



County of Ventura Initiates Response Efforts to Address Homeless Encampments in Watershed Areas Beginning with the Santa Clara River Bottom

Good Afternoon Community Members,

We have heard from many of you having concerns about encampments of individuals facing homelessness in our County. We understand these problems have become especially acute in the Santa Clara River. In this notice, we want to share our current and future efforts, in partnership with the cities of Oxnard and Ventura, to address these challenges. We are marshalling our extensive network of County services and housing programs together with our city and community partners to take a comprehensive approach in attempting to clean out the river bed while also conducting extensive outreach to offer services and housing support in an effort to achieve more long-lasting results. We also thought it would be helpful to share the many programs in place that have been working to address the challenges of individuals facing homelessness both before and during the pandemic and the impacts of those efforts. We look forward to engaging with you on this topic, leveraging current programs and services and providing support where it's needed most.

We will continue to keep you updated as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Mike Powers
County Executive Officer

What

A large-scale clean up led by a collaborative stakeholder group of the County of Ventura and city partners will take place in the coming weeks in the Santa Clara river bottom to begin watershed cleanup, removal of encampments and the relocation of homeless individuals by connecting individuals to safe shelter and supportive services to assist with longer term housing placements. This effort builds upon existing supportive programs and services. It will include future efforts in other targeted areas of the County. The group of stakeholders will continue to meet over the coming months to coordinate the cleanup project and look forward to hearing community perspectives throughout the process.

Why

In recent years, the number and size of homeless encampments in the river bottom have significantly increased pointing to the need for long term solutions for unsheltered individuals and posing a threat to public health, sanitation, and environmental health. Multiple causes have worsened homelessness and encampments in the river bottom including reduced capacity at homeless shelters due to COVID-19 safety protocols, economic impacts of the pandemic, a statewide affordable housing shortage, enforcement challenges, among others.

Who

The collaborative effort, supported by the Board of Supervisors, is led by the County of Ventura's Executive Office working with the Supervisors of the impacted areas including the Offices of Supervisor Carmen Ramirez and Supervisor Matt LaVere. Other partners include the Cities of Oxnard and Ventura and community partner organizations. County departments involved include the Human Services Agency, Health Care Agency, Ventura County Sheriff's Office, Fire Protection District, Public Works Watershed Protection

The effort is part of a coordinated approach to address the short-term watershed cleanup project and the long-term homelessness challenges to prevent the displacement of homeless individuals to nearby urban areas. County and city coordination is a key aspect of the effort to facilitate direct outreach and assistance to homeless individuals and successful placements in shelter and housing.

Building on Existing Homeless Programs and Housing Support

Together, the county and cities have made significant program efforts and financial contributions towards preventing and ending homelessness by investing in staffing, services, shelter and housing solutions. 500 people who would otherwise be unsheltered were placed in hotel rooms across four hotels in Ventura County. More than 200 individuals are sheltered in motels as of early August 2021. In 2020, there were over 2,300 persons experiencing homelessness that accessed services through the [Continuum of Care](#) homeless services system with over 1,200 individuals being placed into housing. The Ventura County Continuum of Care Alliance is a collaborative group dedicated To promoting a safe, desirable and thriving community by ending homelessness in Ventura County.

The County's establishment of the coordinated entry system, countywide homeless management information system (HMIS) and 8 one-stop service centers across the County have helped connect individuals to a range of housing and support services including whole person care, recuperative care, food assistance, rapid housing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, and transitional housing among other services. In recent years, emergency shelter capacity in Ventura County has grown thanks to increased funding from the County and cities, coupled with state funding. These financial contributions have created and supported low barrier emergency shelter programs, including Project Roomkey and seasonal motel placements.

In the last 2 years the Board of Supervisors has allocated nearly \$25 million in federal, state and local funding to a wide range of homeless services and future affordable housing developments. While there has been an increase in housing placements in 2020 and 2021, there is increasing demand for homeless services that are balanced against limited resources available in affordable and permanent supporting housing.

How

Based on the needs of each homeless individual in the river bottom, efforts will be made to connect individuals to shelter and housing options funded by the County and Cities ranging from shelters, hotels, safe camping/parking, affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, and rentals among others. The County and Cities are exploring providing transportation to these options in addition to mobile showers, handwashing stations, property storage and restrooms if relocating to a safe camping location.

The effort will also include watershed clean up and removal of Arundo and Tamarisk, invasive species that pose particularly severe threats to the riparian ecosystem, including negative impacts to water quality, overtaking native plant species, increased flood risk, erosion hazards, and wildfire risk due to their highly flammable characteristics.

In preparation for the upcoming watershed cleanup, County Whole Person Care and numerous county agencies and partners (some pictured below) have been conducting direct outreach to the individuals in the river bottom to share available resources for shelter, healthcare, and basic needs. The County's Watershed Protection District has been performing some cleanup of trash and debris and will provide trash bags and subsequent trash removal services for individuals modeled after Ventura's Trash Bag Program that has been successful in the past for trash removal from the river bottom.



