

# Ending Homelessness in Ventura County: What Are the Next Steps?

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## Ending Homelessness in Ventura County: What Are the Next Steps?

There are 1,774 adults and children who were homeless during the point-in-time count in the County of Ventura according to the Ventura County 2013 Homeless Count and Subpopulation Survey. This number represents an 8% decrease when compared to the number of homeless persons who were counted last year and the lowest total count since its inception in 2007 (see Table 1).

There was an 8% decrease in the number of homeless adults and children during the year between the 2012 homeless count and the 2013 count.

### What Contributed to the Decrease?

During the past two years, the Ventura County and City of Oxnard Homeless Continuum of Care systems<sup>1</sup> have begun implementing a Housing First approach, a Rapid Re-housing approach, and successfully developed over 100 units of permanent supportive housing. These accomplishments have largely contributed to the decrease in the number of homeless persons during the past couple of years. These accomplishments are in addition to the number of persons that emergency shelter and transitional housing providers help exit homelessness every day.

Housing First is recognized as an evidence-based and best practice by national researchers and policymakers based on years of research and implementation. The implementation of a Housing First Approach has helped jurisdictions across the country significantly reduce their homeless population.

Implementation involves moving homeless persons, including chronically homeless individuals, from the streets and directly into housing and providing wrap-around services to ensure housing stability. This approach links chronically homeless persons to permanent supportive housing which provides subsidized housing and appropriate supportive services. This approach is in contrast to a “housing readiness model” which emphasizes that a homeless individual or family must address other issues such as substance abuse and mental illness through case management in a shelter or transitional housing program prior to entering affordable permanent housing.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ventura County and City of Oxnard Homeless Continuum of Care systems have approximately 100 active members of public and private agencies who serve homeless persons throughout the County.

Rapid Re-housing has also been recognized as an evidence-based and best practice by national researchers and policymakers based on years of research and implementation. The implementation of Rapid Re-housing has also helped jurisdictions across the country significantly reduce their homeless population.

Rapid re-housing helps families and individuals who are not chronically homeless obtain permanent housing immediately and to stabilize themselves as soon as possible. Such households have not been living on the streets for years with physical disabling conditions such as serious mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and/or chronic physical illness. They have lived independently in permanent housing in the past and are in need of temporary assistance for several months instead of years. During this time they are able to become increasingly self-sufficient through public assistance and/or employment. They may need long-term non-monetary assistance to prevent the loss of their housing such as free or low cost clothing, food, health care, household supplies, and transportation.

Permanent Supportive Housing provides long-term affordable rental housing and a broad range of on-site and/or off-site wrap-around supportive services. The goal during residency is to increase independent living skills of residents who pay no more than 30% of their monthly income for rent so that they are able to maintain their housing. Persons without permanent disabling conditions may ultimately become self-sufficient and pay 100% of their rent and may or may not need supportive services.

In order to end homelessness in Ventura County, the evidence-base and best practices promoted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) should be implemented. Such practices such as Housing First and Rapid Re-housing were recently incorporated in the January 2013 document “Recalibrating for Results: A Five Year Evaluation and Update of the 2007–2017 County of Ventura 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.”

In order to implement such practices, the following seven steps should be taken.

- **Step 1:** Adopt baseline numbers and establish annual “reduction” benchmarks for each jurisdiction

Next steps should include encouraging each jurisdiction to adopt the 2013 homeless count and subpopulation survey statistics for unsheltered adults and their children as baseline numbers and establish annual “reduction” benchmarks that will serve as markers by which progress towards ending homelessness can be measured. The table below provides the baseline

numbers for the total number of unsheltered adults (1,007) and the breakdown by various subpopulations for each of the cities and unincorporated area.

Table 1. Total Number of Unsheltered Adults and Breakdown by Subpopulations by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Adults	Chronically Homeless Individuals		Mentally Ill		Persons w/ HIV/AIDS		Seniors Age 62+		Substance Abusers	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
County	1,007	707	70	311	31	18	2	86	9	313	31
Camarillo	17	4	24	3	18	0	0	0	0	1	6
Fillmore	13	9	69	4	31	0	0	0	0	4	31
Moorpark	9	6	67	3	33	0	0	0	0	6	67
Ojai	23	9	69	3	13	0	0	2	9	5	22
Oxnard	308	218	71	92	30	11	4	34	11	89	29
Port Hueneme	6	4	67	1	17	0	0	0	0	0	0
Santa Paula	31	27	87	4	13	0	0	3	10	11	35
Simi Valley	186	147	79	45	24	1	0.5	15	8	71	38
Thousand Oaks	44	29	66	11	25	0	0	2	9	5	22
Ventura	313	216	69	128	41	6	2	25	8	103	33
Unincorporated Area	57	38	66	17	30	0	0	5	9	18	32

