

Coordinated Outreach Throughout San Bernardino County

As we reach a continued increase in homelessness across San Bernardino County there is a need to improve the approach to serve individuals experiencing homelessness. Since 2017 the PITC has averaged a near 20% increase in unsheltered homeless, the 2023 PITC has the largest increase we have seen in unsheltered homelessness in SBC. Overall, the county experienced a 67% rise in unsheltered homeless since 2017. This often is looked at as a housing issue, but also is a human service crisis and there is a critical component to serve the unsheltered individuals through street outreach. Outreach is a process in which homeless service providers or other agencies contact people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in public spaces to connect them with services, shelters, and long term to permanent supportive housing.

C.O.R.E.- Coordinated Outreach Resource and Engagement

Coordinated Street Outreach identifies and engages people living in unsheltered locations, such as in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, encampments, and on the streets, which plays critical roles within systems for ending homelessness. The C.O.R.E. Coordinated Outreach Resource and Engagement approach would work to engage and stabilize homeless individuals through consistent outreach. This change would be part of a larger homeless crisis response system that could be designed to effectively address homelessness across the county.

Impactful outreach reaches people who are not otherwise seeking assistance or come to the attention of the homeless service system and ensures that people's basic needs are met while supporting them along pathways toward housing stability.

Most often outreach is reactive, and research has shown that outreach achieves its greatest impacts when organizations engage in proactive approach. San Bernardino County should be striving to strengthen the roles their street outreach programs play within effective systems for helping people who are living unsheltered return to stable living in safe and affordable housing. Core elements of effective street outreach as recommended by the USICH (USICH, 2016), that can be implemented and are broadly applicable to a variety of communities, geographic contexts, and sub-populations.

Recommended Core Elements of Street Outreach

Street Outreach Efforts are Systematic, Coordinated, and Comprehensive

-San Bernardino County covers a vast area and at this time there is no coordination to outreach efforts across the county, like within agencies outreach is siloed.

-Street outreach requires collaboration among stakeholders. Engagement with all agencies conducting street outreach efforts leads to a more strategic use of resources and a comprehensive approach to identify unsheltered homeless individuals.

A systematic approach across the county would ensure communication with all entities providing street outreach. This would include weekly case conferencing via Microsoft Teams software, with InnRoads, Host, Whole Person Care, Coordinated Entry-211, Sheriff's HOPE, and others to work collaboratively in outreach efforts.

Outreach efforts should also coordinate with a broader network of programs and services. This may include law enforcement agencies and other first responders, hospitals, Behavioral Health, Department of Ageing and Adult Services, School District liaisons, faith-based organizations, and other providers.

Street outreach should Utilize available technology.

All street outreach contacts should be documented in HMIS or another local data systems (ESRI- HUB), such as an active or by-name list. Outreach workers should have access to data systems to be able to input data, look up previous contacts with the person experiencing homelessness, and access information on available resources. It is imperative to have outreach entering the most vulnerable into the CES. Often in the rural areas, riverbeds, and other hard to access areas it is difficult to access documents. Utilizing technology and creating digital documents, would allow outreach to complete needed paperwork immediately.

The effort of street outreach for those experiencing homelessness is to make long term connections to services that may lead to housing. Outreach efforts should make an effort to make immediate referrals to emergency shelters or temporary housing to individuals and families that are unsheltered. Moving towards coordinated community outreach there are four principles that studies have shown successful (LAHSA, 2019).

Principles of Outreach

1. Housing First
2. Person-centered
3. Harm Reduction
4. Low Barrier

Systematic Coordination of Outreach

A systematic, documented approach utilizing collaboration with nontraditional partners will better outreach services to unsheltered individuals. Utilizing data, resources can be targeted to hotspots that are identified over time. Outreach teams often focus efforts on areas easily accessible and overlook rural areas, this includes Foothills or mountains, open deserts, and inaccessible riverbeds. Utilizing off-road and drone technology outreach can ensure all individuals are located and contacted to offer services and ensure safety of the individual.

The efforts would also move towards institutional "in-reach" to those in corrections, health care, and behavioral health systems. Working in collaboration with the Sheriff's Transitional Assistance Reentry Team (START) a better system can be instituted to ensure those exiting incarceration at the local level are connected or offered services prior to returning to the community. Additional improvement to the JimsNet system by adding a check box, identifying homeless persons upon booking would allow individuals to be identified for reentry services.

Creating a coordinated outreach effort would allow for outreach to forge ties with homeless individuals. Impactful outreach would ensure there is a gradual, warm handoff to housing and other service providers.

County-wide Outreach working in Tandem

As many organizations conduct outreach at some level many work in different ways. This is impactful to what homeless individuals are being told and often leads to broken promises. It would be important to use evidence-based practices to ensure all efforts are working in tandem with the same goals. Trauma Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, and Critical Time Intervention are among the evidence-based practices that should be adopted by all outreach staff working with this population. When time allows formal trainings of these practices would be important for staff and would increase the effectiveness of the coordinated outreach, in-reach, and engagement efforts.

This systematic change of coordination between different agencies and organizations conducting outreach is key to success. Adding funding for homeless individuals to assist with documents, family reunification, and emergency motels would allow outreach to have a resource immediately available. With San Bernardino County being a vast region with different needs this approach reduces the likelihood of overlooking individuals who are hard to reach.