



# Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz: A Strategic Framework for Addressing Homelessness in Santa Cruz County

January 2021 – January 2024

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## I. Introduction

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The Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County Strategic Framework (the “Framework”) establishes ambitious but achievable goals to significantly reduce homelessness within the County by January 2024. Homelessness severely impacts the health and quality of life of those living without homes and the entire community. The County of Santa Cruz, cities within the County, and many community members recognize the need for strong collaborative action to ensure all residents within the County have stable, safe, and healthy places to live. This Framework acknowledges the impact of unpredictable events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and CZU August Lightning Complex fire as well as the impact of national and state forces on our local ability to prevent and end homelessness. However, evidence from communities around the country indicate that well-coordinated local efforts can and still do have impacts on the issue of homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

Work to develop this Framework began in March 2019, starting with an assessment of current local efforts to respond to homelessness, an analysis of local data, and a review and discussion of experiences from other communities. Focus Strategies, a nationally-recognized technical assistance provider, conducted a series of assessments and analyses to inform planning, supported the engagement and input process, and helped guide the strategy development reflected in this Framework. The Santa Cruz County Homeless Services Coordination Office, located within the County Administrative Office, served as the leading organization providing staff support for the analysis of current efforts, community engagement and Framework development.

The County and its partners drafted Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County through a collaborative process drawing on the experience, expertise, and engagement of a broad set of community stakeholders. A multi-sector Project Advisory Group provided guidance throughout the process and included the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville, key housing and services providers, community leaders and content experts. A larger group of stakeholders, including the [Homeless Action Partnership](#)<sup>2</sup> and its member organizations, as well as advocates and people with lived experience of homelessness were engaged through topical workgroups on outreach, shelter, access and governance, and through targeted focus groups and community meetings.

The dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic CZU August Lightning Complex fire contributed to delays in the development of this Framework. However, these disasters challenged the Santa Cruz County community to act and make decisions quickly, adapting strategies to focus on safeguarding the health and safety of those without homes. Disaster response transformed the local

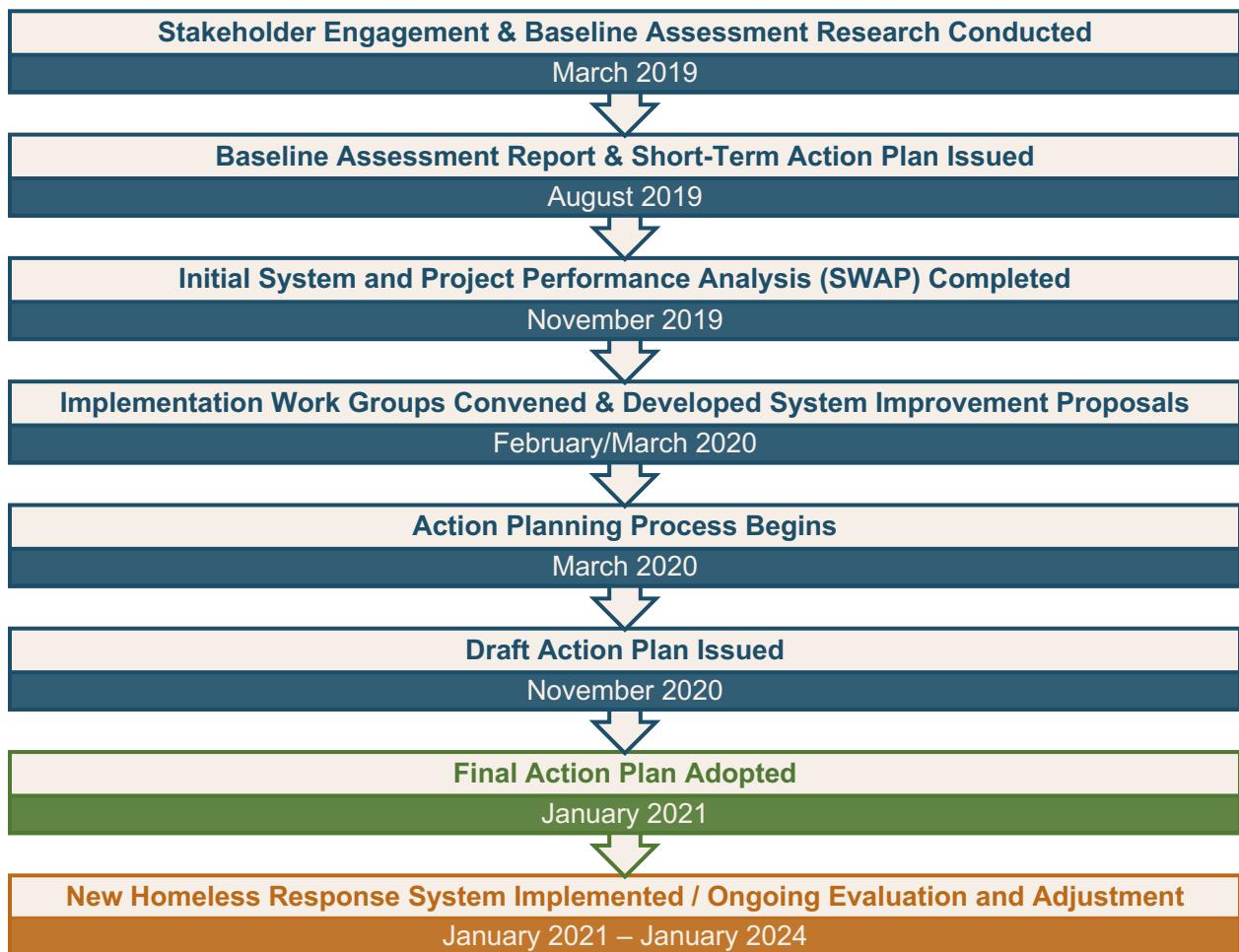
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wbur.org/herenow/tag/the-fight-to-reduce-homelessness>

<sup>2</sup> The Homeless Action Partnership, a key stakeholder group, is a collaboration of the County and each city within Santa Cruz County, along with local homeless service providers, acting as the federally designated Continuum of Care (CoC) for Santa Cruz County and helps allocate State and federal funding to address homelessness.

approach to homelessness by creating new pathways and partnerships for further long-term, proactive, and collaborative strategic actions. During this tumultuous period of strategic planning during a crisis response, local leaders and stakeholders made gains in cross-systems collaboration and learned lessons that inform this Framework. By activating an Incident Command Structure, decision-makers came together across jurisdictions and sectors to advance a defined set of objectives and learned the transformational impact of high-level leadership engagement in a focused set of shared goals. The deployment of a local emergency shelter COVID-19 response system for homeless households over a few short weeks serves as an example of the potential impact of focused and collaborative efforts.

