



Santa Barbara, California with hills and Pacific Ocean in background

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Affordability as the Defining Challenge

It's no surprise that Santa Barbara County, like most of coastal southern California, has high housing costs. What is striking is that the county ranks third among all California counties in its poverty rate (23 percent in 2016). This juxtaposition creates formidable structural challenges to addressing homelessness.

Among the area's homeless population, the rate of unsheltered homelessness is high (62 percent) and very visible in many parts of the County. Nonetheless, Santa Barbara County was among only seven of the 30 California continua of care areas where the overall Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless population count decreased from 2017 to 2019.

Two agencies, Santa Barbara County's Housing and Community Development Division (HCD) and the United Way's Home for Good (HFG), have collaborated in the leadership roles for coordinating the countywide homeless assistance services. HCD takes on most administrative functions of the local Continuum of Care (CoC) and is the Homeless Management Information System administrator.

“While the housing authority does [its] best to find partners in the community to assist, there are not enough resources in place in the community to both prevent people from becoming homeless and finding places for those who are homeless to live.”¹

*Women's Fund of Santa Barbara
2019*

Woman who is staying
at one of the New
Beginnings Counseling
Center safe parking lots
PHOTO: NBCC



It has been coordinating an ongoing planning process for addressing local homelessness and accessing state assistance. In 2017 HFG took over the organizational structure, known as Central Coast Collaborative on Homelessness Policy, that coordinated collaborative funding and leadership on coordinated local approaches to addressing homelessness. Along with this, in 2017, HFG implemented the CoC's Coordinated Entry System and has taken a lead role in outreach countywide.

HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

The Continuum of Care (CoC) is in the process of implementing Housing First strategies to all CoC-funded programs in Santa Barbara County. In a Housing First approach, priority is given to placing people in permanent housing as directly and as quickly as possible. In Santa Barbara County, this also means that the housing is low-barrier, and is coupled with services that are trauma-informed and that take a harm reduction approach.²

INNOVATIVE FEATURE: SANCTUARY IN AN UNSHELTERED SETTING

Safe Parking

Almost two-thirds of Santa Barbara County's homeless individuals are in unsheltered settings. According to the 2019 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, 27 percent of Santa Barbara County's homeless population inhabits vehicles. This creates substantial demand for overnight parking; however, ordinances prohibit overnight parking in most municipal areas of the County.

Launched in 2004 by New Beginnings Counseling Center (NBCC), the Safe Parking Program uses 24 parking lots that are otherwise unused at night. These lots provide overnight parking for up to 133 vehicles, along with casework services available to help participants secure more permanent housing. Safe Parking collectively facilitates accommodations for more people than any year-round shelter in the county while preventing countless tickets, impoundment, and other punitive enforcement actions. Safe Parking provides more independence and affords more privacy than most shelter facilities.

Safe Parking is housing-focused. NBCC's caseworkers refer those staying in the lots to the County's coordinated entry system. NBCC operates its own case management and rapid rehousing services. As a result, 60 people have been housed annually through the program. Another 40 people have been connected to employment and an additional 40 people linked to benefits.

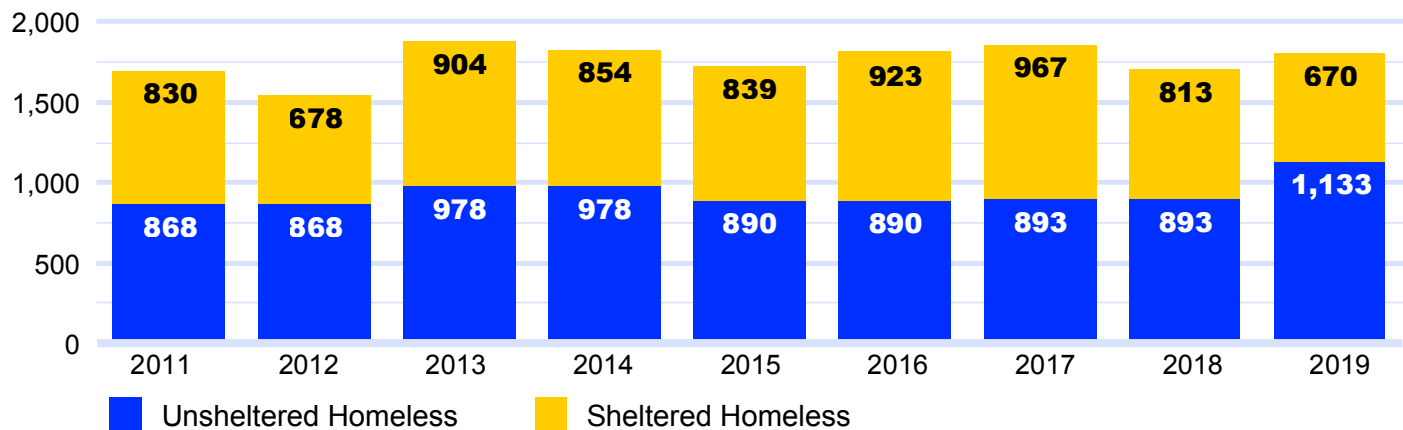
People participating in Safe Parking are counted as unsheltered, which complicates efforts to secure funding. Nevertheless, in this county, Safe Parking has transformed widespread initial resistance into near-universal support and ongoing funding assistance by both the City and County (general funds, federal CDBG, and homeless funding). The approach is standardized and written up in the Safe Parking Program Manual, downloadable for a modest fee.

