

IV. Homeless

HOMELESS

Specific Homeless Prevention Elements

*Please also refer to the Homeless Needs Table in the Needs.xls workbook.

1. Sources of Funds—Identify the private and public resources that the jurisdiction expects to receive during the next year to address homeless needs and to prevent homelessness. These include the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act programs, other special federal, state and local and private funds targeted to homeless individuals and families with children, especially the chronically homeless, the HUD formula programs, and any publicly-owned land or property. Please describe, briefly, the jurisdiction's plan for the investment and use of funds directed toward homelessness.
2. Homelessness—In a narrative, describe how the action plan will address the specific objectives of the Strategic Plan and, ultimately, the priority needs identified. Please also identify potential obstacles to completing these action steps.
3. Chronic homelessness—The jurisdiction must describe the specific planned action steps it will take over the next year aimed at eliminating chronic homelessness by 2012. Again, please identify barriers to achieving this.
4. Homelessness Prevention—The jurisdiction must describe its planned action steps over the next year to address the individual and families with children at imminent risk of becoming homeless.
5. Discharge Coordination Policy—Explain planned activities to implement a cohesive, community-wide Discharge Coordination Policy, and how, in the coming year, the community will move toward such a policy.

Program Year 1 Action Plan Special Needs response:

Question 1: Sources of Funds—Identify the private and public resources that the jurisdiction expects to receive during the next year to address homeless needs and to prevent homelessness. These include the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act programs, other special federal, state and local and private funds targeted to homeless individuals and families with children, especially the chronically homeless, the HUD formula programs, and any publicly-owned land or property. Please describe, briefly, the jurisdiction's plan for the investment and use of funds directed toward homelessness.

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission expects to receive \$89,054 in McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funds from the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) program during FY05/06. The proposed expenditure of these funds is detailed in the accompanying table entitled [Fiscal Year 2005/2006 Action Plan Funding Priorities](#). In addition, the locally adopted CDBG policies prioritize the use of public services CDBG funds for homeless prevention and homeless services and this prioritization for FY05/06 is likewise detailed in the accompanying table. The prioritization and use of CDBG and ESG funds is closely integrated with the Sonoma County Continuum of Care Plan and the associated local planning process resulting in material resources directed to programs serving chronically homeless individuals.

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission is the lead agency in the county Continuum of Care planning process. The Commission and the cities of Petaluma and Santa Rosa work together with over 100 representatives of homeless service providers, housing developers, and other community organizations and interested citizens (collectively known as the Continuum of Care Planning Group) to develop and implement the Sonoma County Continuum of

Care Plan. The Continuum of Care Plan, and all information included in the discussions about homelessness throughout this Consolidated Plan, reflect the demographics, needs and available shelter, housing and services in all three HUD entitlement jurisdictions covering all geographic areas of Sonoma County. Agencies participating in the Continuum of Care Planning Group are successful in obtaining awards of McKinney-Vento Continuum of Care funds typically in the range of \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 annually.

In early 2002, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors prioritized the establishment of a new homeless shelter, resulting in the County purchasing and renovating the Russell Avenue Shelter that opened in late 2003. The capital and operating cost of this successful shelter program is funded with County general funds. The current operational budget is approximately \$250,000 per year. The Russell Avenue shelter operator, Catholic Charities, also operates several other major homeless programs in the county and is highly effective in raising private charitable contributions to augment public funds in support of these, and other, programs. The County is also providing the land for the new Chanate Women's Emergency Shelter for \$1.00 per year, and has also made the commitment to provide up to \$100,000 per year for the cost of operation of the new Samuel Jones Hall emergency shelter slated to open in late 2005.

Question 2: Homelessness—In a narrative, describe how the action plan will address the specific objectives of the Strategic Plan and, ultimately, the priority needs identified. Please also identify potential obstacles to completing these action steps.

The overarching homelessness goal in the 2005-2010 Strategic Plan is: To promote new and existing day centers, emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities and services that will coordinate and improve the continuum of care system for homeless residents of Sonoma County.

Barriers to achieving this broad goal include scarcity of resources, community acceptance of homeless facilities and programs, and the possibility that, due to socio-economic trends, the incidence of homelessness may grow at a rate greater than the growth of prevention and intervention services.

The specific goal and objectives to address homelessness in Sonoma County are listed below, and a brief description of each project funded in FY 2005-2006, the funding amount and identification of the objectives achieved by the project are included in the Homeless Prevention and Homeless Services Priority Funding section of FY 2005-2006 Action Plan Funding Priorities chart included in *Year 1 Additional Files* section of this Action Plan.

Homelessness Goal: To promote new and existing day centers, emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities and services that will coordinate and improve the continuum of care system for homeless residents of Sonoma County.