The figure below outlines a timeline of key events in the planning process that contributed to the creation of this framework document.



## II. Strategic Framework Overview

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The Framework calls for a systems-level approach that is equitable, actionable, person-centered, data-driven, countywide in scope, and engages people with histories of homelessness and housing instability in collaborative planning and action with local government, funders, and other stakeholders. It reflects

the experiences and voices of people in Santa Cruz County currently experiencing homelessness, and it lays a path to address disparate impacts and outcomes, particularly in relation to geography, race and ethnicity, health status and disability, age, gender, and sexual orientation, and household composition.

The Framework sets a goal for a 30% reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness at the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count in January 2024. It also calls for a 50% reduction in the number of homeless individuals living in places not meant for housing such as the streets, cars, and unsafe structures. Statistical modeling conducted by Focus Strategies on behalf of Santa Cruz County indicates that achievement of these goals will require work and performance improvements in four strategic areas coupled with the addition of low-barrier year-round shelter capacity, expanded rapid rehousing, and additional permanent supportive housing. The proposed capacity expansion will require strong collaboration among public and private funders and agencies to strategically invest new one-time funding streams and to creatively utilize, leverage, and develop existing funding and resource partnership opportunities.

The Framework embraces clearly developed housing pathways as the solution to homelessness and prioritizes strategies to ensure everyone in the community has a place to live and includes goals to expand the availability of rapid rehousing, affordable housing for Extremely Low-Income (ELI) households, and permanent supportive housing. Closing the affordable housing gap to meet established state requirements<sup>3</sup> and local need will require increased resources and local County and City support for new or repurposed housing developments. Significant declines in the availability of federal and state financial resources to support affordable housing development make it challenging for local governments to meet established affordable housing development targets. However, several communities in California have demonstrated creative ways to generate new local revenue sources and leverage limited state and federal funding opportunities for generating more affordable housing opportunities. Focus Strategies, the consultant team that provided support for the development of this Framework, also wrote a report analyzing the Santa Cruz housing market to serve as a companion resource document for use in implementing this Framework. While the Framework recognizes a large gap in the number of housing units affordable to extremely low-income households, there are proven strategies and actionable steps that can maximize the success of efforts to help households get and keep housing while we continue working on efforts to expand housing affordability locally. As context for this Plan, Focus Strategies has conducted a [Housing Market Gap Analysis](#) examining the extent of the need for affordable housing in Santa Cruz County.

The Framework recognizes people need safe places to stay on their way to permanent housing, and the added threat to health that COVID-19 poses for those without shelter. The plan calls for an increase in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/community-development/housing-element/index.shtml> : “California’s housing-element law acknowledges that, in order for the private market to adequately address the housing needs and demand of Californians, local governments must adopt plans and regulatory systems that provide opportunities for (and do not unduly constrain), housing development. As a result, housing policy in California rests largely on the effective implementation of local general plans and, in particular, local housing elements.”

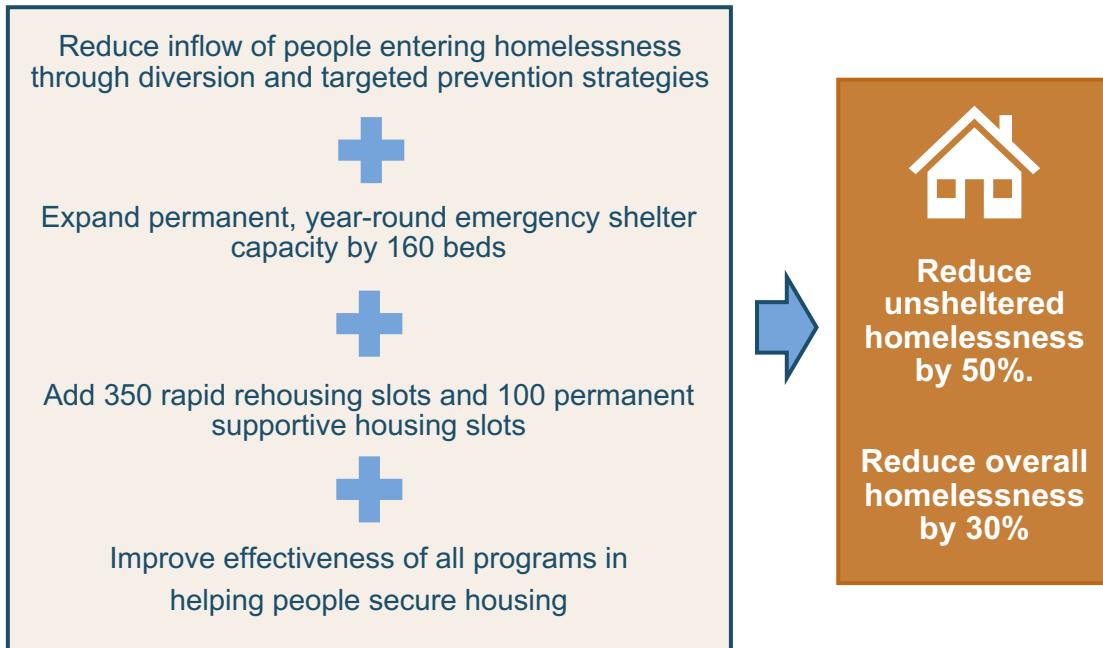
low-barrier shelter bed capacity. Additionally, the emergency shelter provided in this community can operate in a more effective way that helps people move through as rapidly as possible towards a permanent housing solution.

