housing and homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing services.

Among the steps was HAP's implementation of the Smart Path Coordinated Entry System to assess homeless individuals and improve service delivery including housing, medical, and behavioral health resources.

HAP members and community partners also increased efforts to house homeless persons. From 2017 to 2019, the Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County increased Section 8 vouchers by 4 percent, including increases in vouchers for homeless veterans and for medically vulnerable homeless adults. Currently, an additional 50 homeless persons hold housing vouchers and are actively seeking a home.

"The first step in solving homelessness is housing," Housing Authority Executive Director Jenny Panetta said. "Housing is a platform to improve all aspects of health and quality of life. I thank all the landlords who have come forward to be a part of the solution when it comes to reducing homelessness throughout Santa Cruz County."

In the last five years, the County-run CalWORKS Housing Assistance Move-in Program housed 178 families, and the County's Human Services Department housed additional families through the Bringing Families Home and Housing and Disability Advocacy Program.

The County has also taken steps to address underlying factors such as substance use disorder. In the last 18 months, outpatient treatment services are up 50 percent, residential treatment is up 60 percent and withdrawal management has increased threefold.

Since the 2017 PIT count, additional housing units for formerly homelessness persons have been made available at St. Stephen's and Pippin Orchard, and housing services including expanded rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention services are delivered through key community partners such as the Homeless Services Center, Families in Transition, the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County and more. The County-administered Whole Person Care program also provided housing navigation services to 118 additional clients.

Recent funding to address homeless through the Homeless Emergency Aid Program and California Emergency Solutions and Housing program includes the establishment of year-round shelter services in Santa Cruz and Watsonville, additional shelter capacity in Live Oak, and increases in housing and other day services.

The complete 2019 Point-in-Time Count report, which includes demographic information about those surveyed and complete information about subpopulation groups, is being prepared and will be released later this summer. The 2019 PIT Count was conducted January 31, 2019 by service providers, volunteers and navigators with lived experience, and was overseen by Watsonville-based Applied Survey Research, a social research organization with nearly 40 years of experience, including conducting point-in-time counts for counties such as Alameda, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Sonoma, Marin counties and more.

Recent PIT counts have demonstrated significant increases in homelessness in California counties, including Santa Clara (+31.3%), Alameda (+42.5%), San Francisco (+16.8%), Contra Costa (+42.8%), Los Angeles (+7.3%), Orange (+43.1%) and more. Some counties have experienced a decline, including Marin (-7.4%), Santa Barbara (-3.1%), and San Diego (-11.5%)

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 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.