

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

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Comprehensive Homeless Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to summarize the County of San Diego's (County) comprehensive response to homelessness and align with the Framework for Ending Homelessness adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

The County partners with other governmental and private entities to provide a continuum of housing and supportive services to individuals and families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness throughout the region. Cross sector organizations that are critical to ending homelessness include: mainstream housing, physical and/or behavioral health providers, educational institutions, the business community, faith based and philanthropic organizations, social service providers, and the criminal justice system. Provision of housing and supportive services must be addressed by the entire region, including all cities, and demonstrated through appropriate contributions reflected in local jurisdiction budgets and policies.

This policy recognizes that poverty, inequitable economic opportunity, and trauma are among the most significant causes of homelessness; and that a comprehensive approach must embrace the economic, physical, and mental well-being of all San Diego County residents.

Key components of the County's approach to addressing homelessness include:

- Incorporating a Housing First approach in all interventions.
- An increased regional role in leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement; promoting collaborative leadership to support all vulnerable individuals in the San Diego region.
- An ongoing commitment to planning, initiating, and evaluating work with a prevention orientation focus with substantial emphasis on the Social Determinants of Health.
- Improved coordination of existing and future County homeless activities and programs serving as a central point of contact and collaboration for partners.
- Fair and equitable representation for the unincorporated areas of the region.
- Increased supply, access, and availability of key housing interventions, including: affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, emergency, interim, specialty, and shared housing.
- Increased economic security and self-sufficiency, including access to supportive services, including access to childcare when needed, employment, workforce development, entrepreneurship and other income supports that address the role of poverty and income

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insecurity in homelessness.

- Equity and improvement of health and stability across all populations experiencing homelessness.
- Development and funding of flexible and responsive programming and resources tailored to serve the unique needs of the various populations experiencing homelessness.
- Development and funding of comprehensive approaches to address impacts related to encampments including public health, environmental health, and safety issues.
- Increased accessibility to services and immediate housing solutions, including during non-traditional business hours with options for those with pets whenever feasible.
- Amendment of policies and regulatory documents, such as the Zoning Ordinance, as needed, to develop and support programs that provide solutions to homelessness.

Background

The majority of federal funding for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness has historically been provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in accordance with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. The HEARTH Act mandates that the regional Continuum of Care (CoC) play a lead role in coordinating regional efforts to end homelessness and establishes local funding and programming priorities to ensure compliance with federal regulations governing homeless services. The San Diego CoC includes the 18 incorporated cities and all unincorporated areas of the county. The San Diego CoC is governed by the Continuum of Care Advisory Board and the Regional Taskforce on Homelessness (RTFH) is the HUD-designated lead agency, is comprised of representatives from local government, healthcare, public safety, housing providers, business, philanthropy, individuals with lived experience of homelessness, and other stakeholder representatives. The RTFH, a separate entity from the County, engages with the community to offer data and insights in an effort to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring throughout the region.

The RTFH manages the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and data in this system is used throughout the county to inform practices and develop strategies to address homelessness. This is a critical part of the homeless crisis response system, and a subset of the larger mainstream social safety net which includes many County departments and services. HUD also requires a Point-in-Time Count (PITC) of people experiencing homelessness to be conducted at least every two years. The RTFH conducts this PITC on an annual basis. Data from the PITC is a portion of the information the RTFH and the Continuum of Care's Advisory

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Board consider in the establishment of local priorities.

The County has a significant leadership role in regional collaboration to prevent, address, and end homelessness. This includes the establishment of the Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities in Fiscal Year 20-21, a County department charged with being the central coordinating and leadership body for the County's efforts to prevent and end homelessness. In addition, the County continues to make substantial investments to support former foster and other youth at increased risk of experiencing homelessness, as well as key shifts to prevention and community-based care. The Board's adopted Framework for Ending Homelessness includes five strategic domains that are the basis of the County's approach to ending homelessness. These Domains are: Root Cause and Upstream Prevention; Diversion and Mitigation, Services, Treatment and Outreach; Emergency/Interim Housing and Resources; and Permanent Housing and Support. Each of these domains shall incorporate five key drivers as programs and systems to end homelessness are developed and revised. These drivers are: person-centered, data, collaboration, sustainability and equity.

Policy

As resources permit, the Board of Supervisors will enter into collaborative partnerships with local government, non-profits, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to address and end homelessness in a coordinated manner. Key strategies include leveraging State and federal funding; facilitating shared agreements for integrated collaboration on solutions; coordination of services and programs to serve those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness throughout the region. The County seeks to maximize partnerships with all jurisdictions across the County.

The following outlines the County's policy:

1. The County of San Diego will commit to a Housing First approach (as described in Welfare and Institutions Code section 8255 et seq.), which will not condition the provision of housing on acceptance of services in all interventions or system changes.
2. All initiatives focused on individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness will undertake intentional, demonstrable, efforts to ensure racial and social equity. Such efforts shall include the collection of data necessary to assess impact and ensure program design, measurement, and implementation is accountable. This will include providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

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3. The County will prioritize a person-centered approach that emphasizes trauma-responsive care, provides low-barrier access and maximizes harm reduction strategies when possible. This shall include the housing and service choices and perspectives of individuals served, and may include emergency housing on a journey to a stable, permanent home.

4. In alignment with Board of Supervisors Policy F-51, County Real Property Asset Management, and the County's Live Well San Diego strategic goal to support availability and affordability of housing for all community members, the County shall consider use of County surplus property to meet regional affordable housing needs that may serve people who are experiencing homelessness. When possible, property identified for future development of affordable housing or other County uses shall be considered for a temporary or interim use that will serve the population of people who are experiencing homelessness within the county. The County will identify opportunities to streamline the acquisition and leasing process in addressing homelessness and identify revisions required to related policies and administrative code sections.