The Framework includes four strategic priority areas with actionable objectives identified for each, to be developed through a series of “rapid cycle” six-month work plans. Every six months, stakeholders including those with lived experience will review past progress and current conditions and develop a new set of action steps.

The County Human Services Department’s new Housing for Health (H4H) Division will provide the backbone administrative support for implementation of this Framework. Successful implementation will require a high degree of collaboration and support from all jurisdictions, community partners, other County departments, and people with lived experiences of homelessness and housing instability.

The quantitative predictive modeling conducted by Focus Strategies for this Framework demonstrates the achievability of these ambitious goals with performance improvement, expansion of the housing and services inventory through new and redeployed resources, and with all the jurisdictions and stakeholder groups working in concert with those with lived experiences on these shared goals.

The Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz Framework can be summarized as follows:



### III. Context and Background on Homelessness, Housing Instability, and COVID-19 Response

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Homelessness remains a national problem primarily driven by a lack of effective and appropriately scaled investments in affordable housing for extremely low-income households.<sup>4</sup> Seventy-five percent of extremely low-income households in Santa Cruz County pay more than 50% of their income toward housing. The California Housing Partnership estimates that over 10,000 renter households in Santa Cruz County do not have access to an affordable home where they pay less than 30% of their income toward housing.<sup>5</sup> Many extremely low-income households struggle with poverty, housing instability, and overcrowded and unsafe living conditions. A smaller subset of individuals from these households experience homelessness each year.

Across the country and in Santa Cruz County, homelessness disproportionately impacts particular groups of individuals including specific racial and ethnic groups, youth exiting foster care, seniors and people with disabilities, individuals with behavioral health conditions, single parent households, veterans, people with criminal backgrounds, and individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S). High rates of homelessness among particular subgroups of extremely low-income households reflect broad historical and present day social, economic, political, and cultural forces that contribute to these disparities. Approaches to addressing homelessness must understand and address some of the forces contributing to these disparate impacts.

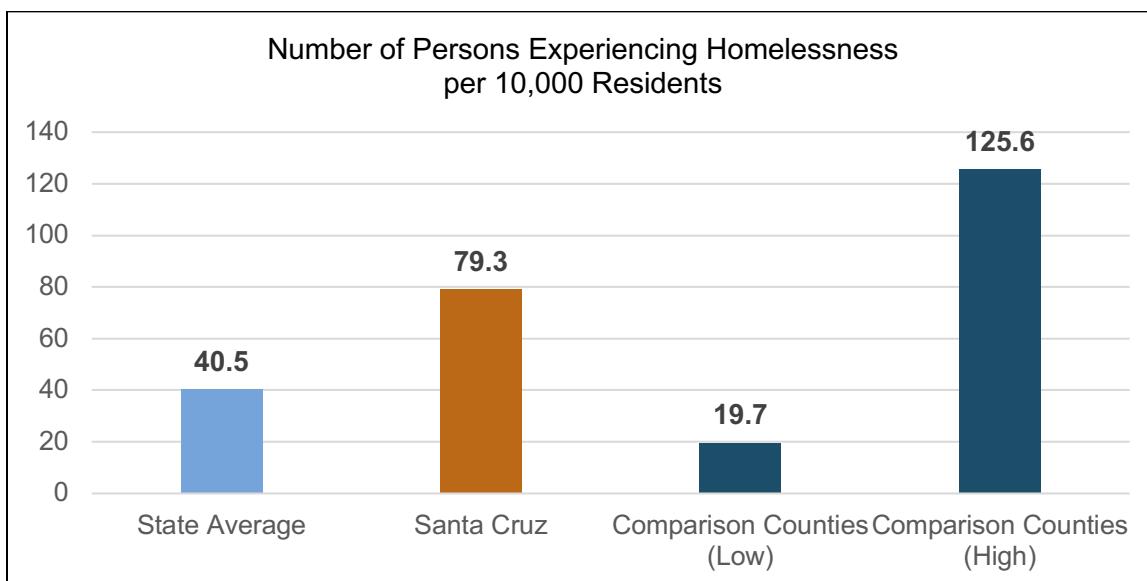
People who experience homelessness in Santa Cruz County each have a unique story and circumstances. Yet as a group, they share some common characteristics:

- Most (89%) households include only adults, while 8% are families with children under 18 years old, and 3% are unaccompanied minors.
- A large percentage of unhoused people (27.5%) are young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.
- Nearly 4 out of 5 people counted (78%) were *unsheltered* – meaning they were living outdoors, in cars, and other places not meant for people to live. The remaining 22% stayed in emergency shelter or transitional housing.
- Unsheltered people are *geographically distributed* throughout the county. The City of Santa Cruz had the largest group of people counted in 2019 (52%), with 48% located in other areas of the county. Nearly three-quarters were living somewhere in Santa Cruz County at the time they became homeless.
- In Santa Cruz County, as across the country, people experiencing homelessness are *disproportionally people of color*. Of those counted in 2019, 8% are Black, though Black people make up only 1% of the county population. Likewise, 10% reported that they were American Indian or Alaskan Native, while this group is also only 1% of the population. Of those counted, 33% were Hispanic/Latinx, which matches the general population (34%).

<sup>4</sup> “Extremely low-income household” – refers to a household with a gross annual income at or below 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) within a given geographic area

<sup>5</sup> [https://1p08d91kd0c03rlxhmhtydpr-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Santa\\_Cruz\\_Housing\\_Needs\\_Report\\_2020-HNR.pdf](https://1p08d91kd0c03rlxhmhtydpr-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Santa_Cruz_Housing_Needs_Report_2020-HNR.pdf)

In 2019, California had the fourth highest rate of homelessness per 10,000 residents in the United States<sup>6</sup>. Within California, Santa Cruz County has one of the highest rates of homelessness at 79.3 per 10,000 residents.



