

# Santa Cruz Baseline System Assessment

Presentation to County Board of Supervisors

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[www.focusstrategies.net](http://www.focusstrategies.net)



# About Focus Strategies

We believe optimized systems, the power of analytics, and expanded housing lead the way to ending homelessness.



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# Systems Approach

# Goal

Moving from a loosely coordinated collection of programs and activities that address *some* homelessness, to a strongly coordinated system that jointly addresses *all* homelessness.

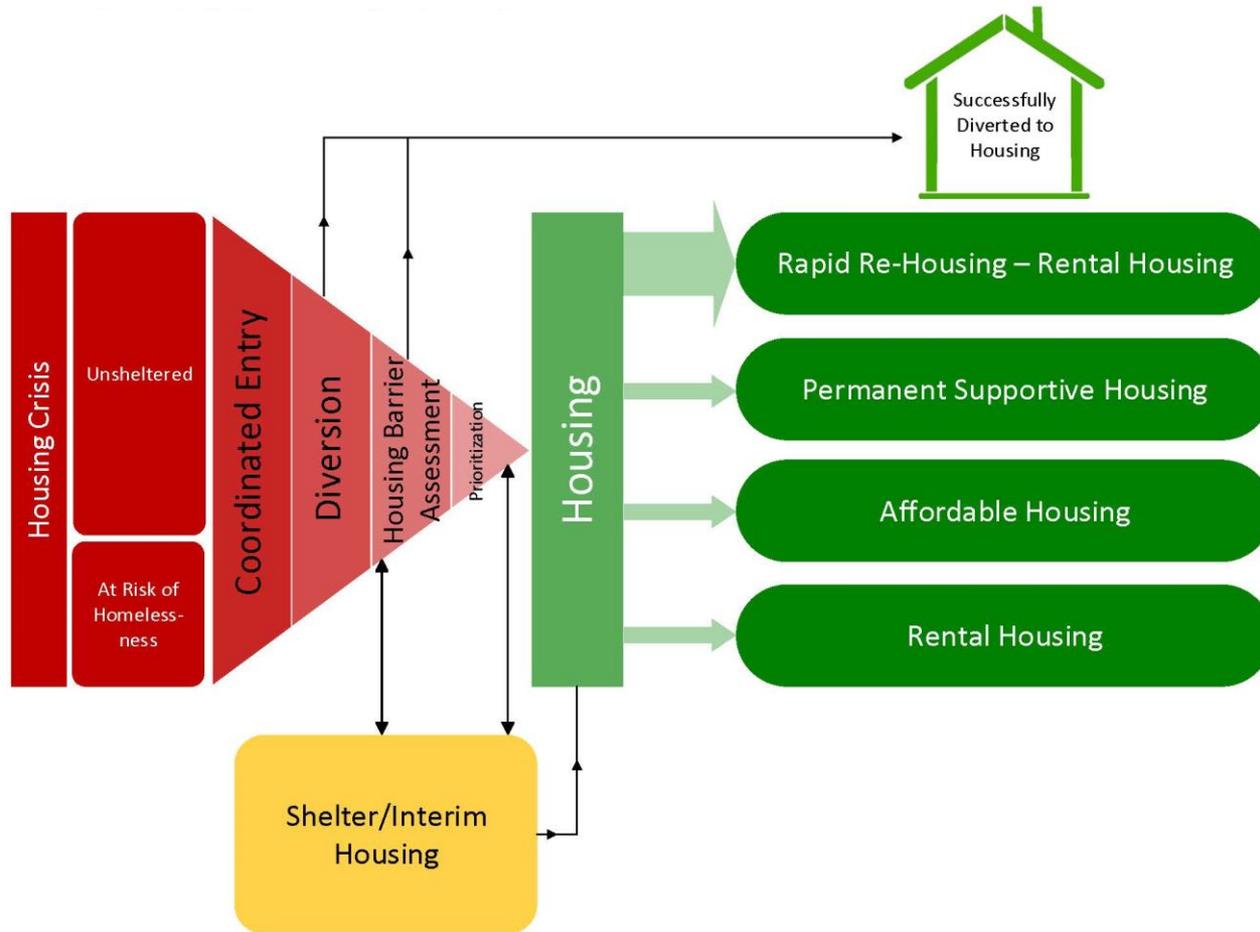
# Why Do You Need a System?

- Programs alone cannot solve the problem
- Limited resources requires joint decision-making shaped by shared goals
- Need to know how you are investing your funds, who is being served, and what the results are
- Creates accountability for all stakeholders

# When You Have a System...

- There are shared objectives all stakeholders agree upon; and:
  - Resources are aligned to achieving shared objectives
  - Programs are designed to achieve shared objectives
  - Data is analyzed to understand whether objectives are being met and make adjustments to improve results
- There is a clear structure and process for making decisions about the community's response to homelessness that is understood by everyone
- Each person who experiences homelessness receives a timely and consistent response that sets them on a pathway towards a housing solution

# Homeless Crisis Response System



# Programmatic Features

A strong homeless crisis response system includes three key features:

1. **Strong Strategies to Reduce System Inflow** – targeted prevention, diversion, reducing institutional discharge to homelessness
2. **High-Performing Homeless System Interventions** – outreach, drop in programs, emergency shelter, transitional housing
3. **Range of Housing Exits** – new affordable units, use of existing inventory (short-term and longer-term rent subsidies and services)

