

NEWS

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County answers call to address chronic homelessness

The Board of Supervisors today adopted a 10-year strategy to end homelessness in the county that will focus on early prevention, community integration, outreach and engagement, income support, and permanent housing.

The Board of Supervisors stepped forward and launched an effort to end chronic homelessness in San Bernardino County in 2007 shortly after a census revealed that 7,331 persons were either homeless or living in facilities that serve the homeless in the county.

Fifth District Supervisor Josie Gonzales led the charge, bringing together board members, county staff, cities, and a host of other community partners. With Board approval the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership and the Office of Homeless Services was formed.

"Homelessness is not confined to geographic boundaries and demands our overdue, long-term attention," said Supervisor Gonzales. "It affects us all at various socioeconomic levels and we need to work together to develop approaches that best address our individual and collective concerns. The partnership facilitates dialogue and will enable us to find solutions to end chronic homelessness in San Bernardino County."

Soon after a 10-Year Plan committee was established it immediately began to research other successful plans and best practices across the country.

Efforts from the committee and a collaborative partnership formed of federal, state, local governments, social service agencies and community and faith-based organizations resulted in the County of San Bernardino's 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness. The plan targets homelessness within the chronic, episodic and at-risk populations.

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"It's important that we implement strategies that make effective use of our resources to and improve outcomes for those who are homeless," said First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who will serve with Supervisor Gonzales on the Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Homelessness is complex and this plan addresses the range of causes that must be considered to effectively deal with the problem."

Some of the hidden and persistent costs of homelessness are associated with the intervention of emergency physical and mental health care, paramedics, law enforcement, temporary motel vouchers and emergency shelter providers. Research conducted to develop the 10-Year Strategy proves that the costs of avoiding homelessness in the first place are far less than rehabilitating a person or family after a long period of living on the streets.

"Planning to end homelessness involves a different approach than we have used in the past," stated Isaac Jackson, the county's Homeless Services Coordinator. "Thinking out of the box is critical to our success."

An Interagency Council on Homelessness, consisting of two county supervisors, seven mayors, five non-profit executive staff members and various county department directors, is being created to ensure the implementation the 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness.

Supervisor Mitzelfelt has selected Barstow Mayor Joe Gomez to serve on the Council.

Federal, state and local resources have already been identified to begin funding programs and to establish housing resources that over time are expected to reduce homelessness in the county.