

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

Volunteers Fan Out Across San Mateo County to Count People Experiencing Homelessness

Results will help reveal what challenges lie ahead and what steps are needed to effectively end homelessness

Redwood City — How many people live without shelter in San Mateo County?

Nearly two hours before dawn today, volunteer teams set out to canvass streets, parks, creek beds, underpasses and other public spaces to answer that question.

The results will help County officials assess how best to serve individuals experiencing homelessness with an eye on the goal of ending homelessness.

“Homelessness is one of the most pressing and challenging issues facing not only San Mateo County but the greater Bay Area,” said Ken Cole, director of the County’s Human Services Agency. “The picture the count gives us will help tell us where to target resources and guide us toward our goal of returning those experiencing homelessness to permanent housing.”

Organized by the Human Services Agency, the count officially began at 5 a.m. as approximately 300 volunteers met at deployment sites across the county and then set out in pairs to cover their assigned areas.

Results of what is called the “point-in-time” One Day Count will be analyzed and included in a wider report on homelessness in San Mateo County. That report will use data from today’s count of unsheltered people, as well as data about individuals and families in emergency shelters and transitional housing and surveys and of people experiencing homelessness,

Ending homeless – defined as having the tools in place countywide to make homelessness rare, brief and one-time – is a goal set by the Board of Supervisors.

“We are committed to providing shelter to every homeless individual who wants it and the resources to help them eventually move into permanent housing,” said County Manager Mike Callagy.

“The count gives us critical information we and our partners can use to best target funding and services. We simply could not undertake this count without the help of hundreds of residents and the County staff and allied agencies who ventured out in the cold and dark – the same cold and dark experienced by those they are counting,” he said.

The last count, held in 2019, found more than 1,500 residents as experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. Of those, more than 900 were unsheltered and a significant number lived in RVs.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires counties conduct the count every two years to access federal funds used for homeless services. The 2021 count was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this year’s count was pushed back by several weeks due to the surge in the Omicron variant.

The pandemic and its medical, social and economic impacts on individuals and families magnified the county’s need for affordable housing options and the strain on existing services and shelter capacity.

Recognizing those needs, the County successfully acquired \$117 million in state [Homekey](#) funds. These funds are being put to work to acquire and turn former hotels into shelters and transitional housing and to build a navigation center, a 240-bed shelter that will provide intensive counseling and other support services.

Providing immediate housing options for unsheltered individuals and families is a hallmark of the “Housing First” approach to homelessness that the County and its partners utilize. This proven approach involves moving people quickly into stable housing as a starting place to address other issues.

Data from the One Day Count will be available later this year in a report by the County’s Center on Homelessness and will be publicly available.

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