Comparison Counties: Sonoma, Marin, San Luis Obispo, Monterey/San Benito, Mendocino, San Mateo, Humboldt, Santa Maria/Santa Barbara

Rates of homelessness show correlations with levels of income inequality within a region where high housing and rental costs preclude lower income households from finding stable homes in a given community. Other variables also influence rates of homelessness in a given community. The 2019 Santa Cruz Point-in-Time Count of homeless persons, found nearly three-fourths of households experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz lost their last housing within the County. Local zoning and planning commission decisions on the types of developments allowed or approved in a given area impact the availability of affordable housing for lower-income households.

Every day, thousands of people in Santa Cruz County live without stable shelter and a home. The most recent annual Homeless Point-in-Time Count, conducted in January 2019, found 2,167 people experiencing homelessness on a single night. These 2,167 people were part of 1,440 distinct households experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that this count took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 CZU August Lightning Complex fire. Both events impact the number of people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/727847/homelessness-rate-in-the-us-by-state/>.

## **Lessons Learned from 2020 Crisis Response**

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new threat to health and safety for people who are unhoused and other members of the community. Unhoused people have nowhere to safely shelter-in-place and many have health conditions that increase health risks from COVID-19 infection. The urgency to respond quickly and comprehensively brought about rapid change in the local response to homelessness. The complex of wildfires in August and September 2020 added additional strains as the community moved to meet the shelter and housing needs of evacuees and people who lost their homes. New ways of working were quickly put in place, and one-time federal and State resources to help the response allowed the community to put in an improved response that this Plan seeks to sustain and build upon. Innovations to preserve include:

### **1. More coordinated decision-making.**

Santa Cruz County activated a multi-jurisdictional decision-making unit, led by the County's Human Services Division (HSD), with the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville. The Shelter and Care Disaster Operations Center (DOC) developed key objectives and managed rapid implementation to achieve them, including quickly mobilizing one-time state and federal funding. Decisive and coordinated action on clear objectives is an important pillar to build upon moving forward.

### **2. Expanded, low-barrier shelter and new processes for shelter access.**

The DOC expanded shelter capacity for people experiencing homelessness in need of isolation and quarantine, as well as those most vulnerable to COVID-19, by leasing rooms in motels. These non-congregate shelters offer privacy and safety and employ minimal eligibility screening. The County also added new, low-barrier semi-congregate shelters providing individual, private space for each resident. These changes helped many people previously unwilling or historically barred from shelter to come inside. Processes were developed to track shelter bed availability and manage referrals, and modifications to the Smart Path Coordinated Entry process to manage this going forward are underway. As a result of the rapid response to COVID-19, the community is on a path to transition from simply having a collection of independent shelters to having a shelter system accessible to all.

### **3. Expanded and redesigned outreach and supportive services.**

Mobile outreach services expanded to ensure that people living outside can access basic hygiene resources, provide connections to COVID-19 testing and other health services, and help refer eligible people to available shelter beds as needed. As a result, outreach has become more coordinated, better defined, and more "solution-oriented."

## IV. Strategic Framework for Homelessness Response: January 2021 to January 2024

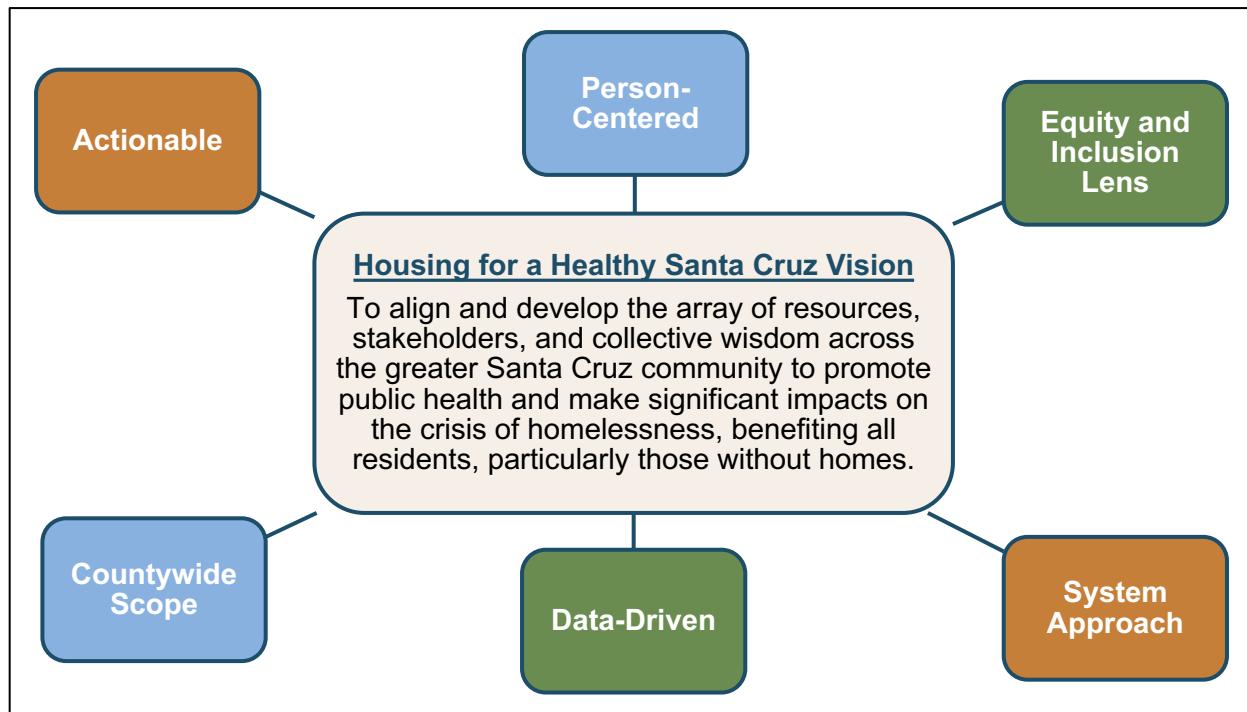
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Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County sets out a vision, guiding principles, goals, strategies, and objectives to guide the community's work to reduce homelessness over the next three years. It sets out measurable goals and system performance targets to track success. This document lays out a broad framework for reducing homelessness and articulates actionable priorities for our community and intentions to guide the implementation of the strategies outlined. The framework calls for six-month work plans, allowing for adjustments over time to respond to situational changes, pursue emerging opportunities, and to build upon successes.

