

# Innovative Partnerships Tackle Elderly Homelessness in Monterey County

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities throughout the United States struggle with how to solve the complex issues of homelessness. New collaborations and innovative partnerships are starting to make a difference. Monterey County's innovative partnerships have led to the collaborations between local police departments, homeless service providers, Adult Protective Services, health care providers, and other community partners. This has led to the creation of a Navigator University. The collaborations and the Navigator University work to help educate, advocate and innovate solutions to issues related to the elderly homeless.

San Mateo County made a commitment to reach a functional zero level of homeless. San Mateo County implemented new strategies outlined in its Human Services Agency's strategic plan: *Ending Homelessness in San Mateo County*. As part of their plan to end homelessness, San Mateo County should explore creating its own Navigator University with the goal of educating, collaborating, and innovating solutions to end homelessness.

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## Introduction

Successfully helping people experiencing homelessness move into housing is a complex social problem that only gets more difficult with the challenges of aging. Studies on homelessness across the United States have shown a clear upward trend in the proportion of “older” persons (age 50-64) among the homeless populations. This group frequently falls through the cracks of government safety nets as they are not old enough for Medicare (65), Social Security (65), or subsidized housing (62). Issues arise when the long-term conditions of homelessness lead to poor nutrition, which can increase physical health issues. Older homeless adults have higher rates of geriatric symptoms (i.e., performing daily activities, walking, vision, and hearing, which increase falls and frailty). Also, older adults are more likely to suffer from cognitive impairments resulting from depression or dementia that contribute to worsening physical health.

The Bay Area has the third largest population of people experiencing homelessness in the United States. Data from San Mateo County Human Services Agency shows that in 2017, of the people served by homeless programs (shelter, outreach, and rapid rehousing), 7% were 62 or older, 10% were 55–61 years old, and 15% were 45–54 years old. Of individuals in Permanent Supportive Housing programs (clients who were formerly homeless and are now living in housing with the support of a program), 26% were over 62 years old and 28% were 55–61 years old. Elderly homeless individuals have complex and diverse challenges that require a

combination of resources and expertise, from homeless service providers to senior, disability, and other supportive services.

The population of San Mateo County in 2017 was 771,410 individuals and the One Day Homeless Count found 1,253 homeless individuals. In contrast, the same year, the population of Monterey County was 437,907 individuals and the One Day Homeless Count found 2,837 homeless individuals. Both counties are dedicated to ending homelessness and are working on innovative and effective strategies to begin solving this complex issue. In an effort to address homelessness in Monterey, the county implemented innovative partnerships that focus on strengthening the skills of the community to better assist seniors living on the streets.

## Monterey County's Collaboration and Innovation

Monterey County Department of Social Services' Adult Protective Services (APS) have been collaborating with community partners to address the challenges faced by the elderly homeless. New innovative partnerships focus on developing collaborations between homeless service providers, local police departments, and public agencies. The Monterey Police Department created a Community Action Team (CAT) that focuses on community policing and engaging the homeless community. Adult Protective Services began going into the community with the CAT Police Officer to make contact with homeless individuals that might meet APS Criteria. A specialized Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT) was also created at the Monterey Police

Department. The MDOT team includes an Adult Protective Services Social Worker and two other social service professionals (Health Care and Domestic Violence). The team is stationed at the Monterey Police Department one half-day per week. A Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) was also developed and includes homeless services providers, public agencies, and the Monterey Police Department. The HOT team meets monthly to collaborate, discuss, and address the specific needs of homeless individuals in the community. All of these collaborations have created a strong multidisciplinary team to address the specific struggles of homeless individuals in the City of Monterey.

One of the many promising practices that grew out of Monterey County's community collaborations was the creation of a Navigator University Pilot Program. The Navigator University was created as a recommendation from the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Summit held in 2017. The Monterey County Navigator University includes four half-day classes that build upon each other to help professionals learn how to motivate complex individuals and assist them in locating and moving into safe housing. It teaches homeless service providers how to develop a working plan to move the elderly individuals from homeless to housing. Elements of the training also included the social and cultural structure of the homeless community and how this affects daily functioning. Modules included in Navigator University are specific to Monterey County and the needs of the elderly homeless. Homeless service providers from various organizations in the county attend the training which is sponsored by the Monterey County's Department of Social Services and Gathering for Women.