INNOVATIVE FEATURE: COLLABORATING TO ENGAGE FREQUENT USERS OF EMERGENCY RESOURCES

The Restorative Policing unit

Santa Barbara Police Chief Lori Luhnnow stated that, as police, "we are social workers." This approach is embodied in the department's Restorative Policing unit, which consists of two police officers and two case managers who work on an ongoing basis with homeless persons who, as per Officer Keld Hove, "come to us by default." Homeless individuals are frequent users of emergency services in the health and law enforcement systems. The Restorative Policing unit provides the means for police officers to engage people on an in-depth basis and in a manner that more resembles social services than it does traditional policing. The question becomes how to widen the program to make a bigger impact. The answer is through partnerships and the creation of Connect Home.

Santa Barbara County, CA Homelessness Trends



The overall 2019 PIT count shows a slight decline from the last full count in 2017. The increase in the unsheltered count was largely due to revisions in local PIT count methodology.

Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>

Connect Home—a coalition of partners

In late 2018, the City of Santa Barbara established Connect Home, expanding the intensive services model initiated by the Restorative Policing unit. This program came about after the City formally declared a “shelter crisis,” and became eligible to receive state funding from the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP). With \$2 million of HEAP funding,

Connect Home targets 50 homeless individuals who are both long-term homeless and use the highest level of emergency resources such as police, EMS, and the emergency department.

As a local newspaper described it, “the plan is to swarm the top 50 service consumers with so much attention, so many services, and so much computer-coordinated oversight that they will almost have no choice but to come in from the cold.”

The key challenge for Connect Home is the minimal available supply of new housing resources. The program has access to some shelter beds and some housing vouchers, as well as a new housing navigation program started by PATH. The program will need to continue competing for scarce existing housing resources and be creative in finding new resources. Having program evaluation as part of this ongoing project will be key to learning how well this services-intensive model works and how adaptable it could be to other settings.

KEY LESSONS

Maximize available resources

The high cost and difficult access to both temporary and permanent housing underscores the need for innovation to reduce unsheltered homelessness in Santa Barbara County. Homeless services in the region maximize available resources; however, without more systemic responses to increasing the housing supply, the innovative programs will have only an incremental impact on unsheltered homelessness rates.

Collaborate to more effectively provide services

A high level of collaboration was already noted with Connect Home. More generally, homeless services in Santa Barbara County collaborate, as services like outreach had workers and agencies in touch and coordinating services with one another, as well as across the county, where the challenges of the geography were accommodated through such practices as increased use of data sharing capabilities.

