



Nick Gerda <ngerda@gmail.com>

Sharp rise in homeless deaths

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To: Nick Gerda <ngerda@gmail.com>

Cc: "Good, Jessica [HCA]" <jgood@ochca.com>

Hi Nick.

We're not in a position to provide the kind of specific causality that you're looking for because of the way the information is reported to us. You may want to contact the Illumination Foundation, Orange County Rescue Mission, and Share Our Selves (SOS), which provide healthcare services to the homeless and may have more anecdotal impressions.

In the meantime, I wanted to pass along information that already has been provided on similar questions (to Erika Aguilar at KPCC) by Karen Roper at OC Community Services as well as Mark Refowitz and Eric Handler from HCA:

From Karen Roper:

- It is difficult to comment on the data and the conclusions for a couple of reasons: 1) I do not know the causes of death; 2) I am not a doctor or nurse that could give a qualified opinion on causes of death even if I had the cause of death information.
- Being homeless is extremely stressful. Being exposed to the elements while living on the streets only exacerbates challenges faced by the homeless, especially health challenges related to chronic disease, alcohol and substance abuse, and other life issues.
- Facing disease and death is difficult for everyone but especially those who have no place they can call home.
- Homeless living with chronic disease and other health issues are often very fragile and medically compromised.
- Our Armory Emergency Shelter Operator, Mercy House, as well as other shelter providers deal with homeless deaths each year. Especially those shelter providers who

serve the chronically homeless that have lived on the streets for many years.

- Expanded outreach and assessment, year-round emergency shelter, and an adequate supply of permanent supportive housing will help us to safely move chronically homeless and medically fragile homeless from the streets to shelter and housing.
- Orange County's Coordinated Entry System (CES) outreach teams use VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index & Service Prioritization Decision Assessment Tool). VI-SPDAT assigns priority scores to ensure that homeless who are the most medically fragile and chronically homeless receive priority for placement in shelter and especially permanent supportive housing. CES and VI-SPDAT are national best practices.
- Orange County's Coordinated Entry System has successfully assessed and housed medically fragile and chronically homeless throughout Orange County.

General response from HCA:

This is a complex issue with no easy answers and it's challenging for us to speculate or provide comment on the data referenced as it wasn't produced by the Health Care Agency (HCA). That being said, HCA is proactively working day in and day out to improve health outcomes for homeless individuals and families in Orange County.

There is detailed information online about our Comprehensive Health Assessment Team that is comprised of public health nurses who provide targeted nursing case management for Orange County residents who are in housing crisis: <http://ochealthinfo.com/phs/about/phn/cn/homeless>; information on the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), including what efforts are currently funded, what's proposed for next fiscal year, and what limits we have in place on how MHSA funds can be spent for homeless programs; and the following description of ongoing assessment and outreach efforts being undertaken at the Santa Ana Civic Center:

- Behavioral Health Services (BHS) has increased staffing, which continues with two staff members working Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- BHS is coordinating with Public Health nurses and the County Social Services Agency to link participants to health services and register for benefit programs
- BHS is working directly with Santa Ana Police Department and the Orange County Sheriff's Department to provide support and follow up to any homeless participants they meet

- Engagement with Civic Center residents resulted in multiple referrals weekly for services being made and additional confirmed linkages to services.
- From 8/5/2015 through 1/8/16, the increased BHS staffing in the Civic Center has resulted in 5,031 outreach contacts. Over this period, 435 confirmed linkages to services have resulted from engagement with the Civic Center residents. The top linkage categories include behavioral health services, health care services/benefits, legal services, entitlement programs, financial assistance services, and housing.

More specific response from Health Care Agency Director Mark Refowitz and Public Health Officer Dr. Eric Handler:

- Lack of permanent shelter, co-morbidity (the simultaneous presence of two chronic diseases or conditions in a patient), decreased quality of the immune system as caused by stress, drug and/or alcohol dependency, the impacts of chronic hunger on health, and the sporadic treatment of behavioral health conditions are not so much trends as they are real and regular issues that impact people who are homeless in Orange County every day.
- The formation of the Illumination Foundation, including CEO and President Paul Leon's background as a former County of Orange public health nurse, has provided some critical successes of recuperative care, as well as Waste Not OC's efforts to combat chronic hunger countywide.
- The County of Orange, led by the Board of Supervisors, is making tremendous progress in addressing these issues. Last November, the Board voted unanimously to purchase an empty building in Anaheim as the site of a new year-round emergency shelter and multi-service center to serve the homeless. Last month, the Board approved paying \$3.3 million for the vacant Orange County Transportation Authority terminal in Santa Ana, which will be opened during weather emergencies to allow homeless individuals in the Civic Center a place to get out of the rain. The County is also currently accepting applications for the position of Director of Care Coordination.
- There is great work being done by local faith-based organizations, which are making a positive impact by taking people who are homeless under their wing and helping them form important social connections by joining the congregation and taking part in group activities.