5. The County shall ensure interdisciplinary coordination and alignment at every stage from planning through execution and evaluation of programs, initiatives and system changes that impact people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. To that end, efforts related to behavioral and physical health, public health, housing, public safety, and the built environment that impact people at risk of or experiencing homelessness will demonstrate evidence of such coordination and alignment efforts.

6. The County will seek to collaborate and form public-private partnerships with local business and industry, organized labor unions, the private, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors, educational and cultural institutions, and/or the faith community to reduce experiences of homelessness and its accompanying conditions throughout the county. To deliver services to people experiencing homelessness in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, the County will collaborate with partnering entities through the CoC to identify gaps in services and to identify resources to address needs.

7. The County will seek to support system changes that decrease the risk of experiencing homelessness by preventing disruption of benefits during people's life disruptions that can lead to experiences of homelessness such as illness, removal of children, and incarceration. This will include a focus on root cause and upstream prevention approaches that will be implemented to focus on decreasing new experiences of homelessness.

8. The County will demonstrate regional responsibility through membership on the CoC

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Advisory Board and promotion of legislative policy changes, including federal, State and local changes to definitions of homelessness, criminal background limitations that create barriers to housing for people exiting institutions, or efforts to assist populations historically affected by predatory lending and/or significant barriers based on inequitable credit or lending policies.

9. The County will support efforts to expand permanent supportive housing, board and care, recuperative care, Safe Havens, independent living homes, emergency, and interim housing options with services in all communities in which data demonstrates the existence of need. These efforts shall include, to the greatest extent possible, providing housing options for people with pets or service animals.

10. The County has regional responsibility for the delivery of public assistance benefits, public health services, and treatment for individuals who are seriously mentally ill or have substance use disorders. The County will employ harm reduction strategies and will prioritize such strategies as supported by evidence and science, to alleviate the human suffering of people experiencing homelessness.

11. The County will actively participate in the annual Point-in-Time Count, ensure to the fullest extent legally permissible full utilization by County staff and contractors of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to assess the scope of homelessness throughout the region and as part of the process measure the effectiveness of interventions and the status of homelessness across the County.

12. The County will utilize scientific, evidence-based and data-driven approaches in all programs or initiatives that encourage residents in all of San Diego County, including the unincorporated communities, to utilize available services. This will include efforts to maximize diversion and mitigation strategies designed to prevent homelessness among people at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness.

13. The County will prioritize investment in quality, timely and accurate data collection, analysis, and reporting, including data management strategies, appropriate data sharing within the County and with outside partners, and the human infrastructure within the County and with contractors to measure the effectiveness of homelessness prevention and intervention efforts. In furtherance of this requirement, the County will engage in coordinated data strategies such as the Built For Zero and coordinated entry initiatives to accurately develop a comprehensive and continuous understanding of entries and exits from experiences of homelessness.

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14. The County will seek to create sustainable programs, initiatives, and system enhancements with long-term funding to support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including efforts to provide 24-hour access to social workers or appropriate trained professionals and associated after-hours housing options.

15. To assist with changing the paradigm of how the community addresses social issues such as homelessness, the County shall expand social work services of assessing, intervening, and evaluating crisis situations by maximizing involvement and availability of social workers and other trained professionals when law enforcement responds to calls for service.

16. The County will move away from outreach by law enforcement and focus on programs that emphasize and consolidate street outreach efforts to offer effective services that meet individuals' needs and help them avoid cycles of arrest and incarceration. The County will support public safety diversion and connections to services for issues caused by homelessness and regularly review policies and practices to avoid criminalizing homelessness.

17. The County will prioritize services for individuals who are experiencing homelessness and are part of a particularly vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, veterans, chronically homeless persons, those disproportionately impacted by homelessness, homeless families with children, youth, foster youth/former foster youth, individuals who have pets, victims of domestic violence and special needs groups including people with disabilities.

18. Understanding the unique needs of homeless children, youth, and young adults, the County will support efforts to tailor prevention, intervention, and housing strategies to youth. Intentional focus shall be given to addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth and youth of color, who are disproportionately represented among young people experiencing homelessness.

19. The County will leverage support for homeless services from the State and federal government and other funding sources. The County will advise its congressional and state delegates of its determination to achieve fair share funding for the San Diego Region. Consistent with rules regarding competitive solicitations, agencies utilizing other funding sources or augmenting local funding sources with other contributions will be given priority in funding decisions to leverage scarce County resources.

20. The County supports the equitable distribution of facilities and services throughout the region based on the data about where the greatest need or greatest risk of experiencing homelessness is determined to be.

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21. The County recognizes that homelessness is a regional countywide concern and that all jurisdictions across San Diego County must address homeless services and shelter needs. Contributions of individual cities may be an important consideration in determining use of County funds to meet homeless needs within cities and will be defined as the relationship of a jurisdiction's contributions to its share of the region's homeless population.

22. The source of funds will also guide the County's investment in homeless services and shelter options. Funding designated for specific communities will be used only in those communities to the extent authorized by law unless substantial regional benefit can be demonstrated.

23. The County will develop dashboards that measure performance and outcomes, and factors related to program performance, outcomes, program effectiveness and cost efficiency will be evaluated in making County funding decisions and program design. Recipients of County funding will be required to demonstrate achievement of acceptable outcome measures.

24. The County will continue to support and develop comprehensive programs that address impacts from encampments on surrounding communities to maximize public health, environmental health and safety.

25. The County will allow flexibility in this policy during a declared state of emergency, natural disaster or catastrophic event.

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Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12/31/2030.

Board Action

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CAO Reference

1. Health and Human Services Agency