Note 1: Under each of the objectives listed below, the financial assistance may be provided to acquire, renovate, construct or reconstruct the facility in which services will be provided and/or to pay a portion of the delivery costs for the services to homeless persons.

Note 2: Permanent supportive housing represents one component of a fully developed continuum of care system for homeless person, as well as a housing solution for non-homeless people with special needs. The County's specific objective for assisting permanent supportive housing development is discussed in the *Specific Housing Objectives* section of this Plan and is not repeated here.

Homelessness Objective S-1

Provide day center services to homeless persons, some with special needs.

Homelessness Objective S-2

Provide emergency shelter beds for homeless persons, some with special needs

Homelessness Objective S-3

Provide transitional housing with supportive services to persons leaving homeless shelters or to persons who are living “on the streets”, some with special needs.

Homelessness Objective S-4

Provide mental health, other health and social services, counseling, employment training, education, childcare, parenting education, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence intervention, self-sufficiency skills, and transportation assistance, to homeless persons living “on the streets” or in emergency shelters, including outreach to the “street” homeless and assessment of individual and family needs. Some of the assisted persons will be from special needs subpopulations.

Homelessness Objective S-5

Provide homeless prevention services to households who are at risk of becoming homeless, some with special needs.

Question 3: Chronic homelessness—The jurisdiction must describe the specific planned action steps it will take over the next year aimed at eliminating chronic homelessness by 2012. Again, please identify barriers to achieving this.

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission and the cities of Petaluma and Santa Rosa jointly comprise the Lead Agency for the Sonoma County Continuum of Care planning process. Comprised of the three HUD entitlement jurisdictions in the County directly funded by HUD, the joint Lead Agency ensures that the Continuum of Care planning process results in a Continuum of Care Plan compatible with their Consolidated Plans and Housing Authority Agency Plans, as well as with local Housing Elements and related policies, so that the Continuum of Care Plan can be coordinated with each jurisdiction’s other efforts in the areas of affordable housing and homelessness. In each year since 1997, the Sonoma County Continuum of Care Plan has been endorsed by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, as well as by the cities of Santa Rosa and Petaluma.

The following excerpt from the 2004 Sonoma County Continuum of Care Plan summarizes the strategy for addressing chronic homelessness in Sonoma County:

“The Sonoma County Continuum of Care Planning Group (CCPG) bases its ending chronic homelessness strategy on a 2003 document entitled “VISION 2012: ENDING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS.” That document indicates strategic directions for housing the 539 chronically homeless individuals in Sonoma County (currently numbering 309 sheltered, 216 unsheltered) by 2012. This document puts a focus on improving linkages between services at every stage, increasing the supply of transitional and permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless population, and continuing capacity building, advocacy and education.

Service Linkages include expanded outreach services to seek out those with special needs or backgrounds (e.g., mental illness, social isolates) to build trust and provide assistance; coordinated intake and assessment that places people in appropriate housing and treatment settings as soon as possible; individualized case management; substance abuse treatment capacity such that slots are available within one week for those who choose or are mandated to receive treatment; and significant progress in eliminating service redundancies and developing effective interfaces among CCPG participants and other mainstream systems such as criminal justice, health care, mental health, social security and veteran’s programs.

Housing Strategies include developing a well coordinated homeless prevention strategy to keep people at-risk of homelessness in their current housing (including programs to address rent arrears, substandard housing units, utility costs and support for households who have a member battling addiction); increased transitional housing with appropriate supportive services, especially those who have completed initial substance abuse treatment who are not ready to live independently; and an increase in the supply of affordable permanent supportive housing such that chronically homeless people whose disabilities will prevent full self-sufficiency can obtain permanent supportive housing within three months.

Advocacy, Education & Policy measures will be designed towards the goal of broad community support of the Strategy to End Chronic Homelessness.

The CCPG's Ending Chronic Homelessness Committee has explored best practices in street outreach, convened visioning sessions, and begun to create a comprehensive outreach plan to chronically homeless in Sonoma County. Funding is being sought for new projects to provide service linkages to chronically homeless individuals in the courts. These activities will complement and expand upon existing partnerships with the County Division of Alcohol and Other Drug Services to provide housing to largely chronically homeless offenders through the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act (SACPA) program.

The CCPG is very much aware of community concerns in placing individuals with mental illness or active substance abuse into local neighborhoods. Unless adequate supportive services are available, housing chronically homeless individuals without accompanying services will create a sensitive situation. The CCPG will continue to work with the Sonoma County Housing Coalition, the Task Force on the Homeless, and other advocacy groups to educate local communities about housing and counter NIMBYism. At the same time, the CCPG must engage with our partners in the mental health and substance abuse fields to creatively discover new sources of funding to ensure that adequate services are available to chronically homeless adults as quickly as possible once the individual becomes ready to accept services.

