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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RECEIVES REPORT ON HOMELESS DEATHS IN THE COUNTY

Reported Homeless Deaths in 2018 Are Down Slightly from 2017

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) – At its regular meeting on Tuesday, February 11, 2020, the Board of Supervisors heard an annual report on the number of homeless deaths that occurred in the county in 2018, which was down slightly from the previous year. According to the report, which is compiled by the County Public Health Department’s Homeless Death Review Team (HDRT), 41 persons experiencing homelessness died in Santa Barbara County in 2018 as compared to 44 deaths each in 2017 and 2016.

The HDRT was created by County staff in 2008 to review homeless deaths and their causes, explore means to avert similar deaths and, where available, compile statistical data to identify trends. Through identification and elimination of barriers, the hope is to avert premature death associated with homelessness.

Multiple agencies in the county collaborate to address challenges and provide lifesaving/life prolonging services, such as housing, drug treatment, medical care, employment resources, and mental wellness. Since 2018, several expanded services are assisting persons experiencing homelessness, such as Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and recuperative care.

“The increased availability of recuperative care beds, also known as medical respite, in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara help homeless patients who are far too ill to mend on the street and require a safe and clean environment with access to good nutrition in which the housed population typically recuperates,” said Van Do-Reynoso, Santa Barbara County Public Health Director. “In addition, recuperative care programs are a proven strategy in reducing readmissions to hospitals.”

Medication assisted treatment (MAT) is an effective use of medications in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies in the treatment of substance use disorders, and can help some people to sustain recovery. The HDRT reports that in 2019, there was a positive response from an Organized Delivery System (ODS) of care and increased use of the Behavioral Wellness Department’s 24-hour Access Line [(888) 868-1649] for behavioral health crisis response and service.

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2018 HOMELESS DEATHS REPORT

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In 2018, the leading cause of death was due to cardiovascular disease and drug/alcohol overdose. These individuals died prematurely with an average age of 58, compared to 76 years in the housed population for the same year. Of the 41 deaths identified in 2018, 76 percent were male with 63 percent of the deaths occurring indoors. Of the total, 73 percent occurred in south county, 20 percent in the north, and 7 percent in central parts of the county.

Based on the data over the past several years, several themes are apparent:

- Substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) remains the most prevalent health condition identified in homeless individuals who died in 2018.
- Seasonally, there is an overall even distribution of deaths.
- No deaths were attributed to the weather in 2018. In other words, no hypothermia, hyperthermia, or dehydration-related causes was listed as a manner of death for any of the 2018 decedents.

To read the full report, click on [Homeless Death Review Report](#). To learn more about County resources on homelessness, housing, behavioral health and public health, click on the links below.

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(2/12/20) [Board of Supervisors Authorizes Staff to Seek \\$4 Million in New State Funding for Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention](#)

(2/6/20) [Board of Supervisors Approves Extensive Funding ...For Vulnerable Individuals](#)

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