



Legislation Text

File #: 2021-1166, **Version:** 1

To: Board of Supervisors of Sonoma County
Department or Agency Name(s): Department of Health Services
Staff Name and Phone Number: Tina Rivera, 565-4774
Vote Requirement: 4/5th
Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

Alternative Shelter and Housing Solutions

Recommended Action:

Adopt a budget resolution programming \$200,000 of General Fund Contingencies to support alternative and innovative shelter and housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness in encampments in Sonoma County. (4/5th Vote Required)

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on actions the Board has directed staff to take in proposing uses for \$200,000 in Board-designated funds to support those working with the Interdepartmental Multi-Disciplinary Team (IMDT). At the Board of Supervisors meeting on August 31, 2021, the Department of Health Services was directed to propose plans for use of such funds and return for future consideration by the Board. This report aims to propose general parameters and plans for use of these funds, while still allowing for inclusion of unforeseen or otherwise unplanned but equally effective remedies to sheltering those residing in encampments.

Discussion:

One of California's most vexing issues is the large and rising number of residents who lack a safe place to call home. In a state with vast wealth, more than 150,000 of our residents sleep in shelters, cars, or on the street. Our federal and state officials have pledged help, yet our state persists in maintaining the largest homeless population in the country and highest proportion of people living without shelter. About one in nine Americans lives in California, roughly one in four homeless Americans live here. This makes our homeless population far more visible than in other places, as well as more vulnerable to the illness, violence, and death that often accompanies living on the street.

A growing focus is our ability to shelter and house our County's homeless population, including those living in encampments throughout the County. The attached "HEART Encampment Flowcharts" help provide a visual depiction of how the IMDT and its Homeless Encampment Assistance and Resource Team work to engage with those residing in encampments and connect services, shelter and housing. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced congregate shelter capacity, resulting in fewer shelter options for those willing to engage with IMDT and pursue congregate shelters. The reduction in capacity available to those seeking shelter paired with increasing numbers of those who are less inclined or otherwise unable to access congregate shelter and services presents several challenges in coordinating placements during homeless outreach in encampments. Many of these challenges fall into one of two broad categories detailed below: 1) available shelter options and

2) barriers to accessing available shelter options.

Available Shelter Options - Presently there are no accessible shelter options for individuals living in RVs, motorhomes, or trailers. Of the last twenty encampments worked by IMDT, thirty percent have one or more vehicles in these categories. When removing smaller encampments of less than ten individuals, this number jumps to fifty percent. While the County is pursuing multiple solutions for safe parking sites, a common request of homeless persons is to have options close to their community of origin. It is also probable that newly established solutions such as safe parking and tiny villages will be at maximum capacity at various times, and dynamic problem solving will be necessary for placements. Flexible funding proposed would allow funding one-off solutions that meet geographic and capacity needs without the expense of larger facilities and operational costs that would be otherwise prohibitive. An individual may be unwilling to do overnight parking at a Santa Rosa location, but may consider a temporary placement at an RV campsite in Cloverdale, for instance.

Barriers to Accessing Available Shelter Options - Another common challenge is the demand for non-congregate shelter options either by preference or because of a necessary accommodation such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A majority of homeless persons have experienced trauma with an even higher percentage among women and some of these individuals reach the level of diagnosed PTSD. This diagnosis often obligates a reasonable accommodation when offering a placement. Likewise, people without such accommodation needs often state a preference for, and request non-congregate settings such as tiny villages (Los Guilicos Village) and hotels. These settings tend to provide greater personal space, as well as other benefits such as increased safety and security for the individual and their property by providing them their own space. In addition to a lack of available placements of these non-congregate types, geography becomes a challenge as well. Someone agreeable to a hotel or tiny village living in Cloverdale may decline options in Santa Rosa as being too distant from their community of origin.

Below are flexible solutions using the \$200,000 for increasing available shelter options and reducing barriers in order to access available shelter options. The solution offered to individuals will be decided on a case by case basis using the individual's unique situation for the solution that will be the most effective, helpful, and/or addressing a need. We anticipate serving approximately 100 homeless individuals with this funding.

Increasing Available Shelter Options by Placing Individuals Temporarily in (such as the following but not limited to these examples):

- Hotel/Motels (Approximately 1-2 weeks)
- Shared housing: Sober Living Environments (Approximately 30-90 days)
- Shared housing: Rentals with or without meals provided (Approximately 30-90 days)
- Campgrounds: For both RVs and individuals more comfortable living outside (Approximately 30-90 days)

Reducing Barriers to Accessing Available Shelter Options (such as the following but not limited to these examples):

- Minor car and RV repairs
- Renewal for expired registration or insurance
- Storage for Possessions
- Storage for RVs, Trailers, and Motorhomes
- Application fees
- Medical needs such as medication, minor supplies, walker/cane

- Bus or plane tickets (to reunite with family or friends out of county)

Department of Health Services will return to the Board in the Fall of 2022 with a report on how the funding was used and the effectiveness of this type of program.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Healthy and Safe Communities

Goal: Goal 1: Expand integrated system of care to address gaps in services to the County's most vulnerable.

Objective: Objective 3: Create a "no wrong door" approach where clients who need services across multiple departments and programs are able to access the array of services needed regardless of where they enter the system.

Implementation of this item will assist in achieving several goals and objectives of the Healthy and Safe Communities pillar of the Strategic Plan. Sonoma County has utilized the ACCESS Sonoma's IMDT technology, infrastructure, and its specialized cohorts of staff to effectively respond to and support those experiencing homelessness, conducting outreach, engagement and case management. This investment to support our impacted community is designed to, and proven effective at, streamlining access, improving service integration, and bolstering opportunities for coordination of care. In addition, this item will provide for new and innovative responses to homelessness, addressing gaps in services that have not supported the most vulnerable or otherwise un-inclined to accept traditional shelter services. The work presented below reflects both existing and potential for future expanded efforts of the IMDT. The IMDT is poised to implement these efforts, continuing progress in attaining the goals and objectives of the plan.

Prior Board Actions:

On August 31, 2021 the Board Directed staff to work with cities, community-based organizations and the Continuum of Care Board on a collaborative county wide approach to supportive housing projects potentially funded by the State of California's Project Homekey 2.0 funds and the next round of Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP-3) funding and to return with concepts for discussion on October 26, 2021.

FISCAL SUMMARY

| Expenditures | FY 21-22 Adopted | FY 22-23 Projected | FY 23-24 Projected |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Budgeted Expenses | | | |
| Additional Appropriation Requested | \$200,000 | | |
| Total Expenditures | \$200,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Funding Sources | | | |
| General Fund/WA GF | \$200,000 | | |
| State/Federal | | | |
| Fees/Other | | | |
| Use of Fund Balance | | | |

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Contingencies | | | |
| Total Sources | \$200,000 | 0 | 0 |

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The Interdepartmental Multi-Disciplinary Team (IMDT) and its Homeless Encampment Assistance & Resource Team (HEART) alternative housing and shelter solutions will be funded with FY 2021-22 General Fund Contingencies as directed by the Board on August 31, 2021.

| Staffing Impacts: | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Position Title (Payroll Classification) | Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step) | Additions (Number) | Deletions (Number) |
| | | | |

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1 - HEART Encampment Flowcharts

Attachment 2 - Budget Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None