In this historically agricultural county, there is no large or underutilized housing stock to be rehabilitated to increase the supply of available affordable housing units. The County and its nine incorporated jurisdictions responded to the County's affordability crisis by drafting General Plan Housing Elements that facilitate the development of new affordable housing units, and by providing new housing programs, local funding, land grants, fee deferrals, density bonuses, and other regulatory incentives to developers of new affordable units. Sonoma County's Housing Element directs staff to investigate the possibility of allowing SRO hotels in urban commercial districts, and the City of Santa Rosa's Housing Element now includes specific incentives to aid in the development of emergency shelter, special needs and SRO housing. In January 2004, the City of Petaluma adopted Sonoma County's first commercial-housing linkage fee. The Sonoma County Housing Advocacy Group and the Sonoma County Task Force on the Homeless are advocating adoption of additional Jobs-Housing Linkage fees, as well as strong inclusionary zoning ordinances and maximum use of Redevelopment funds to foster development of affordable housing.

Local agencies have found tenant-based rental subsidies, used in both existing and new market rate housing, to be an effective tool for meeting the affordable housing needs that cannot be met through subsidized construction alone. The Santa Rosa and Sonoma County Housing Authorities provide rental subsidies to over 3,500 very low-income people throughout the County through the Section 8 Voucher Program, but both Housing Authorities have long waiting lists for their programs. The County Housing Authority also uses one-half of the County's annual HOME Program allocation for its Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBA) Program, providing subsidies to 60 homeless households leaving emergency shelters, who have obtained supportive services from local non-profits. The County Housing Authority administers five Shelter Plus Care grant programs, providing rental subsidies to 52 homeless persons with HIV/AIDS, mental illness or physical disabilities."

The CCPG establishes specific Action Steps for addressing chronic homelessness as part of the annual Continuum of Care planning process. A full listing of each year's Action Steps can be found in the annual Continuum of Care Plan. A full copy of the current Plan can be viewed and downloaded from the Sonoma County Community Development Commission's website at www.sonoma-county.org/cdc.

Specific to FY05/06 activities, the County's commitment to tenant-based assistance is maintained through HOME funding at \$556,653 and through the maintenance, and expanding where possible, the Shelter Plus Care programs. Additionally, the commitment to the CCPG will be maintained including renewing funding for a Continuum of Care Coordinator for FY05/06. Primary barriers to addressing the needs of chronically homeless individuals mirror those of serving homeless people in general, namely; community acceptance of facilities and programs and the scarcity of resources.

Question 4: Homelessness Prevention—The jurisdiction must describe its planned action steps over the next year to address the individual and families with children at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

The County, cities and local nonprofit agencies offer a range of programs that provide financial and other assistance to those who are at-risk of becoming homeless due to: 1) financial emergencies, 2) loss of existing dwelling units through inaccessibility by persons with mobility impairments, natural disasters or unabated deterioration, and 3) the rapidly escalating costs of housing in Sonoma County. In addition to these specific prevention programs, many of the supportive services detailed in the *Homeless Inventory* section of the Strategic Plan are available to non-homeless persons who have special needs and who may be at risk of homelessness. Furthermore, most of the listed services provided in conjunction with the emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive programs discussed in the previous three questions function to prevent a continuation or recurrence of homelessness by working to address the underlying problems that initially led the individual or family to become homeless. All of these services and programs are detailed in the charts included in the *Homeless Inventory* section of the Strategic Plan and will not be repeated here.

The specific actions and funding levels for FY05/06 are detailed in questions 1,2 & 3 above and in the accompanying Fiscal Year 2005/2006 Action Plan Funding Priorities table.

Question 5: Discharge Coordination Policy—Explain planned activities to implement a cohesive, community-wide Discharge Coordination Policy, and how, in the coming year, the community will move toward such a policy.

The Sonoma County Health and Human Services Functional (HHS) Committee meets monthly to discuss policies and protocols that can be successfully implemented to ensure that, to the extent practicable and where appropriate, the discharge of persons from publicly funded institutions or systems of care does not immediately result in homelessness. The HHS Committee is an inter-departmental group comprised of the County departments of Health Services (Divisions of Alcohol and Other Drug Services, Mental Health, Prevention and Planning, Public Health), Human Services (Divisions of Adult & Aging Services, Economic Assistance, Employment & Training Services, and Family, Youth & Children's Services), Probation, County Administrator's Office, the Office of Commissions (Human Services Commission, Commission on Human Rights, Commission on the Status of Women), and the Community Development Commission (Housing Authority, Redevelopment Agency and Community Development Division).

