

# Potential Local Measure to Support Mental Health, Homeless, Housing and Substance Use Services in Sonoma County



Sonoma County strives to provide outstanding services to children, veterans, seniors and other adults, those experiencing homelessness and those needing mental health and addiction treatment, yet many still need access to these critical services.

## Need for Additional Services in Sonoma County

The lack of necessary mental health resources and substance abuse services has overwhelmed law enforcement and first responders who are left to handle mental health and substance abuse emergencies. Suicide and mental health conditions have become a growing epidemic across the country and right here at home. The current coronavirus pandemic has added additional strain to our community, negatively impacting mental health and creating new barriers for those seeking treatment. Many in Sonoma County are experiencing homelessness or are still healing from the trauma caused by wildfires. In fact, 60% of households are impacted by a mental health condition here in our county. In addition, opioid use and drug overdoses are serious problems in our community.



## Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

In recent years, the need for services for those experiencing homelessness has increased. Many of those experiencing homelessness are suffering from mental illness or substance use disorders. Adequate treatment, facilities and supportive housing are needed to serve this population. The coronavirus pandemic has severely impacted those experiencing homelessness and has underscored the importance of having access to health care and a safe place to live.

## Impact On Our Community

Our entire community is impacted when we lack mental health and substance use disorder services, as law enforcement are burdened with dealing with emergencies. People often turn to emergency rooms to seek treatment, making our hospitals overcrowded for all. In addition, businesses, tourism and neighborhoods are impacted as areas become less desirable and quality of life is impacted.

## Budget Cuts

At the same time that more and more residents need treatment, budget shortfalls have forced drastic reductions to services in our county. Lack of Federal and State funding has resulted in cuts to essential programs, such as early intervention programs serving children at schools and reductions in the number of beds available at facilities to serve those in a crisis.

Unless additional funding is secured, our services face significant cuts. Additional funding is needed to ensure that those who need it most—children, veterans, seniors, those experiencing homelessness and people facing trauma or drug addiction—have access to the essential care they need.

## Potential Local Measure

To prevent additional service reductions and ensure local residents have access to mental health treatment and substance abuse services, Sonoma County is considering placing a local measure on the ballot this November. Recent polling of Sonoma County voters indicates that 70% of voters are supportive of a measure in our county. Although no final decisions have been made, the potential measure may be a sales tax to support:

- Services for children, veterans and seniors
- Emergency psychiatric care
- Mental health and addiction facilities
- Services for those experiencing homelessness
- Behavioral and mental health crisis assessment
- Suicide prevention
- Permanent Supportive Housing

## Potential Expenditure Plan

The measure may allocate funding to the following services:

### **Emergency Psychiatric/Crisis Services**

Including mobile support team expansion to schools, crisis-assessment, crisis response to schools (CAPE), crisis stabilization unit

### **Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment Facilities**

Including residential care facilities, psychiatric health facilities and transitional housing

### **Outpatient Services**

Including mental health services at children's shelters and substance abuse services

### **Homeless Services/Care Coordination**

Including increasing services for the homeless population including, the ACCESS Interdepartmental Multi-Disciplinary Team (IMDT)

### **Transitional and Permanent Supportive Housing for Homeless**

Supporting housing pooled funds

## Fiscal Accountability Would Be Required

- Every penny from the measure would benefit Sonoma County
- No funds could be taken away by the State or go to other communities
- Independent citizens' oversight and annual audits would be required



### We Want to Hear from You

We welcome your feedback and questions as the County explores the possibility of placing a measure on the ballot to protect mental and behavioral health services in our community. Please contact Leah Benz at (707) 565-6614 with any questions or comments.