

Emergency Action for San Diego



Real Action to Tackle Homelessness, Hepatitis A &
the Affordable Housing Crisis



Goal: End San Diego Homeless Crisis

San Diego County Emergency Action Plan

I. Calling County Government to Action:

While the County of San Diego leadership sits by, our region is suffering from “America’s Deadliest Hepatitis Crisis. [1]”

This is a man-made crisis due to lack of shelter and housing. In January of 2017, an estimated 5,621 San Diegans were sleeping in the streets, and another 3,495 were in shelters. The County of San Diego failed to curb regional chronic homelessness with the evidential increase of homelessness by 62 percent over the previous year. [2]

Urgent action and innovative solutions are needed to assist homeless San Diegans that are dying on the street. Hepatitis A is spreading throughout our region, putting our communities at risk. Our tourism economy is suffering, and city government can’t be expected to solve this crisis alone.

It’s time for San Diego County government to step up and support comprehensive solutions to help the homeless get off the street and into housing. We must act immediately to address Hepatitis A, while investing in long term solutions to address chronic homelessness. We must demand stronger services to those in need and expand affordable housing where San Diegans can live safely.

Our Call to Action:

If County politicians could pledge \$150 million for a Chargers stadium, then they can certainly invest that same amount in real solutions to the homeless, hepatitis A, and housing crisis affecting all of San Diego.

II. A Real Commitment to End the Homeless Crisis with the \$150 million offered to the Chargers:

The County of San Diego can leverage their substantial funds, including their large investment reserve, to deliver an immediate impact on the existing homeless crisis. They can do that by supporting a proven “housing first” approach to addressing chronic homelessness and helping San Diegans with chronic homelessness secure long-term housing.

A. Funds Are Available:

County officials already stated that there was \$150 million available to giveaway to the Chargers. [3] We should instead direct those funds to proven priorities that will get homeless off the street by investing in housing and treatment. Thus, expanding affordable housing in our region and addressing the homeless crisis with long-term solutions.

B. County Investment Thus Far is Insufficient:

The \$25 million and 11 County-owned properties offered by Supervisors Roberts and Jacobs [4] is a step forward, but unfortunately still insufficient.

C. No Place Like Home:

The County of San Diego is expected to receive over \$143 million in state funds from the “No Place Like Home” program over the next few years. These funds are intended to be used for permanent supportive housing for those with mental illness. [5] These funds are critical and must be used for their intended purpose.

III. Immediate Action in Partnership with City of San Diego:

The three largest concentrations of homeless individuals in the San Diego region are all in the Fourth Supervisorial District. These communities include Downtown, the San Diego river area in Mission Valley, and in Ocean Beach. The County of San Diego needs a strong partnership with the City of San Diego to make progress.

A. County Social Workers & Nurses at City of San Diego’s Temporary Shelters:

The County of San Diego needs to support the City of San Diego’s new shelters by providing dedicated social work teams to visit residents and to identify resources for them, get them signed up, and track their progress. Additionally, the County should fund nursing positions within their departments to ensure quality care for San Diegans.

B. Hepatitis A Strike Teams:

Special teams should be deployed to provide Hepatitis A vaccinations at the City of San Diego’s temporary shelters, busy MTS transit stations, and in areas where the homeless congregate, and in areas that are susceptible to new breakouts.

C. Invest in Permanent, Year-Round Mental Health Treatment Facilities:

San Diego is in desperate need of permanent mental healthcare facilities that can provide ongoing treatment and services including inpatient treatment.

IV. Support the Proven “Housing First” Strategy to Get Homeless Housed

Housing first creates stability in the lives of the chronically homeless and allows them to have the opportunity to overcome addictions and other issues that were the root cause of the homelessness. The new Executive Director for the San Diego Regional Task Force, Gordan Walker, has experienced remarkable success in the state of Utah utilizing a “Housing First Strategy.” Mr. Walker successfully housed over 90% of the state’s chronically homeless [10]. In the past, treatment was a prerequisite to housing, and it was a “Treatment First” model. The “Treatment First” model has been shown to be inferior to the “Housing First” model and should no longer be pursued. The County of San Diego would benefit from using the “Housing First” strategy to address the local chronic homelessness crisis.

A. Chronic Homelessness Defined:

The focus for a “Housing First” strategy would be on focusing on Chronic Homelessness: HUD defined people as chronically homeless, meaning they had been homeless a year or more, or had four episodes of homelessness in three years. [11]

B. Support for Current Housing First Programs:

The County should support local nonprofits that utilize housing first programs that have shown efficiency on housing the chronically homeless using a housing first model.

C. Prioritize Housing Choice Vouchers for New Construction and Homeless:

The County of San Diego runs the second largest Public Housing Authority in the region, with more than 10,000 vouchers from the Federal government. [13] The Health and Human Services Agency should review their voucher program to maximize the waitlist priority given to homeless individuals and families. The County should annually evaluate the number of “Project-Based Vouchers” it administers to ensure we use the maximum allowed by HUD guidelines (20 percent). [14] Using vouchers to subsidize housing construction will expand the supply of permanently affordable homes dedicated to those at risk of homelessness.

D. Provide Rental Assistance to those most in need:

Many local families are vulnerable to rising rents and may need rental assistance. The County could provide direct rental assistance to get these individuals off the streets and back into permanent housing. Additionally, the County could be proactive about ensuring those currently housed remain housed.

V. Increase Investment in Affordable Housing

Our region's affordable housing crisis is exacerbating the homelessness crisis. County Government can take concrete steps to increase the availability of affordable homes and encourage sustainable development of housing that is available. Through smart investment and key policy changes.