Prioritize available housing

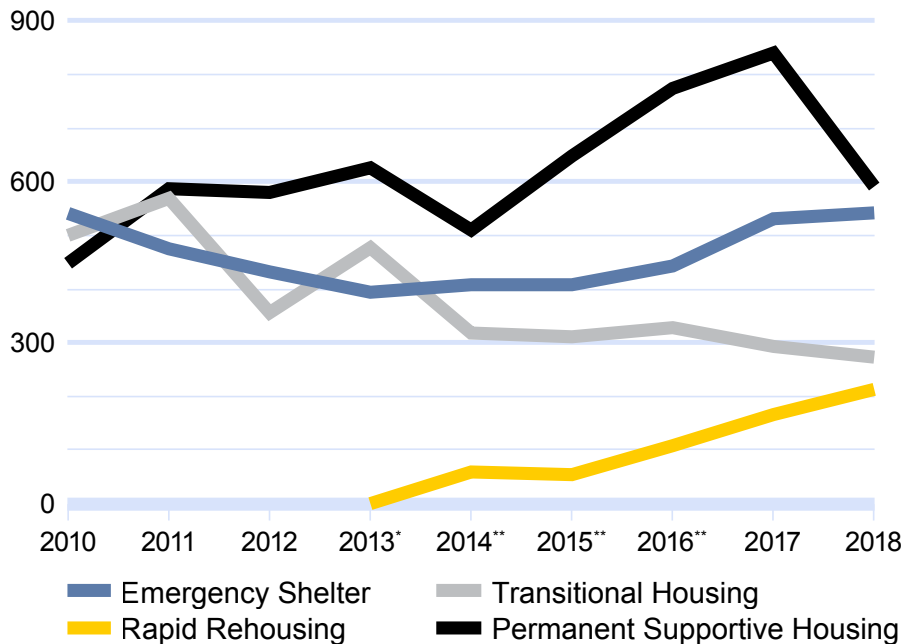
Santa Barbara County contends with a very limited supply of housing for moving homeless households out of the homeless services system.

CONNECT HOME — CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Through a coalition of partners, Connect Home has access to dedicated health care and case management services and shelter beds. Partners include:

- > Santa Barbara Police Department Restorative Policing unit
- > Cottage Health—Santa Barbara County’s largest health care provider
- > City Net—a nonprofit organization contracted to perform outreach services
- > People Assisting the Homeless (PATH)—the largest shelter in the city of Santa Barbara
- > Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara County, CA Total Year-Round Beds Trends



Low levels of permanent housing and emergency shelter exacerbates attempts to decrease unsheltered homelessness.

* 2013 Counts RRH in Total Year-Round Beds, HMIS Participation, and Total Beds for Households with/without Children.
 ** 2014–2016 has two types of RRH values: one that includes demonstration programs and one that excludes demonstration programs. The value including demonstration programs was used for Total Year-Round Beds (RRH).
 Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>



Because so many people are living in unsheltered situations, basic services need to go out into the field to meet them where they are at.

This limited passage from homelessness to permanent housing threatens to keep persons in the system as the homeless population increases. One pragmatic (though not ideal) way to mitigate this backup is by prioritizing housing for those with the longest histories of homelessness, which can then also reduce costs of institutional settings in other systems.

Provide services in unsheltered settings

With almost two-thirds of Santa Barbara County's homeless population in unsheltered settings, various services that would typically be provided in shelters and other homeless services locations are instead provided in other settings. The Santa Barbara Central

Public Library serves as a de facto day center for homeless individuals who make use of the various services and sanctuary that the library offers. Showers of Blessing makes mobile shower and hygiene services available at outdoor locations, such as feeding programs, where people who are experiencing homeless congregate. Doctors without Walls runs a comprehensive outdoor health clinic at a set of outdoor locations.

- Establish a services and sanctuary space
- Make mobile shower, hygiene, and health services available at outdoor locations where people who are experiencing homelessness congregate

SOLUTIONS BASED ON EVIDENCE

Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropic organization with the mission to invest in evidence-based solutions that maximize opportunities and minimize injustice. AV supported a study to identify practices and policies that promote alternatives to using punitive and enforcement-based measures as the primary responses to unsheltered homelessness. Project investigators conducted a three-day visit in spring–summer 2019 to each of nine sites for an in-person review of community-specific initiatives. The sites represent the major regions of the U.S. and include cities of different sizes as well as rural, suburban, and tribal areas and provide an array of different socioeconomic contexts and present different local housing market configurations.

1 The Impact of Poverty on: Housing and Homelessness in south Santa Barbara County. <https://www.womensfundsb.org/sites/womensfundsb.org/files/documents/2019-housing-and-homelessness-2019-09-09.pdf>
 2 County of Santa Barbara Community Services Department (Housing and Community Development Division) (2018). *Community Action Plan to Address Homelessness in Santa Barbara County*. Available at: http://www.countyofsb.org/uploadedFiles/housing/Content/Homeless_Assistance/Documents/Phase_1_for_website.pdf