

# Plan to house homeless vets and chronically homeless gains wide support

L.A. County and city officials, law enforcement, social service and housing providers, philanthropists and community leaders pledge support for the five-year plan developed by a group of business leaders.

December 02, 2010 | By Alexandra Zavis, Los Angeles Times

Dozens of elected officials, law enforcement representatives, social service and housing providers, philanthropists and community leaders pledged support Wednesday for a plan that aims to get all homeless veterans and the chronically homeless off the streets of Los Angeles County within five years.

The ambitious plan, released by a group of business leaders Nov. 9, is the latest of numerous initiatives to reduce the county's homeless population, which numbers more than 48,000 on any given day. It proposes reallocating about \$230 million in existing resources each year to pay for a rapid increase in permanent supportive housing, which includes counseling and treatment, for the most hard-core street dwellers.

Although the chronically homeless make up just a quarter of the homeless population, they use up a disproportionate share of services, including beds in emergency shelters, hospitals and jails.

"It is over 40% cheaper to house them in this way and support them in this way than to leave them on the streets," said Jerry Neuman, who co-chaired the Los Angeles Business Leaders Task Force on Homelessness, an initiative of the local branches of the Chamber of Commerce and the United Way.

Among those gathered at the California Science Center to endorse the task force's plan Wednesday were three of the five members of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors — Zev Yaroslavsky, Mark Ridley-Thomas and Don Knabe.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster have also signed onto the plan along with Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck, Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca, members of the Los Angeles and Santa Monica city councils, federal officials, religious leaders and nonprofits.

"I think the real challenge now over the next 90 days is how do we really start implementing the plan and really putting rubber to the road," said Neuman, who called support so far "outstanding."

The plan reflects an emerging consensus among homeless advocates that putting a permanent roof over people's heads must be the priority. It also aligns with the Obama administration's stated goal to put an end to chronic and veteran homelessness.

"If we want to end homelessness, we have to provide people with a home," said Yaroslavsky, who initiated a pilot version of the strategy known as Project 50.

The county plans to collaborate with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs on a new project to house 60 homeless veterans, Yaroslavsky said, and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation announced \$13 million in grants to fund other components of the plan.

But the approach remains controversial. Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich has complained about spending tax dollars to provide housing to individuals who continue to abuse drugs and avoid treatment, calling the approach "warehousing without healing."

Previous attempts to persuade communities to share responsibility for housing the homeless have met resistance from residents who fear a spread of the problems in downtown Los Angeles' skid row.

Neuman said the task force will be reaching out to more county and city officials.

"We think that every city in the county has to recognize that they have homeless people within their community and that they have to help to take care of them," he said.

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**Los Angeles Times**

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