Statements from San Diego County leaders about their 2023 homelessness plans

**County Supervisor Nathan Fletcher:**

“Historically, the County of San Diego was minimally involved, but within the last four years that has changed. We are active participants in the regional effort to tackle homelessness.

Our Office of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities is actively working in partnership with the 18 incorporated cities, and residents in unincorporated areas, and that dedicated team will continue that work in the new year. Several of the initiatives we announce this year alone will begin operations in the new year, including shelters, safe parking and camping sites, and a safe haven we funded. We’ll continue to focus on helping unsheltered people and leveraging our behavioral health resources; but one of the areas we want to focus more on in the new year is prevention.

If we get ahead of the issues an individual is having that might cause them to fall into homelessness, we can help reduce the number of people living without a home. We doubled down on our successful flex pool funding program this year by making more money available for next year to support individuals and families dealing with financial hardship in order to keep them in their home.

We are also investing in technology to address homelessness. Earlier this year we began a process to create a predictive analytics tool that will use existing data the county collects from residents who engage with our departments, to create predictors that tell us if someone is at-risk of being unhoused. We will have a specialized team dedicated to proactively and strategically keep people from becoming homeless.

Additionally, we are going to continue to support development projects that deliver affordable housing opportunities for San Diegans, and leverage government land to help make more accessible housing a reality.

Homelessness is a complex issue, and there is not a single solution to help every person because each person's situation is different. But we are committed as a county to continue to work with our cities, service providers and residents to support those in need.”

**County Supervisor Nora Vargas:**

“As a county, we have made it a priority to ensure all San Diegans have a roof over their head and it is imperative that we continue to prioritize housing stability throughout our county. In September, I proudly led efforts to declare Homelessness a Public Healthcare Crisis which allows the county to deploy additional resources and help find solutions in partnership with the Regional Task Force on Homelessness and community organizations committed to addressing this issue.

Homelessness is a very complex problem and to truly address it, we need to have a multi-prong approach. Only through strong collaboration and partnership, we will find viable and long-lasting solutions. No single organization or entity of government can do this work alone. With this in mind, our county has been active on many fronts to provide much-needed support to those experiencing
homelessness. We’re not only investing in emergency housing solutions but also investing in creating affordable housing and investing in the prevention of homelessness.

In 2023, we will continue this work and I will champion the expansion of emergency housing solutions like safe parking and cabin shelters as well as the increase of support for those families that are experiencing financial hardship and that are at risk of losing their homes. Over the last year, I have been a strong champion of CARE Court, which will be another opportunity to support our unsheltered neighbors that are experiencing mental health crises’ and help place them into permanent housing and to receive the healthcare they need. We will be one of the first counties in the nation to receive $5.6 million in funding to plan and prepare for the implementation of CARE Court.

I am also eager to work on other housing solutions like eviction protection, rent stabilization, and inflation protection for working families. I will work with my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors to continue to expand and preserve affordable housing, create more opportunities for economic prosperity, expand access to healthcare and ensure there is increased food security for our unsheltered families and individuals.

As a county, and as the safety net for our communities, we will continue to work with other jurisdictions, locally, at the state and federal levels to provide urgent relief for our residents.”

Here are some prior investments:

- $243.6 million awarded in rent and utility assistance to over 23,400 households
- $4 million in security deposit assistance for renters
- $2.75 million to support seniors with shallow subsidy
- $10 million for cities to assist in the creation of shelters
- $5 million in rental assistance for small landlords
- $10 million for tenant support and eviction prevention over three years
- $3.6 million for a coordinated eviction prevention system over three years
- $3 million for specialized funding for imminent needs to support those at risk and experiencing homelessness with the removal of barriers to housing over three years
- $500,000 to the flexible housing pool
- $10 million to housing vouchers for the unincorporated area of the County
- $1.5 million to support private/public partnerships in creating emergency sleeping cabin shelters
- $47 million in compassionate emergency housing solutions for the creation of emergency housing like safe parking, safe camping, and sleeping cabin shelters
- $7.2 million to support transitional-aged youth with housing and wrap-around services over five years
- $3.2 million to support community harm reduction outreach teams and a 22-bed transitional housing haven facility for those with behavioral health needs
- $6 million from Prop. 47 funds for expansion of community care coordination programs for justice-involved individuals who are exiting custody to provide housing and wrap-around services over five years
- $8M for Housing and Disability Advocacy program over two years
- $9.8M for Home Safe Program to serve older adults at risk or experiencing homelessness with case management and flexible funding to remove barriers to housing over four years
$5 million to support LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness
$12 million for very low-income housing

San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria:

“In 2023, we plan to build on and expand what has proven to be successful in getting folks off the streets and connected to the resources that enable them to end their homelessness. These successful programs and actions include coordinated street outreach events; expanding low-barrier shelters and diversifying our shelter network; creating more safe parking in more areas of the city; and continued investment in homes that are affordable to very low-income San Diegans, including permanent supportive housing.