Existing programs will be leveraged to help address individual needs. Current collaborative and on going efforts typically includes many partners some of which include:

- Ventura County Health Care Agency (VCHCA) – Ambulatory Care/Whole Person Care
- VCHCA – Ambulatory Care/Health Care for the Homeless and Medication Assistant Treatment (MAT) Clinic
- VCMC – Family Medicine Residency and MAT Fellowship Doctors
- Ventura County Behavioral Health – RISE/PATH/ASSIST and Logrando Bienestar
- Ventura County Public Health – HIV, Communicable Diseases
- Human Services Agency – Homeless Prevention
- Ventura County Sheriff's Office
- Turning Point
- Salvation Army
- Rescue Mission
- United Way
- Mercy House
- Spirit of Santa Paula
- Lutheran Social Services
- Harbor House
- Samaritan Center
- Local/State Law Enforcement
- County and State Parks, CalTrans
- The Nature Conservancy (River Haven, Ormond Beach)
- Cities



Pictured: County Executive Officer Mike Powers, Sheriff Bill Ayub and Supervisor Matt LaVere assessing encampments in the Santa Clara River bottom area.



- Provided non-congregate shelter/Project Roomkey (motel placements), meals, and case management supports to nearly 614 persons (seniors and medically vulnerable homeless persons) countywide since March 2020.
- Currently serving 219 persons in Roomkey placements countywide.
- 150 persons have been permanently housed through this effort.
- 8 weekly One Stop/Care Pod events continued operations during the pandemic with 162 events year-to-date in 2021, reaching more than 1,923 unsheltered persons with co-located hygiene, health, behavioral health, social services, and basic needs supports.
- Healthcare Agency providing COVID-19 vaccines and testing to emergency shelter programs and to unsheltered persons countywide, with 69 vaccine events specifically targeted to the unsheltered population year to date
- Backpack Medicine continues to conduct outreach across the county to unsheltered persons including those in encampments.
- Emergency Shelters still operating at reduced capacity to align with CDC and Public Health guidance for safe operations during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Provided handwashing stations and hygiene services throughout county in partnership with cities and nonprofit agencies.
- RV Safe Parking program in unincorporated area along 33 Hwy between Ventura and Ojai.
- Homeless Prevention/Rental Assistance provided by County and State through HousingisKey.org
- Eviction Moratorium in place through September 30, 2021
- Partnership with nonprofit agencies to provide grant funds and operational support.

Additional County Homeless Response Efforts

Through our services, individuals and families are connected to a network of agencies that provide health care, mental health services, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, temporary housing, and other benefits, including help in securing permanent housing.

County Executive Office

Continuum of Care Lead Agency/Collaborative Applicant

Provides oversight and staff support to countywide service system.

Administers over \$10 million in State and Federal funding for homeless assistance and housing programs.

Coordinating Santa Clara Taskforce response efforts.

Human Services Agency

Homeless Services Program

Administers over 3.5 million in local, state and federal funding for Rapid Re-Housing and rental assistance programs.

RAIN Transitional Living Center

Provides transitional housing for families.

Homeless Management Information System Administrator

Trains system users and oversees use of HMIS (client services database).

Supportive Housing Program

Scattered site supportive housing for 25 chronically homeless individuals (disabled); subsidized housing + supportive services

Health Care Agency

Healthcare for the Homeless Program/ One Stop

Health Care for the Homeless clinic on VCMC campus provides low-barrier medical, substance use disorder, and behavioral health services for unsheltered persons at the

Health Care for the Homeless Clinic; medical services for the homeless also provided at Ambulatory Care clinics county-wide

8 regularly scheduled outreach events, offered throughout the County, that bring healthcare and social services together to provide services. One stops provide mobile medical services, shower pods and linkages to services.

Whole Person Care

Coordinates health, behavioral health, and social services for frequent utilizers of emergency department and hospital services whose needs span multiple systems.

Backpack Medicine

County Medical team provides outreach and healthcare services to people living in remote encampments

Recuperative Care

Provides 12 recuperative care beds in Ventura and 20 recuperative care beds in Oxnard for patients who are homeless and discharged from the hospital or with significant health/behavioral risks transitioning from streets to shelter.

Behavioral Health

Supportive Housing

Provides supportive services to site-based supportive housing programs for chronically homeless individuals with serious mental illness.

RISE program

Provides community based outreach to individuals with serious mental illness including those that are homeless.

Emergency Shelter/Navigation Center Capacity

Established two new emergency shelter/navigation centers for homeless adults in West County. One in Ventura (55 beds) and one in Oxnard (110 beds). Cost sharing with cities for ongoing operational expenses.

Learn more about services for people experiencing homelessness [by clicking here](#).



HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE

- **1,452 persons connected with permanent housing between 10/2019 and 9/2020**
- 121 veteran households provided permanent housing from 10/2019 to date.
- Housing Inventory Increase in 2020-2021: 300 emergency shelter beds (due to project RoomKey), 20 supportive housing units and ability to support 50 additional households with rapid rehousing assistance



HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE

- Countywide Continuum of Care
- Coordinated Entry
- Homeless Management Information System
- Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing
- Transitional Living Center in Camarillo
- Year-Round Shelters in Ventura and Oxnard
- County Funds Over \$51 Million in Services
- Key Gap – Permanent Supportive Housing
- 1,652 housed since the pandemic began. This includes 843 adult households and 809 persons in families of minor children.





CONTINUUM OF CARE SYSTEM

31 agencies participating in coordination

United Way Landlord Engagement Program has assisted in securing housing for 100 households since launching in January 2020

Increased outreach locations: One Stop, Whole Person Care and Backpack Medicine Programs.

8 ONE STOP LOCATIONS!

One stops provide mobile medical services, shower pods and linkages to services.



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