### A. Vision and Guiding Principles<sup>7</sup>

The vision of Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz is to align and develop the array of resources, stakeholders, and collective wisdom across the greater Santa Cruz community to promote public health and make significant impacts on the crisis of homelessness, benefiting all residents, particularly those without homes.

This Framework has six overarching guiding principles, which are depicted in the graphic below.



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<sup>7</sup> The All-In Plan contained six guiding principles which were similar but not identical to these. These principles are drawn from themes across the many working groups and community meetings.

**Person-Centered:** People experiencing homelessness are experts about their own goals, priorities, and support needs. Housing and services resources coordinated by the homelessness response system must center around the self-identified needs and goals of those who use them.

**Equity and Inclusion Lens:** Certain subgroups of people experience disproportionate rates of homelessness. Efforts undertaken through this Framework must address and eliminate any disparities in access and outcomes within the homelessness response system and confront the continuing impacts of broader historical and present-day forces on unhoused people and those at risk of homelessness. The Framework must recognize the differences among and address the specific needs of different subpopulations.

**System Approach:** To maximize impact requires a coordinated *system approach* that streamlines access to housing and services, links system components, formalizes working partnerships with other systems, and targets resources to achieve identified objectives.

**Data-Driven:** Decisions about programs, resources, and approaches must be informed by high quality, well-understood qualitative and quantitative data about the system and its outcomes for the people it serves, including measures of disparities and inequity. Data will be widely shared and used to improve understanding and increase accountability of all parts of the system.

**Countywide Scope:** Homelessness occurs in all parts of Santa Cruz County, whether urban, suburban, agricultural, or rural. Implementation of this Framework will address each area of the community and develop appropriate solutions to homelessness and its impacts for every sub-region, including North County, Mid-County, South County, and the San Lorenzo Valley. Geographic equity must be at the center of this framework.

**Actionable:** This Framework must result in actionable steps. It must be understood, implemented, and evaluated with the resources available and with clear responsibilities and accountabilities. System leaders and stakeholders will regularly review progress and update strategies and activities to ensure continued progress towards meeting goals and targets.

## B. Goals – Targeted Results and Measuring Success

### **Overarching Goal: Substantially Reduce the Number of People Experiencing Homelessness at a Point in Time in January**

According to data analysis and statistical modeling conducted by Focus Strategies, the combined result of improving system performance and adding inventory will lead to measurable reductions in the numbers of people in Santa Cruz County experiencing homelessness and the number without any shelter.

1. Number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness will decrease by 50%	2. Number of households experiencing homelessness will decrease by 30%
With performance improvements and new capacity, the number of households living in unhoused situations (outdoors, in encampments, in vehicles, or other places not meant for people to live) will decrease by 50% - from a current point in time count of 1,100 households to approximately 550.	Households staying in emergency shelter are part of the population who are unhoused. The Framework relies on having more households enter shelter and then exit from shelter to housing. Overall, the total numbers of households experiencing homelessness (both unsheltered and in shelter) is projected to go down by 30% - from 1,400 to 1,000 households.

The overall goals of reductions in both overall and unsheltered homeless require action in four identified strategic areas, coupled with specific system expansions and improvements. Focus Strategies conducted a [System Performance Assessment](#) and [Predictive Modeling Summary Report](#) that informed the development of these targets.

### **Core Goal #1: Improve the effectiveness of all programs in helping people secure housing**

The H4H Division and its partners will oversee a robust effort to improve the effectiveness of all programs and interventions targeted to assisting people experiencing homelessness. This includes reducing how long people spend unhoused or in programs prior to securing housing, increasing the rate at which people attain housing, and decreasing the number of people who fall into homelessness and require the system's help. Interim benchmarks for these focus areas have been established for each year and progress will be regularly assessed, and adjustments made as needed to maximize results.

By the end of 2023, the following system performance measurement improvements will be achieved, resulting in significantly increased effectiveness of all programs:

Measure	Emergency Shelter		Transitional Housing		Rapid Rehousing		Permanent Supportive Housing	
	From	To	From	To	From	To	From	To
Reduce length of stay (days)	76	60	413	250	281	180	N/A	
Increase rehousing rate	21%	40%	66%	80%	62%	85%	N/A	

Measure	Emergency Shelter		Transitional Housing		Rapid Rehousing		Permanent Supportive Housing	
	From	To	From	To	From	To	From	To
Increase program entries from homelessness <sup>8</sup>	44%	75%	78%	90%	50%	85%	81%	95%

## Core Goal #2: Expand Capacity within the homelessness response system

Improvements in performance alone will not be sufficient to achieve a significant reduction in homelessness. During the three-year time frame of this Framework, community leadership, funders, and key stakeholders will work collaboratively to implement a targeted expansion in system inventory.

- A. Add 160 year-round, low-barrier emergency shelter beds, consisting of 140 beds for adults and 5 units (20 beds) for families with children under 18 years old.

Expanding the inventory of permanent, year-round shelter beds will be accomplished either by converting currently temporary COVID-19 shelter beds and/or by adding entirely new beds such as through the creation of one or more Navigation Centers. All additional beds will follow Housing First principles - low barriers to entry, client-centered, and housing-focused services - and build upon lessons learned from the rapid expansion of the temporary shelter inventory in Santa Cruz County in response to COVID-19. Adding this capacity is estimated to cost between \$3.8 million and \$4.9 million per year depending on the level of services provided, at an estimated average cost of \$65-\$85 per bed per night.

- B. Add 350 rapid rehousing slots for currently homeless adult households

Expanding the inventory of short-term rapid rehousing programs for people who are unhoused will not fully close the gap needed to house everyone experiencing homelessness. However, these targets appear feasible given projected resource availability and will be needed to achieve the desired reductions in homelessness. Adding this capacity is estimated to cost between \$4.2 million and \$6.3 million at an estimated cost of \$12,000 to \$18,000 per slot.

