



Monterey County supervisors approve pilot project to help those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19

SALINAS, Calif. (KION) The Monterey County Board of Supervisors have unanimously approved a pilot project with the goal of helping residents disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The "Community Outreach and Education Pilot Project" will run for six months starting on Jan. 1. It was originally expected to span over three months, but board members decided it would be more beneficial as a long-term project.

The project is expected to help residents by implementing a public awareness campaign and community education efforts using trusted messengers.

Some of what it will include is 45 health workers to provide outreach and education, assistance with setting up testing appointments and help finding resources for isolation and recovery.

This program pulls in community-based programs like COPA, Communities Organized for Relational Power of Action.

Maria Elena Manzo, a community leader with the group COPA says this new program also targets people who have limited access to healthcare as well as people too afraid to seek resources because of their legal status.

"There's fear and there's lack of knowledge, the efforts that were happening were based on the idea that people have a primary doctor, that's not the case for most immigrants," says Manzo.

Manzo says the goal is to have one hundred community health care workers in the county to connect people in underserved communities to resources.

The program will cost about \$4.9 million.

Monterey County Supervisor Luis Alejo says funding will not come from CARES Act money, which he says has already been utilized, but rather county reserve funds and nearly \$3 million in cannabis tax funds.

"We want to show the community that this is all local money and we're putting it to good use because this is about saving lives, we don't want that money sitting in an account when we can be using it to really curb this pandemic in our county," says Alejo.

Alejo and Manzo are asking people to call 211 for more questions about resources in the meantime.

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