# Infrastructure

In addition, a crisis response system should include three structural elements:

1. **Leadership and Governance** that guides system-level planning and decision making towards a single shared set of strategies and policies
2. **Planning, Policy, Data and Evaluation Capacity** to support ongoing assessment of performance at project and system levels, including robust HMIS data
3. **Staffing Capacity** to adequately support system changes and implementation of shared strategies and policies

# Scope of Work Timeline



# Observations and Findings

# Purpose of Baseline Report

- Summarize Focus Strategies initial observations about current response to homelessness in Santa Cruz County
- Identify strengths and challenges of current efforts
- Inform next steps, including the analysis of data, system planning, and governance structure development
- Provide Short-Term Action Plan for impactful work that can be launched while the rest of the scope is underway

# Overview of Areas Assessed

Areas assessed on a community-wide level:

- Leadership and Governance
- Strategies to Reduce Inflow
- Emergency Response
- Homeless-Targeted Housing
- Affordable Housing
- Coordinated Entry and Data

# Leadership and Governance

- HAP is a positive forum for community to share information, coordinate work, meet HUD requirements, and update on changes in the field
- Governance re-design work not completed; needs further fleshing out, particularly in relation to roles and decision-making processes, setting and implementing funding priorities
- Agreement regarding jurisdictional roles and responsibilities need to be developed (cities, County)

# Strategies to Reduce Inflow

- **Diversion** started but not fully built-out in system and inconsistently practiced
- **Prevention** offered by a number of agencies, but targeting and efficacy has to be evaluated
- **Reducing Institutional Discharge to Homelessness** approach in early development

# Emergency Response

- **Outreach** efforts connect individuals to basic needs, health and behavioral health, and CES
- **Drop in** and **day services** are available in limited quantities
- **Emergency shelter** is predominantly in North County
- **Navigation Centers** will open in both North and South County – low barriers to entry and services focused on securing housing upon exit, open year-round, 24/7
- **Safe parking** is newly implemented; connecting people to services and system
- **Encampment** response is major focus; efforts to address health and safety impacts consumes significant resources

# Emergency Response

- Encampments are just one portion of the homeless population, but drive community's media and political narratives due to visibility
- Response to encampments focused on immediate public health/public safety issues; not connected to strategy for reducing unsheltered homelessness
- To reduce unsheltered homelessness, people have to move from outdoors and into housing, this can include an intermediate stay in temporary shelter

# Homeless-Targeted Housing

- Community shifting from transitional to permanent housing interventions
- Increased housing navigation services and targeting of landlords to build relationships
- Rapid Rehousing and PSH are not yet to scale; more resources and scaling up of housing-focused case management, housing navigation, and landlord engagement is needed

# Affordable Housing

- Developers interested in building units and funders willing to put dollars into projects
- County has low or no growth policies – particularly in unincorporated areas
- Loss of Redevelopment Agency has impacted amount of units available
- Significant gap in inventory exists for households at lowest incomes
- Variations in community acceptance, political will, and belief that additional housing will help

# Coordinated Entry and Data

- Coordinated Entry:
  - Highest need individuals being prioritized; change in who has access to housing
  - System utilizes static list; lacks dynamic prioritization, people get stuck waiting
- Data and Evaluation Capacity:
  - County is aligning homelessness data with CORE measures to improve system processes
  - Data not being used to understand system performance, inform planning, or develop strategic direction
  - No individual or entity is responsible for data analysis and evaluation, and there is little staffing capacity to perform those tasks

# Interim Recommendations and Short-Term Action Plan

# Summary of Findings

- Key elements in place that can be built on: Coordinated Entry, outreach, shelters, targeted housing for high needs
- Some immediate gaps: diversion, housing-focused shelter, limited Rapid Rehousing and PSH exits
- Individual components need to be tied into a system approach
- Important to continue progress towards adopting a governance structure that can better oversee a systems approach; address community concerns about decision-making, transparency and goals
- Data underutilized; HMIS coverage and data quality concerns
- Current staffing capacity for homeless system functions is inadequate

# Diversion/CES, Shelter, and Outreach

1. Implement systemwide Diversion practice to reduce inflow; includes retooling Smart Path Coordinated Entry
2. Build capacity of emergency shelters to deliver housing-focused services through training and seeding new pool of flexible resources
3. Coordinate and standardize outreach efforts through agreement on aligned approach by outreach teams and funders

# Governance

- Relaunch and complete work on a new Governance structure
- Reconvene the Governance study group with support from Focus Strategies to answer:
  - How will the revised structure operate?
  - What purview it will have?
  - What resources and efforts it will jointly oversee?
  - What administrative staffing is needed to implement the system?
- End result will be agreement on the new structure, including protocols and procedures.

# What Happens Next?

- Finalize and release Short-Term Action Plan following incorporation of today's feedback
- Start any work on interim recommendations, including relaunch of governance work
- Other system development work is already underway (SWAP)

# DISCUSSION

In Summary:  
Systems Approach  
Observations and Findings  
Interim Recommendations

# Purpose of Today's Study Session

- ❑ Share first major deliverable from 12 month technical assistance engagement with Focus Strategies:
  1. Systems approach to homelessness
  2. Baseline System Assessment Findings
  3. interim recommendations and initial community feedback
  4. Review next phases
  
- ❑ Garner input and feedback from the Board on Phase 1 deliverables and next steps overall