- C. Add 100 permanent supportive housing slots for currently homeless adult households.

Expanding the inventory of longer-term permanent supportive housing programs for people who are unhoused will not fully close the gap needed to house everyone experiencing homelessness. However, these targets appear feasible given projected resource availability and will be needed to achieve the desired reductions in homelessness. Adding this capacity will cost an estimated \$1.8 million to \$3,000,000 per year at an estimated annual cost of \$18,000 to \$30,000 per slot.

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<sup>8</sup> In this measure, homelessness means people who are unsheltered or living in emergency shelter

## C. Strategies and Key Objectives

The Framework promotes an approach that promotes aligned and coordinated efforts among homelessness response system stakeholders. Individual programs or initiatives may yield results with a specific subpopulation or group but making progress on the overall size of the homeless population requires a joint, systematic approach.

Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County sets out four high-level strategic areas and numerous specific objectives to transform current efforts to address homelessness. The objectives listed below will span over multiple six-month action plan cycles.

### **Strategy 1: Enhance and Effectively Target Outreach, Engagement, and Temporary Shelter Resources**

The homeless response system must have an array of interventions to meet the immediate health and safety needs of people experiencing homelessness while they are on their path to housing, including street outreach, crisis services, and emergency shelter. Emergency housing resources should focus on serving unsheltered households and working to increase the pace and number of households exiting to permanent housing. Emergency interventions will build upon and preserve gains made in this part of the system in response to COVID-19.

Over the next three years, Housing for A Healthy Santa Cruz County calls for Santa Cruz County leaders, funders, local government, private-sector and non-profit providers to collaboratively develop a robust emergency response system that includes improvements to street outreach, emergency shelter, care management, housing navigation services, and working to clarify appropriate collaborative responses to public encampments. Emergency interventions will build upon and preserve gains made in this part of the system in response to COVID-19. The effectiveness of these interventions will be measured by how quickly they help people experiencing homelessness secure housing.

Strategy 1.1. Continue to ensure shelters are safe and supportive environments that protect the health of their residents.	
<b>Objectives</b>	
1.1.a.	Maintain appropriate density to allow for physical distancing.
1.1.b.	Provide referrals to health services including COVID-19 testing for as long as needed.
1.1.c.	Provide accessible and relevant information to shelter residents to help them make choices that will prevent disease transmission and maintain their health and safety.
1.1.d.	Work together with city jurisdictions and other County departments to identify and implement best practices for collaborative responses to public homeless encampments.

<b>Strategy 1.2: Reduce barriers to shelter, particularly for people with disabling conditions and/or those with a history of not accessing the existing shelter system.</b>
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<b>Objectives</b>	
1.2.a.	Identify and remove access barriers, such as sobriety and service participation requirements.
1.2.b.	Offer person-centered and trauma-informed services.
1.2.c.	Develop participation agreements and rules that do not unnecessarily cause terminations/bans.
1.2.d.	Continue to develop centralized bed vacancy tracking and access system to manage referrals into shelter.

<b>Strategy 1.3: Ensure all shelters residents are provided care management, housing navigation and other financial supports that bolster their ability to secure housing, making shelter stays a brief stop on the pathway to housing. Embed rapid housing problem-solving practices in all shelters.</b>
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<b>Objectives</b>	
1.3.a.	Provide housing-focused care management, housing navigation and other services that bolster the ability of residents to exit to housing.
1.3.b.	Provide shelter residents with access to flexible funding to help support rapid housing solutions, e.g., first and last month's rent, paying utility arrears or deposits.
1.3.c.	Track and report on movement from shelter to permanent housing, including identifying and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in regaining housing.

<b>Strategy 1.4. Develop capacity for health and housing-focused street outreach to connect all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness throughout the county with the crisis support services they need while assisting them to develop a health and housing plan and secure permanent housing.</b>
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<b>Objectives</b>	
1.4.a.	Add capacity as needed to ensure outreach occurs countywide, including in underserved areas such as San Lorenzo Valley and South County.
1.4.b.	Expand and build upon street outreach efforts to link homeless households with essential public benefits, employment, income, health insurance, and appropriate health care services including primary care, behavioral health, dental, and optometry services.
1.4.c.	Equip and train street outreach teams to go beyond health and harm reduction conversations that are the mainstay of street outreach, and engage people experiencing homelessness in conversations about housing, and to offer accurate and practical information and support to access available emergency shelter, develop a housing plan, and find a permanent solution to their homelessness.
1.4.d.	Establish and implement policies to collect data on street outreach contacts in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
1.4.e.	Use data on street outreach contacts to better understand the numbers and characteristics of unsheltered people not accessing other services or shelter.

1.4.f.	In partnership with cities and other county departments, collaboratively develop and implement a public property management approach for encampments of homeless persons. This includes clarifying street outreach worker roles when public property management enforcement activities become necessary.
1.4.g.	In partnership with local jurisdictions, target street outreach efforts to high need individuals and areas to regularly engage individuals and assist them to connect to resources and develop pathways to temporary and permanent housing.

## Strategy 2: Expand Permanent Housing Exit Resources and Pathways

Successfully reducing homelessness requires an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable housing available to those experiencing homelessness. This includes increasing the supply of rental housing affordable to people at the lowest income levels through construction of new rental units as well as acquisition and rehabilitation of existing housing. It also includes helping people access the private market, through providing short- and long-term rent subsidies, recruiting property owners and managers to accept subsidies, and providing search and navigation services to help people locate and secure housing. Housing pathways also include helping individuals share housing with others, reconnect with family and friends, and finding housing options in other areas when appropriate and desired.

Over a three-year period starting in January 2021, the County, cities, housing providers and developers, funders and finance entities will work to increase the availability of housing pathways and opportunities for people experiencing homelessness, through additions to the housing supply, more effective use of the existing inventory, through share living opportunities and reconnections with family and friends, through pursuit of desired relocation opportunities, and overall building of more effective approaches to assisting people locate and secure housing.