Table 1. Total Number of Unsheltered Adults and Breakdown by Subpopulations by Jurisdiction (con't)

Jurisdiction	Total Number of Adults	Veterans		Victims of Domestic Violence		Youth Age 18 - 24		Unaccompanied Youth < Age 18		Persons Released from Jail*	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
County	1,007	134	13	264	26	62	6	9	1	315	31
Camarillo	17	2	12	7	41	2	12	2	12	2	12
Fillmore	13	2	15	3	23	1	8	0	0	2	15
Moorpark	9	2	22	0	0	1	11	0	0	2	22
Ojai	23	6	26	0	0	1	4	0	0	3	13
Oxnard	308	33	11	67	22	20	6	3	1	92	30
Port Hueneme	6	0	0	0	0	1	17	0	0	0	0
Santa Paula	31	0	0	6	19	4	13	0	0	11	35
Simi Valley	186	20	11	41	22	7	7	1	0.5	69	37
Thousand Oaks	44	9	20	10	23	6	14	0	0	7	16
Ventura	313	53	17	116	37	19	6	3	1	110	35
Unincorporated Area	57	7	12	14	25	0	0	0	0	17	30

\*This subpopulation was based upon the survey question "During the last 12 months, were you recently released from a correctional institution such as a jail or prison after serving a court-mandated sentence".

Table 2. Total Number of Unsheltered Families and Breakdown by Adults and Children by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	# of Families	# of Adults	# of Children	Total	# of Chronic Hmls Families	# of Adults	# of Children	Total
County	50	55	99	149	12	14	33	47
Camarillo	4	5	10	15	0	0	0	0
Fillmore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moorpark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ojai	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
Oxnard	17	17	31	48	2	2	4	6
Port Hueneme	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Santa Paula	3	3	3	6	1	1	1	2
Simi Valley	4	5	4	9	2	2	2	4
Thousand Oaks	4	3	8	10	0	0	0	0
Ventura	17	21	42	59	7	9	26	35
Unincorporated Area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The next table provides an example of baseline and benchmark numbers. The table lists the baseline numbers for various subpopulations of unsheltered homeless persons for City A. Annual incremental “reduction” percentages that serve as benchmarks are also provided. If these benchmarks are achieved, there will be no homeless persons within three years for each subpopulation category.

Table 2. Sample Baseline Numbers and Benchmarks

City A	2013	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
		Benchmark		Benchmark		Benchmark		Benchmark		Benchmark	
	Baseline Number	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
<b>Subpopulations:</b>											
Chronically Hmls Individuals	40	50	20	50	10	100	0	0	0	0	0
Chronically Hmls Families	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mentally Ill	25	50	12	50	6	100	0	0	0	0	0
Persons w/HIV/AIDS	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Substance Abusers	25	50	12	50	6	100	0	0	0	0	0
Veterans	10	50	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Victims of Domestic Violence	20	50	10	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth 18 – 24	10	50	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth Under Age 18	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Persons Released from Jail*	25	50	12	50	6	100	0	0	0	0	0

It is important to note that each subpopulation category is not mutually exclusive. A chronic homeless person can also be a substance abuser, a veteran, and a person recently released

from jail. Thus, ending homelessness for this person will reduce the number of homeless persons in four of the subpopulation categories.

It is also important to note that several of the subpopulations consist of a small number of persons and that homelessness for these persons can end in two years. For example, there are 10 homeless veterans noted. Half, or five, veterans of these veterans can exit homelessness during the first year and the other half during the following year. The evidence-based and best practices below can help City A achieve “no more homeless veterans” and prevent other veterans from becoming homeless.

Ending homelessness for larger number of persons within the subpopulation categories below can be achieved in three years. For example, as noted in the table below, the number of chronic homeless persons in 2013 can be reduced by half (from 40 persons to 20) during 2014, by half (20 persons to 10) during 2015, and by 100% (from 10 persons to 0 persons) during 2016. Again, it is worth noting that each subpopulation category is not mutually exclusive and that ending homelessness for one person will reduce the number of homeless persons in one or more subpopulation categories.

- **Step 2:** Develop a zero tolerance policy for children living on the streets, in vehicles, and other places not meant for human habitation.