What’s become abundantly clear is that we have to focus more of our efforts upstream, to prevent people from falling into homelessness, because all of our success in getting people off the streets is being subsumed by those who are losing their housing as rents rise. The tenant protection framework, which will become an ordinance that protects renters next year, is a start, but we’ll also work with federal, state and county partners on other ways to identify people at the greatest risk of becoming homeless and deploy more resources to keep them in their homes.”

Also provided by Gloria’s office:

The City of San Diego’s efforts to move people off the streets and onto a path to permanent housing are working. Between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, we exited nearly 1,300 unsheltered San Diegans to long-term housing just from our shelter system and street outreach program alone.

However, as the Regional Task Force on Homelessness recently reported, for every 10 people we house across our county, 13 others fall into homelessness.

In 2023, we will do everything we can to reverse the math, including:

• Making it easier to build affordable housing. In 2022, the City Council passed the first Housing Action Package under our “Homes For All of Us” initiative, which contained nine different policy reforms. In 2023, we will pass Housing Action Package 2.0, with 11 additional reforms.

• Investing directly in affordable housing: Through our “Bridge to Home” program, we are providing gap financing assistance to help builders get their projects across the finish line. Rounds 1 and 2 provided roughly $46 million to help complete the financing for 10 projects across the city, totaling 904 affordable apartments -- 232 of which will be for people experiencing homelessness. Round 3 will be announced in 2023.

• Increasing and diversifying our shelter capacity: Until we have enough homes for everyone, we must continue to provide temporary shelter. In 2022, we’ve made an additional 645 shelter beds available, including the Rosecrans Shelter, the Palm Avenue Interim Shelter, the Rachel’s Promise shelter for women, a Safe Haven for those struggling with behavioral health issues, temporary shelter at the Old Central Library and a non-congregate shelter for seniors (later in December). In 2023, we already have planned a non-congregate shelter for families, and we will continue to explore additional shelter locations.
• Expanding our Safe Parking Program. No one should have to live in a vehicle, but until we have enough housing, we must continue to provide safe places for people who choose their car over shelter. In 2022, we expanded one of our three Safe Parking lots to 24 hours a day. In early 2023, we will add a fourth lot to the program that will provide approximately 30 spaces for cars and RVs. And with the City Council’s help, we will explore additional sites for new lots.

• Exploring Safe Camping: In 2023, we will open a pilot safe village program in Downtown, serving 40 seniors in a safe, secure environment.

• Remaining committed to proven street outreach. Outreach work is nothing short of heroic. And it is effective. Building trust with unsheltered residents, many of whom have experienced trauma in their lives, can take time, but as outreach workers often say, “Today’s ‘no’ might be tomorrow’s ‘yes.’” And so we continue the painstaking work to persuade folks to accept help. In 2023, outreach will be part of a robust budget conversation.

• Continuing advocacy at the State and federal levels. CARE Court was a great start, but we need to reform our conservatorship laws and fix our broken mental health care system, in addition to cracking down on dealers of dangerous drugs like fentanyl. We will be aggressive in pursuing Project Homekey dollars. As leader of the Big City Mayors coalition, I will also be pressing for the Governor and Legislature to continue investing in Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) grant funding as we increase accountability. At the federal level, we will work to increase resources to address the backlog in housing vouchers so we can build off our success with the Emergency Housing Voucher program and find additional ways to support the development and financing of affordable housing.

• Focusing on prevention. For our strategies to be successful, we must do whatever we can to stop people from falling into homelessness. In 2023, in partnership with Council President Sean Elo-Rivera, we will build out our recently announced framework on tenant protections and present an ordinance that does more to protect renters than the City’s ever done before.

San Diego City Council President Sean Elo-Rivera:

“Homelessness is the most important issue of the day and has been since I moved to San Diego. I agree with San Diegans who are dissatisfied with our progress on this issue, which is why I will leave no stone unturned in pursuit of alleviating the human suffering on our streets and that begins with prevention.

San Diego has made many attempts to address homelessness but has not done nearly enough to prevent it. As a result, we continue slipping backwards and that is unacceptable to me and should be unacceptable to everyone. That’s why I’m working with Mayor Gloria and advocates for our communities to prevent people from falling into homelessness by strengthening tenant protections. I’ll also continue to support the Housing Instability Prevention Program and the expansion of programs that provide a safety net to San Diegans struggling to pay rent, especially our seniors, families with children, and people with disabilities.

To help those who are experiencing homelessness, I will continue working with my colleagues and the various agencies working on homelessness to mitigate the impact on those with and without a home. That means investment in practical and effective tactics such as safe parking locations in different parts
of the city, non-congregate shelter opportunities and compassionate, tailored outreach and services for those experiencing homelessness.

