



November 7, 2017

The Honorable Mayor Kevin Faulconer
City of San Diego
City Administration Building
202 "C" Street, 11th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

The Honorable Supervisor Ron Roberts
County of San Diego
County Administration Building
1600 Pacific Hwy. Room 335
San Diego, CA 92101

The Honorable Councilmember Chris Ward
City of San Diego
City Administration Building
202 "C" Street, 10th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Mr. Gordon Walker
Chief Executive Officer
Regional Task Force on the Homeless
4699 Murphy Canyon Rd, Suite 104
San Diego, CA 92123

Dear Mayor Faulconer, Supervisor Roberts, Councilmember Ward, and Mr. Walker:

Thank you all for taking time to meet with me and Norm Suchar during our recent trip to San Diego. We appreciated the opportunity to speak with each of you and with some members of your teams. These conversations helped us better understand your perspectives and priorities for both the response to the Hepatitis A outbreak and for adding urgency to your efforts to address and reduce homelessness, including unsheltered homelessness, in the community.

Supervisor Roberts asked for a brief summary of our feedback and recommendations following the completion of our trip, and we thought it would be helpful to provide this same information to each of you. Recent substantive progress limiting the spread of infection is encouraging. The joint County/Municipal activities initiated in the last several months are clearly having an effect. Continuing those activities and constructing a path to permanent housing for vulnerable members of the community will be critical to sustaining your progress.

The recommendations below represent the joint feedback of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and are presented as immediate steps for responding to the Hepatitis A outbreak, as well as steps needed to address unsheltered homelessness within the community. We have grouped our feedback and recommendations into the following areas:

- 1) Strengthening Outreach and Engagement of people Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness;

- 2) Prioritizing Housing Placement Strategies and Outcomes as an Alternative for People Who are Unsheltered or Who Enter New Shelter Settings; and
- 3) Strengthening Coordinated Decision-making and Collaborative Implementation of Activities

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly if you would like to discuss any of this information further, and technical assistance from HUD will remain in place to support the continued efforts to combat the outbreak.

Recommendation Area #1: Strengthening Outreach and Engagement of People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

- We recommend a strong emphasis on strengthening efforts to contact and connect with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, with a primary focus on developing trusting relationships and connecting people to meaningful alternatives and solutions, including housing and services interventions.
- We encourage you to ensure that the community continues to follow the guidance of technical assistance providers to increase and better coordinate outreach efforts, engaging outreach capacity from multiple agencies and programs into a coherent, coordinated strategy, rather than the very limited and more siloed, program-by-program approach that has been in place.
- We have significant concerns that the recent and current activities of law enforcement personnel, focused on clearing areas for necessary cleaning activities, are complicating the ability of outreach efforts to connect with people and to engage them into housing and services opportunities.
- We strongly recommend utilizing trained outreach workers as lead for reaching out to and working with people who are unsheltered, rather than law enforcement personnel, in order to make such necessary cleaning activities possible.
- We recommend using HUD-funded technical assistance to train staff in motivational interviewing, engagement techniques, and other effective interventions to successfully engage this vulnerable population. Your community has recently committed to investing resources to develop this capacity locally, and it is essential that street outreach workers being hired have the necessary expertise, experience and training in delivering evidence-based services.
- Law enforcement personnel should be involved in such efforts primarily to ensure the safety and well-being of outreach workers and the unsheltered people, not as the leads for interacting with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Recommendation Area #2: Prioritizing Housing Placement Strategies and Outcomes as an Alternative for People Who are Unsheltered or Who Enter New Shelter Settings

- We are aware that several steps have been taken in recent weeks to provide alternative settings for people who are unsheltered, including the opening of the “campground” in the Golden Hill area, which we were able to visit, and the planning for three (3) sprung structures.

- Relocating encampments from contaminated environments to interim tents is an effective tactic for limiting infections during this public health emergency. However, this tactical response must be consistent with an overall strategic approach that prioritizes assisting people experiencing homelessness to access permanent housing opportunities.
- We'd encourage a much greater focus on implementing housing strategies and resources to which people can be linked in order to exit those new settings or exit unsheltered homelessness, which should include facilitating access to: Project One For All subsidies and services; Continuum of Care funded programs; other permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, and rapid rehousing options; and problem-solving services to help people identify other stable housing options they can access.
- Regarding the Project One For All program specifically, identifying ways to expedite enrollment and expand eligibility to those receiving outpatient services can bolster efforts to more quickly qualify and house hundreds of severely mentally ill people experiencing homelessness in the region.
- Because the new interim tents are a potential bottleneck in the service system, the community should immediately design and implement pilot processes for rapidly housing individuals and families. TA currently available to the Continuum of Care can assist with designing and piloting a systematic procedure to ensure flow from the tents into stable housing.
- We recommend that this focus start right away by strengthening efforts to help people to exit the "campground" setting to permanent housing options, in order to identify resources, and develop strategies and practices, that can be used once the sprung structures are opened. Continuing to focus on such efforts, and partnering with HUD-funded technical assistance, will be vital to achieving a reduction in households living on the street.
- We also think that it is especially important to focus on assisting families with children to exit the "campground" setting as quickly as possible. We do not think the "campground" is providing an appropriate, solutions-focused environment for any people staying there. It is especially inappropriate for any family with children to stay there for any longer than is absolutely necessary to secure some other temporary living arrangement for the family, such as emergency shelter, transitional housing, or subsidized stays in hotels or motels, while efforts to secure a permanent housing placement for the family continue.

Recommendation Area #3: Strengthening Coordinated Decision-making and Collaborative Implementation of Activities

- Strengthening outreach and engagement activities, and developing a stronger strategy for assisting people to exit unsheltered homelessness and the "campground" and sprung structure settings to permanent housing, will require stronger and more formalized coordination of decision-making across jurisdictions and systems than appears to currently be in place.
- Making such progress must be seen as the shared responsibility of City government, County government, and the Regional Task Force on the Homeless, through collaborative decision-making and close coordination of implementation activities.

- We recommend that a senior leader from County government, a senior leader from City government, and a senior leader from the Regional Task Force be identified and charged with partnering with one another to better coordinate communication, decision-making, and the implementation of activities, and these leaders should be given the authority to guide the activities of many other staff and partners.
- This team of leaders should also be charged with regularly reporting back to the County, City, and the Regional Task Force to report on progress and to discuss obstacles and challenges that other local leaders can help them to address.

Once again, we would be happy to discuss these recommendations with you further, and stand ready to support your implementation of such activities, including through the continued HUD-funded technical assistance being provided to the community.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly at matthew.doherty@usich.gov or 202.708.4663.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew Doherty".

Matthew Doherty
Executive Director
U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Cc:

- Jemine Bryon, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Needs, HUD
- Norm Suchar, Director, SNAPS Office, HUD
- Beverley Ebersold, Director of National Initiatives, USICH
- Nick Macchione, Director and Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, San Diego Health and Human Services Agency
- Rick Gentry, CEO, San Diego Housing Commission
- David Estrella, Director, Integrative Services, San Diego Health and Human Services Agency
- Susan Bower, Assistant Director, Integrative Services, San Diego Health and Human Services Agency
- Stephanie Gioia-Beckman, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Supervisor Ron Roberts
- Jonathan Herrera, Senior Advisor on Homeless Coordination, Office of Mayor Kevin Faulconer
- Brian Elliott, Policy Advisor, Office of Councilmember Chris Ward