

## **Nevada County 2020 CSAC Challenge Award: Homeless Outreach and Medical Engagement (HOME) Team**

**Overview:** The Homeless Outreach and Medical Engagement (HOME) Team is an innovative solution for engaging and housing those experiencing chronic homelessness in rural communities.

**Challenge:** Like many communities in California, homelessness is a significant problem in Nevada County. Our community is somewhat unique in the proportion of chronically homeless individuals. Nevada County is well above state averages for this group; 44% of people surveyed in our 2018 Point in Time (PIT) count met the chronically homeless definition versus the state average of 28%. Additionally, 41% of those surveyed identified as suffering from chronic health conditions, and 43% reported having a physical disability. This high percentage of people self-reporting as having unmet physical health needs illustrated the opportunity for a creative strategy to engage this population in care. Unmet physical health needs often create a barrier to accessing other necessary services such as behavioral health treatment, substance use treatment, and housing. In addition, unaddressed physical health issues and chronic conditions also result in high utilization of emergency and urgent medical care.

**Solution:** In response to the observed challenge, Nevada County created the innovative Homeless Outreach and Medical Engagement (HOME) Team in April of 2019 consisting of a Nurse, two Personal Services Coordinators, a Substance Use Disorder Counselor, Housing Specialist, and Peer Specialist to identify physical health, mental health, and substance use disorder needs in a welcoming and destigmatizing manner. The HOME team meets individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness at locations in the community where they are living. The team engages people through: providing physical health care services first, which is a less stigmatized form of care than substance use or mental health services; embedding a person with lived experience in the team who will be able to address issues of mistrust in this population; offering low barrier, housing-first options that do not require sobriety or service engagement for entrance; and creating a close connection with law enforcement staff so that people who are arrested or incarcerated are quickly offered services and housing.

**Innovation:** The HOME team is a unique program design created to address the specific need of reducing a disproportionately large population of chronically homeless individuals in our rural county. Elements of the program build upon successes experienced elsewhere, but by combining medical care with peer support, together with a housing first approach, we believe we have established a successful strategy to engage and support a population that has proven to be difficult to stabilize. People are often reluctant to discuss their mental health and substance use issues, but typically are more comfortable engaging with help for their physical ailments like a wound or a cold, which can then be the starting point for a more trusting relationship and eventually openness to discussing more challenging issues. Homelessness is experienced differently in small rural counties than in urban centers. The challenges of expansive geography, unique cultural and social norms, and limited services all have influenced our program design. In recognition of this innovative program, Governor Newsom visited Nevada County to see the HOME Team in action on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**Results:** The HOME Team has had incredible impacts and results since its creation in April of 2019. Through June of 2020, the HOME Team has conducted outreach to 396 individuals experiencing homelessness. 140 individuals officially entered the HOME Team program and received intensive case management services. 156 Substance Use Disorder or Mental Health assessments were performed, 124 of which resulted in subsequent placement in Mental Health or Substance Use Treatment Programs. 50 individuals secured housing through recovery residences, bridge housing programs, or permanent housing situations. The HOME Team Nurse has engaged with 139 individuals, providing medical related assessments, minor medical care, and referrals for medical needs.

**Replicability:** This program is highly relevant to other rural counties struggling with a persistent population of homeless people who are difficult to engage in services and housing. Stigma around mental health and substance use treatment is particularly pervasive in rural communities. Leading with physical health care services has resulted in increased engagement from clients, allowing staff to build connections and trust that lead to better treatment and housing outcomes.

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Local Media Article on the Governor's Visit: <https://yubanet.com/regional/governor-newsom-highlights-nevada-countys-home-team-as-model-program-during-kickoff-of-his-homelessness-tour/>

Additional Information related to the HOME Team:

<https://www.mynevadacounty.com/DocumentCenter/Index/1325>