Finally, because homelessness is ultimately a housing issue, Council will also look for more ways to build more housing more quickly and less expensively so we can improve the housing affordability crisis.”

Regional Task Force on Homelessness CEO Tamera Kohler:

“From October 2021 to the end of September 2022, 10 people found housing for every 13 people who experienced homelessness for the first time. This troubling data point shows what our region is up against – every day someone’s stint of homelessness is ended but we simply cannot keep up with the number of San Diegans reaching our streets. In 2023, we need to not only help those who are experiencing homelessness throughout our region with continued services and a range of shelter options, but we must also go further up the pipeline through diversion and prevention opportunities. That means more landlord engagement to utilize programs like Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing vouchers, flexible funding to keep people secure in their housing and expanding ways to find those who are on the knife’s edge of homelessness. Until we can get more people off our streets than are becoming homeless, this battle against our regional crisis will continue to be difficult.”

Chula Vista Mayor John McCann:

“The city of Chula Vista will be opening a new 66-unit bridge shelter in January 2023 with wrap-around services. The council will also be working with our (Chula Vista Police Department) Homeless Outreach Program team to ensure the team has all the resources they need to assist with getting homeless off the street. (…) The bridge shelter will open in January with 66 units available. That will be the first phase. The second phase will be to expand that bridge shelter to 120 units to be able to assist more people in getting off the streets.”

On planned support for the Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Program: “We want to make sure that we give them additional resources. Our homeless outreach team is a collaboration with the nonprofits that we have and our police department. We believe that it’s a highly effective way to engage people that are not housed by having the social workers engage them but also having a police officer there to make sure they protect the social workers and address any issues if there is something criminal going on. (…) We have put together the homeless outreach team so that they can engage individuals and specifically find out what their needs are because many homeless are going be very different in what their needs are and we want to make sure that we’re applying the appropriate solutions to somebody who is unhoused.”

Note: McCann provided his comments during a Dec. 15 phone interview.

Oceanside Mayor Esther Sanchez:

“We are breaking ground in January 2023 on our 59-unit affordable housing project with wrap-around services, to include mental health services funded through the county’s No Place Like Home program.
Next spring, approximately March 2023, we will be opening our 50-bed year-round homeless shelter/navigation center, the first in our city. We had created a 30-unit hotel voucher program, up to 21 days each, active since the beginning of COVID. The hotel voucher program has been extended until the opening of the shelter/navigation center to ensure there are no gaps in addressing our homeless issues.

Homelessness is a very critical issue in Oceanside, with special efforts to keep individuals and families from becoming homeless. We work very closely with community partners such as Interfaith Community Services to maximize our efforts. The county is also an essential partner by providing social workers and mental health professionals critical to our outreach efforts.”

Provided to Voice of San Diego by Oceanside Assistant City Manager Michael Gossman at Sanchez’s request:

“In the coming year, Oceanside plans to continue and make addressing homelessness a top priority. To this end the city is investing almost $22 million in programs and projects aimed at addressing homelessness.

This includes:

• $14.1 million in Homeless programs and services
  - Oceanside Navigation Center - $8.3 million
  - Homeless Outreach Teams, Bridge Housing Transitional Housing, Sobering Services - $2.3 million
  - Housing Assistance (including hotel voucher program) - $2.6 million
  - Women’s Resource Center Transitional Housing, Winter Shelter Network, Rental Assistance - $500K

• $7.6 million in rental subsidy programs.

On top of this $22 million, the city is contributing $33 million to the 59-unit affordable housing development that the mayor references.

The above funding does not include the over $3 million spent on addressing homeless encampments in neighborhoods across the city.

The city continually looks for opportunities to partner with our federal, state, and regional partners to address this very important issue.”

El Cajon Mayor Bill Wells:

“In the upcoming year, the City of El Cajon will continue to focus on programs it put in place over the past few years. For example, El Cajon will continue to operate its housing navigator program and permanent housing assistance program. The City will also continue to support and fund one of the largest shelter programs in the County (the East County Transitional Living Center). Also, we will continue the “A Way Back Home” program that we piloted a few years ago with the Salvation Army. El
Cajon will continue to allow the operation of emergency cabins or tiny homes—only city in the County to have them. Ultimately, all of these programs focus on finding permanent housing for those currently experiencing homelessness and not accommodating a homeless lifestyle.

Lastly, one of my personal goals in the upcoming year is to bring attention to the fact that as a region we have focused on the lack of affordable housing, while ignoring the blatant reality that mental illness and drug addictions contribute to the homeless problem. I hope to start a regional dialogue on how programs and policies need to address these two factors as part of regional’s homeless solutions.”