<b>Strategy 2.1. Develop or purchase units to expand housing specifically targeted to people experiencing homelessness, including taking advantage of new funding opportunities.</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	
2.1.a.	Take advantage of all immediate opportunities to acquire additional housing, including new opportunities from the State of California and federal government, such as Project Homekey, No Place Like Home, Housing for a Healthy California, Permanent Local Housing Allocation, Mainstream Non-Elderly Disabled housing vouchers, or others.
2.1.b.	Convene a Housing Development Pipeline group with representation from County, cities, Housing Authority and other housing funders to coordinate and leverage available funding to develop permanent supportive and affordable housing and make progress on bridging the housing gap, particularly for Extremely Low Income (ELI) housing - at or below 30% AMI.

**Strategy 2.2. Expand and improve the effectiveness of rapid rehousing rental assistance programs to quickly return people to housing.**

Objectives	
2.2.a.	Invest in expanded rapid rehousing capacity to provide support for people experiencing homelessness to leave emergency shelter directly to housing.
2.2.b.	Convene a rapid rehousing provider peer learning community to review current performance results and identify strategies for improvement, such as by bringing procedures into alignment with national best practices, and bolstering staff training.
2.2.c.	Monitor rapid rehousing outcomes for disparate impacts, particularly returns to homelessness rates for different racial/ethnic groups and other subpopulations. Use this data to inform program improvements.

**Strategy 2.3. Develop landlord engagement strategy for property owner/manager recruitment.**

Objectives	
2.3.a.	Develop a countywide landlord engagement campaign to recruit and engage owners of rental units to be part of the solution to homelessness by making units available to lease for people experiencing homelessness who have housing subsidies.
2.3.b.	Build upon lessons learned in other communities about messaging, outreach, and best practices.
2.3.c.	Set a target and track progress on numbers of open market units secured to support the community's goal of reducing homelessness.

**Strategy 2.4. Implement changes to Coordinated Entry to support improved pace and effectiveness of housing exits.**

Objectives	
2.4.a.	Implement inventory-based prioritization for housing units, which will accelerate placements and reduce both community queue wait times for clients and receipt of referrals for providers.
2.4.b.	Conduct periodic equity analyses to monitor the potential impacts of Coordinated Entry practices on equitable access to services for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or sexual preference.
2.4.c.	Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the coordinated entry system and monitor coordinated entry data to allow for tracking of progress and identification of issues.
2.4.d.	Incorporate diversion and housing problem-solving practices as a first step of the Smart Path process for all people seeking shelter or homeless services.

### **Strategy 3: Implement Targeted Prevention, Diversion, and Housing Problem Solving Interventions**

While implementing strategies to help people who are already homeless secure housing more rapidly, the homeless response system will also employ strategies to prevent people from becoming homeless to begin with. This will include implementing interventions designed to reach those who have the greatest risk factors and targeting support to help them retain the housing they have or move directly to a more stable situation. By slowing the rate at which new people become homeless and reducing the numbers of people entering shelters or programs for homeless people unnecessarily, existing beds, services, and housing resources can be targeted those already living unsheltered, particularly individuals with long histories of homelessness.

Over the next three years, the County will coordinate a community-wide effort to slow the rate at which new people become homeless and reduce the numbers of people entering shelters or homeless programs unnecessarily.

<b>Strategy 3.1. Implement systemwide Housing Problem Solving for those seeking housing crisis response and support services by integrating this practice into Smart Path - Coordinated Entry.</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	
3.1.a.	Incorporate diversion/problem-solving practices as a first step of the Smart Path process for people seeking shelter or services for homeless people.
3.1.b.	Ensure that all people who connect with Smart Path have access to a trained Housing Problem Solving Specialist/Assessor who will engage them in a collaborative process exploring available options to resolve their homelessness.
3.1.c.	Provide flexible immediate, short-term financial assistance as part of the housing problem solving process, track results, and refine approach.

<b>Strategy 3.2. Coordinate with other community and public entities to provide well-designed and targeted prevention assistance throughout the community; prioritize prevention assistance offered by the homelessness response system for those at most severe risk of homelessness.<sup>9</sup></b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	
3.2.a.	Develop strong partnerships and linkages between the homeless response system, other jurisdictions, other systems, and community agencies to develop and provide deeply-targeted prevention assistance to those most at risk of literal homelessness.
3.2.b.	Collaboratively develop a screening tool to identify those households facing eviction most likely to experience unsheltered homelessness and prioritize financial assistance to this group.

<sup>9</sup> Those at most severe risk: at imminent risk of homelessness or already homeless with a total household income below 30 percent of the median family income for the area.

## **Strategy 4: Implement New Governance, Planning, Evaluation, Communication, and Collaborative Action Structures**

To design, implement, and oversee the system described above will require the creation of a new countywide structure to develop, direct, and evaluate the response to homelessness throughout the county; engage in joint planning, funding, and evaluation; use the best available data, client, and provider feedback, and current knowledge of result-generating practices to inform decision-making; and commit to clear and consistent communication to all stakeholders regarding decisions made and their results.

Building upon the successes and lessons learned from the COVID-19 Incident Command Structure and the Shelter and Care Disaster Operations Center (DOC), over the next three years Santa Cruz County leaders will design, operationalize, and assess new structures and processes to develop, direct, and evaluate the response to homelessness throughout the county through joint planning, funding, and evaluation. This regional governance effort will use the best available data, client, and provider feedback, and current knowledge of best practices, and commit to clear and consistent communication to all stakeholders regarding decisions made and their results.

Strategy 4.1 Finalize design, launch, and operate a new regional governance entity.	
Objectives	
4.1.a.	The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, elected officials from the four cities, together with city and County staff and key community stakeholders will finalize the design and draft bylaws/charter for the new governance structure proposal.
4.1.b.	The new regional governance structure proposal will include a plan to incorporate the existing HAP into the new structure.

