

● Supervisors approve nearly \$5 million to put trusted health workers into neighborhoods suffering under Covid.

By Pam Marino - Dec 21, 2020

Concerned that three months would not be enough time to train and effectively deploy 100 community health care workers in the neighborhoods with the highest number of Covid-19 cases, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors today unanimously approved a six-month outreach and education program at a cost of nearly \$5 million to begin in January.



County Supervisor Chris Lopez (center, and current chair of the board); County Counsel Les Girard (left); and County Administrative Officer Charles McKee (right) at a May 26 Board of Supervisors meeting. The other supervisors were attending by Zoom, seen on a screen in back.

"This is the biggest thing that we have ever been charged with doing and if we don't step forth in a strong resolute way, I don't think we are going to succeed," Supervisor Mary Adams said in the lead-up to the 5-0 vote.

"I think we have to make our mark," she said. "We'll probably be known as the first county to ever fully jump in and invest our dollars at the core. It will be lasting."

While other counties have used CARES Act monies to finance similar programs that use trusted members of the community to outreach to farmworkers and others negatively impacted by Covid, Monterey County has used nearly all of its federal Covid dollars. To fund this new pilot program supervisors are drawing from a combination of \$2.9 million in cannabis tax revenues, \$1 million from strategic reserves and \$1 million from a contingency fund.

The monies will be distributed through the Community Foundation for Monterey County to seven nonprofit groups and the city of Gonzales to hire and train the workers who will engage with community members at testing sites and elsewhere. The goal will be to educate and connect people to services should they test positive for Covid. Part of the money will go toward stipends to pay for quarantine needs, including food, medical care and housing.

In addition to targeting the census tracts within the county with the highest rates of the virus to get people to testing and services, the supervisors see the pilot as an important way to educate and encourage people to get vaccinated as [the Covid-19 vaccines become available to essential workers in the months ahead](#).

Late on Friday afternoon a staff recommendation for [a three-month program went up on the county's website](#). Over the weekend community organizers and various nonprofits, including COPA, Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, worked to gain support for the secondary proposal for the six-month alternative approved today.

Representatives from the Monterey County Farm Bureau and the Monterey County Hospitality Association said they fully support a six-month program. Also in support is [the collaborative group convened by the foundation](#). CFMC President and CEO Dan Baldwin told the supervisors.

The only change in the program's budget came after Supervisor Chris Lopez questioned why 15 percent of the program's budget—roughly \$643,000—would cover the indirect administrative costs of the nonprofits and city involved. He wanted some of the money to go toward quarantine stipend costs that go directly to residents. He wanted groups to receive 10 percent for administrative costs.

A representative from one of the nonprofits, Andrea Manzo of Building Health Communities, said lowering what the nonprofits receive would negatively impact their ability to administer the program.

The board agreed to a compromise of 12 percent of the total budget going to cover those costs, with 2 percent going toward increasing the quarantine stipend.

The supervisors asked for monthly progress reports beginning in February so they can monitor the program's effectiveness and make changes to the budget as needed.

Correction

This story has been updated to reflect the sum originally proposed for direct administrative costs was about \$643,000, not \$300,000. It was originally proposed to be 15 percent of the total cost, as originally noted.