- **Module I: Introduction/Benefits**

Navigation Assessment Tool, Homeless social dynamics/culture, Chinatown support group, Acquiring ID/Birth Certificate, SSA Benefits, SSI Advocacy/SSDI/HDAP, CalFresh/GA/Medi-Cal/CAPI, MediCal-CHOICE, Adult Protective Services

- **Module II: Health**

Mobile Crisis, Montage Health Mobile Clinic, Bodily fluid precautions/Overview of communicable diseases/bed bugs, scabies, Whole Person Care, Chinatown Health Center/Needle Exchange, Addictions/Recovery Resources, Behavioral Health and Central California Alliance for Health

- **Module III: Legal**

Immigration and Benefits for undocumented clients, Conservatorship/Power of Attorney/Trusts, Law Enforcement/Monterey Police Department Multidisciplinary Outreach Team/Community Action Team, Evictions, Community Workshops/Lawyer Referral Service, California Rural Legal Assistance, Legal Services for Seniors

- **Module IV: Housing**

Community Action Partnership, Veterans Transition Center, Housing Resource Center, Central Coast Center for Independent Living, Community Homeless Solutions, Coalition of Homeless Services Providers/CARS, Warming Shelter

All the module's components are presented by local subject matter experts. This gives attendees in the class a name and contact information for all the topics, creating a natural resource when specific client issues arise after the training. Initial results from the Pilot Navigator University in 2018 were positive. Attendees reported the classes helped them understand the many resources available in the county and the complex needs of the elderly homeless. The positive results of the training led Monterey County to offer the Navigator University on an annual basis. This year was their second session; it was videotaped and over 30 professionals enrolled in the program.

### **San Mateo County Collaboration and Innovation**

San Mateo County (SMC) made a commitment to reach a functional zero level of homelessness in the

community by 2020 in its strategic plan “Ending Homelessness in San Mateo County, 2016”. The plan explains the path to achieving that goal. The methodology to develop the plan included a community input process, data analysis, and strategic direction. San Mateo County’s plan addresses homelessness as a housing crisis and uses a systematic approach targeted at helping people maintain their housing. It prioritizes existing system capacity for those who face the highest barriers and longest history of homelessness. San Mateo County collaborates with numerous stakeholders ranging from county departments, Board of Supervisors, cities, local law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, and other public and private agencies (including health care providers). San Mateo County’s first goal in its plan involves creating a Housing Crisis Resolution System to end homelessness. This has several inter-related strategies, one being that “providers receiving training to support learning and capacity building to implement Housing First practices.” This strategy directly relates to the recommendation of San Mateo County creating a Navigator University for our homeless providers.

## Recommendations

San Mateo County is dedicated to reaching a functional zero level of homelessness. Its partnerships, data analysis and innovation have developed into a system that combines best practices within a local context. While San Mateo County offers numerous trainings to homeless service providers and provider agencies each conduct ongoing trainings of their staff, there is no all-encompassing Navigator University that focus on resources, available benefits, and best practices for serving elderly clients. This includes the ability to motivate individuals and inspire them to move into safe housing. It is recommended that San Mateo County create a Navigator University specific to our community and include specific elements in serving the complex needs of elderly individuals experiencing homelessness and elderly individuals who previously experienced

homelessness and are now being served by a Permanent Supportive Housing program. The duration, format, and specific topics to be covered should be developed by HSA in collaboration with homeless service providers to ensure that the training is applicable to the local context, aligns to the strategic plan, and does not duplicate existing trainings.

Costs for creating the training would primarily include staff time to develop the Navigator University and provider staff time to attend. In the past SMC has contracted with HomeBase to create specific trainings for SMC homeless system providers. These training have included Employment Services, Motivational Interviewing, Housing-Focused Case Management, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) documentation training, and Tenants Rights and Landlord Engagement training. Implementation time would need to include curriculum outline development, identifying subject matter experts, event planning and marketing the Navigator University to the homeless service providers. It is estimated that it could take six months to a year to coordinate all the elements of a San Mateo County Homeless Services Navigator University. It is also recommended to explore options related to videotaping and other ways to save the Navigator University Modules and share with additional provider staff.

In conclusion, a Homelessness Navigator University designed for San Mateo County homeless service providers and specific to the local population’s needs would help all providers to better serve people struggling with homelessness, including those who are elderly. The training model is directly in line with the HSA 2015–2020 Strategic Plan’s Mission to enhance the well-being of children, adults, and families by providing professional, responsive, caring, and supportive service. Specifically, it relates to Goal #5: Collaboration—Cultivate Community Partnerships to Achieve Shared Goals. Objective 5.1: Increase awareness of complex community needs and available resources and 5.2: Align community efforts and resources to solve shared challenges together.

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