Strategy 4.2. Authentically and meaningfully involve people with lived experience of homelessness in system design and oversight.	
Objectives	
4.2.a.	Center the perspectives of people with experiences of homelessness, a critical step in designing a more effective and equitable system.
4.2.b.	Convene a working group of advocates and those experiencing homelessness to advise system leaders on options for meaningful and authentic inclusion, such as through the creation of a Lived Experience Advisory Board.
4.2.c.	Implement the selected strategy as part of the launch of the new governance structure.
4.2.d.	Support members of the new advisory body to participate.
4.2.e.	Use ongoing feedback from homelessness response system clients, together with data, to evaluate the effectiveness of the system and inform policy decisions.

**Strategy 4.3. Establish and support the Housing for Health (H4H) division within the Human Services Department (HSD) and provide sufficient resources to support overall implementation, development, and implementation of six-month work plans, ongoing data and evaluation, and administrative support of the new regional governance structure.**

<b>Objectives</b>	
4.3.a.	Assess level of staffing required to fully support the work identified in this Framework.
4.3.b.	Develop a three-year staffing plan to fully resource the H4H division.
4.3.c.	Conduct a fiscal and resource landscape analysis every six months to track current investments in the homelessness response system and other available resources for increasing investments.
4.3.d.	Make recommendations regarding funding allocations and investments to key decision-making bodies as part of each six-month work plan.

**Strategy 4.4. Develop and maintain commitment and capacity to become fully data-informed at all levels of the homeless response system.**

<b>Objectives</b>	
4.4.a.	Complete the transition of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Lead Agency to HSD and implement regular reporting on performance, including ongoing equity analysis.
4.4.b.	Investigate ways to use HMIS data in coordination with other County data such as the Health Information Exchange to identify needs and gaps and evaluate outcomes.
4.4.c.	Develop and refine a data-driven methodology for assessing system capacity needs including geographic location and target subpopulation for additional emergency shelter beds, rapid rehousing slots, permanent supportive housing units, and other potential responses to local needs.
4.4.d.	Continue to increase HMIS participation, improve data quality, and expand community capacity for data use including providing support and training to users and stakeholders to understand and apply performance information to their work.
4.4.e.	Make system performance reports publicly available in understandable formats that reflect the commitment to accountability.
4.4.f.	Develop a system to collect and respond to qualitative assessments of users' experience of the system, e.g., focus groups, surveys, review of complaints and grievances.

## D. Six-Month Work Plans

The work outlined in this Framework will be carried out through a series of six-month rapid-cycle work plans aligned with the four strategic priority areas. The work plans will identify key responsible and participating parties, time frames, as well as the staffing and financial resources required to carry them out.

This Framework builds on results from two analytical studies conducted by Focus Strategies using their Systemwide Analytics and Performance (SWAP) suite of tools:

- **Baseline performance:** Using HMIS data from 2018-2019, Focus Strategies assessed the performance of projects in the system (shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing) with a focus on how effectively each program is helping people secure housing. Results were shared, discussed, and refined with leaders, key stakeholders, and individual provider agencies, to begin building a culture of data analysis and accountability for results.
- **Predictive modeling:** Using data from the baseline performance analysis, Focus Strategies developed a range of scenarios predicting changes to the size of the population of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County over the next three years as different strategies are implemented. The model considers a number of variables and their inter-relationships, including the current population size and rate at which people become newly homeless, number of beds in the system across a range of program types, and the outcomes of those programs. Taken together, these factors map the systems current and potential “flow” and impact on numbers of people experiencing homelessness. The modeling work provided the basis for the targets adopted in this Framework.

### Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County is a data-driven Framework

This means a commitment to continuously gather and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand resource investments, current performance, and how to improve results. As part of creating the H4H division, the County has migrated the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to H4H and, provided sufficient resources, will invest in more robust data analysis and evaluation capacity.

## V. Resource Needs and Assumptions

The Framework as articulated is aspirational but achievable with all partners working collaboratively, with additional financial and human capital resources becoming available, and a clear and consistent focused commitment to our overall goals of tangible reductions in homelessness. Some core assumptions underly this document and any deviations from these assumptions will create additional barriers or opportunities toward achieving our goals:

1. The impact of the recent wildfires, COVID-19 pandemic, and upcoming election cycle on Santa Cruz County will not have a lasting and profound impact on the housing market for extremely low-income households.
2. Federal and state financial resources to provide services and housing resources for homeless households will remain steady or increase.

3. Federal and state financial resources to create more affordable housing opportunities for extremely low-income households will remain steady or increase.
4. Sufficient staffing resources will exist within the H4H Division to lead and sustain the administration, implementation, and ongoing data and evaluation of the work outlined in the Framework.
5. Funds eligible to serve households experiencing homelessness will be prioritized for investment in the strategies outlined in the Framework.
6. State and federal housing development resources will be prioritized to support expansion of housing for extremely low-income and homeless households.
7. Sufficient organizational capacity exists or can get developed within the housing and service provider community to operationalize new or expanded programs.
8. There will be robust collaboration and partnership from County departments, cities, and community partners who will be directly involved, actively engaged, and supporting the implementation of the Framework.
9. Elected officials and local stakeholders will work collaboratively to find locations for service and housing programs to address homelessness and to expand affordable housing opportunities for extremely low-income households.

## VI. Conclusion and Call to Action

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Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz County calls for the entire community to join in being part of the solution to homelessness. No single individual, organization, city, or County Department can do this alone. This Plan sets out a framework that all stakeholders can use to align, coordinate, and collaborate to accomplish the shared goal of helping unhoused residents in Santa Cruz County to secure housing. In a community where housing is severely limited in supply and homelessness is at a crisis level, it is necessary to implement nationally recognized best practices to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our system, and to increase our success rate at finding permanent solutions for each person experiencing homelessness. By involving those with histories of homelessness and housing instability in our efforts, setting measurable goals, working collaboratively across sectors on implementing proven strategies, using data to assess progress, and continually improving and refining the work, Santa Cruz County can and will create a future in which housing and health are a reality for everyone.

# Acknowledgements

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