Each jurisdiction should be encouraged to develop a zero tolerance policy for children living on the streets, in vehicles, and other places not meant for human habitation. The following table lists the number of children, and the number of families, living on the streets, in vehicles, and other places not meant for human habitation.

Jurisdiction	# of Unsheltered Children	# of Unsheltered Families
Camarillo	10	4
Fillmore	0	0
Moorpark	0	0
Ojai	1	1
Oxnard	31	17
Port Hueneme	0	0
Santa Paula	3	3
Simi Valley	4	4
Thousand Oaks	8	4
Ventura	42	17
Unincorporated Area	0	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>50</b>

Each jurisdiction should also be encouraged to implement a rapid re-housing approach which is described in step 3 below. This approach is consistent with the best practices concerning ending family homelessness. These practices are outlined in a recent report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness entitled “Ending Family Homelessness: Lessons from Communities. The report noted that best practices focus on the following strategy:

“Communities are also expanding the options offered to families seeking shelter. By offering financial assistance and rapid re-housing services when families apply for shelter, communities are finding that they can divert families from shelter and can instead use the resources to help them resolve the crisis that threatens their housing or quickly relocate them into new housing in the community.”

- **Step 3:** Continue implementing Housing First and Rapid Re-housing approaches

Next steps include continuing the Housing First and Rapid Re-housing approaches that were described on pages 3 and 4. The homeless count and survey data revealed that approximately 70% of the unsheltered homeless population is chronically homeless and in need of longer-term assistance such as rental assistance and wrap-around social services. Thus, a Housing First approach is needed. Conversely, the data showed that 30% of the unsheltered homeless population is not chronically homeless and will likely need shorter-term assistance such as a few months of rental assistance and not as reliant on social services. Thus, a Rapid Re-housing approach is needed.

- **Step 4:** Identify, engage, house, and provide intensive integrated supportive services and treatment to the most vulnerable, visible, and hardest-to-reach chronically homeless single adults and families who have been living on the streets of Ventura County.

Next steps should also focus on supporting street outreach and engagement efforts. Such action should continue to focus on identifying chronically homeless persons in need of a housing first approach. Such attention should be given to the most visible and hardest-to-reach individuals. These actions should have the support of various public and private partners who can help identify, house, and provide social services in order to help implement a housing first approach.

- **Step 5:** Develop sufficient permanent supportive housing beds to serve the chronically homeless population.

Sufficient permanent supportive housing beds should be developed. Models of development should include multi-family complexes and scattered-site units. Permanent Supportive Housing assists homeless individuals and families with mental disabilities, chronic substance abuse, and/or infected with HIV/AIDS by providing long-term affordable rental housing and a broad range of on-site and/or off-site supportive services. The goal is also to increase independent living skills of residents who pay no more than 30% of their monthly income for rent and the balance of their actual cost of rent is subsidized by HUD.

- **Step 6:** Increase homeless prevention resources and services that will help more households remain in their housing by alleviating the problems that place them at risk of becoming homeless and that such assistance is more effective and efficiently delivered to households within the stability of their own housing.

Increasing resources for homeless prevention will help more households remain in their housing by alleviating the problems that place them at risk of becoming homeless. Households living below the poverty level are at serious risk of becoming homeless. Because of their limited income, they frequently have to choose between paying their rent or mortgage and other daily living costs such as child care, clothing, food, health care, and transportation. The generally accepted standard for housing affordability is that households should not spend more than 30% of their incomes on rent and utilities. Many at risk households spend 70% or more of their income on rent and utilities.

Resources include food, health care, clothing, legal assistance, public assistance, rental assistance, and utility assistance at little or no cost. Immediate skilled help such as legal assistance or landlord-tenant mediation may also be necessary. Longer-term assistance, which often includes subsidized affordable child care and health care, help stabilize households. Such assistance may also necessitate credit counseling, employment counseling and placement, and income support programs such as public assistance (e.g., CAL FRESH/food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and CalWorks).

**Step 7:** Increase financial resources for rental and utility assistance to households that are most likely to become homeless if not for this assistance.

Financial resources should only be for rental and utility assistance to households that are most likely to become homeless if not for this assistance. In other words, efforts should be made to ensure that these resources are provided to households that would become homeless without them.

Such households should be identified through an intake process. Criteria used to determine whether the household is likely to become homeless should include monthly household income being 30% or less of the area median income and whether the household has experienced homelessness by either living on the streets and/or in shelters. In addition, these households are likely to be in need the resources that are noted in Step 6.