

## **Ventura County Health Care Agency Mobile Encampment Outreach- Meeting People Where They Are**

**Overview** – Our program brings together partners that span across jurisdictional boundaries and our partners’ traditional roles to address challenges posed by and experienced by vulnerable persons living in encampments.

**Challenge** – The rising number of persons experiencing homelessness in Ventura County and across the nation is emerging as the social, political, and equity issue of our time. The 2020 annual point in time count in Ventura County identified 1,743 homeless adults and children; the most at-risk among these being the 1,265 (72.6%) found living unsheltered in cars, RVs, and informal encampments in river bottoms, urban parks, and vacant lots. Poor health, risky behaviors, food insecurity, lack of shelter, transportation, and employment opportunities are just a few of the key barriers to success our homeless community faces. Additionally, encampments pose environmental and health and safety concerns for those living unsheltered, as well as the surrounding community.

By addressing challenges outside of the scope of traditional systems, or asking people to come to us, we are building trust, and meeting needs of our patients, especially some of our most at-risk patients.

Through working collaboratively in an ecosystem of partners such as Cities, public safety, and private non-profits, we have established a network to address complex social, political, environmental, and health equity concerns on the spot.

**Solution** – Led by the Health Care Agency, a bi-weekly One Stop event at encampment sites throughout the County was established. This effort brings together multiple County, city, and non-profit teams to provide shower pods and a medical mobile unit, as well as other services including: housing navigators from the cities, homeless liaison officers from the city and County Sherriff, Health Care for the Homeless Clinic, Medication Assisted Treatment Clinic, Whole Person Care, street outreach teams from local non-profits, RISE – county sponsored mental health resources, and HIV testing, needle exchange, condoms, and vaccinations.

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Patient buy-in is achieved through low-pressure techniques and allowing the patient to set the pace of care, especially for those patients that have experienced trauma and have distrust public systems.

Frequent and consistent engagement has proven to build patient trust over time.

**Innovation** – These efforts place health care teams in collaboration with multiple other partners working towards common goals and addressing social determinants of health. The innovation is in providing non-traditional services to meet the needs of vulnerable patients outside of usual care delivery models. As health care providers, we might not have seen ourselves in the primary role in providing encampment outreach, however, through integration, we have extended the front door of our health care system and have become part of a broader solution.

**Results** – While other health care initiatives may be characterized by the volume of participants that can be reached or cost-effectiveness through economies of scale this effort, through modest commitment of resources is concentrated on benefitting the most substantially at-risk.

Risks to encampment residents, such as the hardship of living outdoors, exposure to physical harm and exploitation, lack of adequate sanitation, and isolation from public services create unique vulnerability for the unsheltered as well as potentially unnecessary costs and burden on the health care system and other collaborating partners. By providing medical care to persons experiencing homelessness outside of traditional medical settings we have decreased emergency department utilization for homeless persons who are super-utilizers by 63%.

**Replicability** – Mobile encampment outreach can be implemented by any county. Facilitated through County leadership, the success and foundation of this effort is based upon breaking out of silos, the integration of services and programs, as well as leveraging limited funding and resources.

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**Link to our video describing the partnership and program:** <https://vimeo.com/595415361/c441a7864c>