A. Fee Deferral for Affordable Homes:

The County should defer any impact fees it charges to deed-restricted affordable homes for 15 years. That will allow construction to begin more immediately, even with less available financing.

B. Impact for 100% Affordable Developments:

The 15-year period will also allow the fee deferral to count as a local contribution under California's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Allocation Committee program, giving applicants in San Diego a leg up in the tie-breaking competition for scarce funding.

C. Impact for Market-Rate Construction:

This program would also reduce the cost to construct mixed-income projects, like those using the California Density Bonus Law. The affordable units will be cheaper to finance, because the impact fees could be deferred until later pro forma documents.

D. Impact on Neighborhoods:

To preserve quality of neighborhoods, the County should loan new SB 1 streets and roads dollars to project areas where new developments occur but do not generate immediate impact fees. \$13 million of these new SB 1 dollars will be available annually. [8]

VI. Homeowner Incentives for Accessory Dwelling Units

Accessory dwelling units, or granny flats, can help expand the affordable housing stock in our region and add value to San Diego homeowners' properties. California law recently changed to make Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) easier to permit. [9] The County of San Diego needs to streamline our regulations to ensure more homeowners can take advantage of these rules. The County's role for ADUs is limited to the unincorporated areas, but those often have larger lots that can accommodate these types of additions.

A. Fees Should Be Reduced:

ADUs should be charged a small and flat fee, lower than the costs associated with building other residential units to reflect their smaller impact.

B. Construction Loans:

County can create a revolving loan fund at below-market rates if a homeowner agrees to rent their ADU to house a veteran or a Housing Choice Voucher recipient for the first five years of its operation.

C. Granny Flat Pilot program

Various Counties in the United States have started pilot programs to curb their region’s spiking level of homelessness. In August of 2017, the LA County Board of Supervisors, provided a pilot program for qualifying homeowners up to \$75,000 in funding—as well as a streamlined permitting process—to construct accessory dwelling units on their properties. In return, they must agree to rent the units to formerly homeless individuals. [12}

VII. Taxpayer Accountability and Public Transparency to Measure Results

San Diego’s homeless programs have been beset by false starts, lack of oversight and missteps for years. With a large-scale investment in ending the homeless crisis, County Government must implement ironclad taxpayer protections and strict oversight measures to ensure taxpayers know how their money is being spent and what’s working.

A. Strong Citizen Oversight Led by Homeless Service Providers

An all-volunteer oversight board should be appointed to review proper expenditures of SD HELP funds and inform the public when change or reform is needed. San Diego’s homegrown network of award winning homeless service providers must play a leadership role on the oversight board.

B. Annual Independent Fiscal Audits

Comprehensive analysis of programs ensures taxpayer dollars spent wisely and programs that aren’t delivering results are ended. Audits will be performed by “The Regional Task Force on the Homeless” and will be independent of political or bureaucratic interference.

C. Total Transparency with Online Dashboard

We need urgent coordinated action, and efficient spending, to address the homeless epidemic. An online dashboard can allow the public to see in real time how their money is being spent. All contracts and expenditures will be posted online and available for review by the media and the public to ensure the impact of the investment. These reportable metrics will be utilized to measure progress.

VIII. Conclusion:

It is time for San Diego County to take comprehensive and immediate action to play its part in addressing the homeless crisis that is threatening our neighborhoods. The City of San Diego has stepped up and is beginning to do its part, but our region needs County Government to act as a more committed partner in this urgent challenge.

If County leaders can offer \$150 million to build a stadium for the Chargers, surely, we can make a similar investment to tackle the homeless crisis, which is taking people's lives and affecting all of San Diego.

Sources:

[1] The Guardian (August 28), available at

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/28/hepatitis-a-san-diego-deaths>

[2] Regional Taskforce on the Homeless, Point in Time Count on January 27, 2017, available at <http://www.rtfhsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/comp-report-final.pdf>.]

[3] San Diego Union Tribune (January 29, 2016), available at

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-spanos-says-chargers-to-stay-in-san-diego-in-2016-2016jan29-story.html>.

[4] San Diego Union Tribune (June 12, 2017), available at

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/politics/sd-me-county-housing-20170612-story.html>.

[5] [Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development, No Place Like Home Program, available at <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/nplh.shtml>]

[6] PHA Guidebook to Ending Homelessness (November 2013), available at

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[7] County of San Diego MHSA Fiscal year 2016-17 Annual Update (July 19, 2016), available at

<http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/homepage/MHSA/MHSA%20FY2016-17%20Annual%20Update%20FULL%20REPORT%20.pdf>.

[8] California State Association of Counties (April 13, 2017) ("Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account" or "RMRA") available at

http://www.counties.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/fy_2017-18_huta_and_sb_1_revenue_estimates_041317_0.pdf.

[9] California Department of Housing and Community Development (December 2016), available at <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-research/docs/2016-12-12-ADU-TA-Memo.docx.pdf>.

[10] San Diego Union Tribune (June 27, 2017), available at

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[11] Defining Chronic Homelessness: A Technical Guide for HUD Programs (September 2007), available at

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/DefiningChronicHomeless.pdf>

[12] Second Dwelling Unit (Accessory Dwelling Unit) Pilot Program, available at

<http://planning.lacounty.gov/secondunitpilot>

[13] Affordable Housing Online (last visited October 9, 2017), available at

<https://affordablehousingonline.com/housing-authority/California/Housing-Authority-of-the-County-of-San-Diego/CA108>.

[14] Project Based Vouchers – Frequently Asked Questions, available at

https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_9157.PDF.

[15] McClatchy Newspapers (October 26, 2008), available at

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/article24505888.html>.