Because these departments administer or contract for services with systems of care and publicly funded institutions, such as foster care, youth facilities, mental health treatment facilities,

domestic violence programs, homeless shelters, and substance abuse treatment facilities, their coordinated involvement is important to assess current discharge policies and protocols and to recommend new or revised policies and protocols to prevent homelessness upon discharge where feasible. Numerous County agencies have developed and implemented protocols in the area of discharge planning, often in cross-department and public/private collaborations. Several of these efforts are described further below.

The Sonoma County Human Services Department offers two programs designed to provide youth aging out of foster care with the skills needed to avoid homelessness. The Independent Living Skills Program (ILP) facilitates housing and life skills development for youth aging out of foster care. ILP provides housing search services as well as assistance with housing move-in costs for approximately 60% of the County's youth who are aging out of foster care. The Department's Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) places youth ages 16-17 into a quasi-independent living situation rather than traditional foster care through a contract with Redwood Children's Services. THPP provides services, classes and one-on-one mentoring as well as shelter, with the goal of transitioning foster youth from a THPP apartment to a nearby independent apartment.

At the County's Norton Psychiatric Center, mental health service providers or social workers discuss discharge plans with mental health patients. A financial counselor is available to assist patients to apply for SSI and other resources, and a range of referrals are made available prior to discharge. Patients who would be homeless on discharge are referred to Project HOPE for comprehensive treatment services, housing assistance, independent living skills coaching, and employment development services. Patients who return to an outdoor living situation by choice are often contacted again through Project HOPE's street outreach.

The Probation Department now issues copies of the Sonoma County Homeless/At-Risk Resource Guide to all inmates being released from the County detention facilities. This pocket guide, which is updated periodically, lists information and contacts for all of the services, shelters, and subsidized housing resources that are available for people who are at-risk of becoming homeless or who are already homeless. While it is not reasonable to expect that the County can prevent homelessness for all released inmates, this guide can help to connect the inmates with local resources that can help to provide the housing and services they need.

The Sonoma County Housing Authority has established a number of preferences for admission to the federally funded Section 8 program, as well as to its Shelter Plus Care and HOME tenant-based rental assistance programs. Several of these preferences are targeted to groups of people who are involved in the County's systems of care. Examples of such preferences are for victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities and/or seniors, veterans and veterans' families, families and individuals who are involuntarily displaced by natural disasters, emancipated foster youth, homeless families and individuals transitioning from shelters to self-sufficiency, and persons with HIV/AIDS. By implementing these admission preferences for these target groups, the Housing Authority facilitates provision of monthly rental subsidies that make decent, safe and sanitary housing affordable and available to people who may otherwise become homeless upon leaving their institution or system of care.

A range of effective diversion programs have been developed to effectively move homeless people with special needs out of local criminal justice facilities and into appropriate services and housing. For example, the County-funded Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime (TASC) project allows non-violent offenders with substance abuse issues to have their sentence in the county jail modified or diverted by referring them into dedicated beds in local substance abuse treatment programs. Similarly, several local police jurisdictions have agreements with County Alcohol and Other Drug Services to bring individuals suspected of public drunkenness or similar infractions to the Orenda Center for detoxification services, in lieu of taking them to jail and booking them.

During this past year, the Sonoma County Superior Courts and the Sonoma County Task Force on the Homeless (a member of the Continuum of Care Planning Group Steering Committee) have continued to engage a broad spectrum of public and non-profit sector representatives in designing a Court Homeless Protocol Project, which will bring homeless defendants the assistance they need to stabilize their situations and stop recycling through the court system. The community-wide process to design and implement the program has included several judges and Court personnel, the District Attorney, Public Defender, Santa Rosa City Attorney, Police, and Housing and Redevelopment Agency, County Sheriff's office, Human Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services, Human Services Commission, and Courts, as well as many nonprofit homeless and alcohol and drug services providers, religious congregations, and United Way.

Two service areas are planned for the Court Homeless Protocol Project:

1. Many defendants could be appropriately diverted from the court system through direct law enforcement referrals to drug and alcohol treatment, and/or shelter. Detoxification and shelter will be made available and linkages strengthened between social services and law enforcement agencies.
2. An extra-judicial social services advocate (Court Homeless Protocol Project Advocate) will serve within the court system to assure early planning for release to treatment, shelter, or appropriate services. Discharge planning will start at entry to the system, be available at sentencing, and follow up to assure that defendants received appropriate services, including benefits assistance, treatment and/or housing, upon release. Agreements are in process with various agencies to provide beds or services to these defendants upon their release.

The HHS Committee and the other collaborative groups described above will continue to meet to develop and implement plans, and to discuss other ways in which policies and protocols can be developed to prevent future homelessness for those leaving publicly funded institutions or systems of care.

Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG)

(States only) Describe the process for awarding grants to State recipients, and a description of how the allocation will be made available to units of local government.

Program Year 1 Action Plan ESG response:

Not applicable to the Urban County.