



CITY OF ESCONDIDO
STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS & TRANSIENCY
UPDATED – FEBRUARY 2021

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, GO TO:

[HTTPS://HOMELESSNESS.ESCONDIDO.ORG](https://homelessness.esccondido.org)

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I. STATEMENT OF OUR CHALLENGE

To eliminate the negative impact of homelessness and transiency on our community.

II. BACKGROUND

Homelessness is defined most simply as “the state of no home.” A home provides security, control, belonging, identity, and privacy, among other things. Most of all, it’s a place that provides us with a centering – a place from which we leave but also to which we return.

Homelessness is a national, statewide, regional, and local challenge. No single organization or siloed strategy will solve the myriad issues that contribute to homelessness. This “Strategy” is the City of Escondido’s endeavor to articulate and implement the best approaches for eliminating community impacts. We do so with sensitivity to the importance of tackling underlying causes and helping people. Our challenge is intentionally stated very narrowly; addressing the greater human condition would be commendable, but we must start with an achievable objective.

According to 2019 data, Escondido’s unsheltered homeless population is estimated at 241 individuals, a reduction from the prior year estimate of 263 individuals. Unsheltered is defined as “individuals who are living on the streets or in abandoned buildings, storage structures, vehicles, encampments, or any other place unfit for human habitation”.

Varied circumstances lead one to becoming homeless. Common reasons include one or several of the following:

- Drug, alcohol, or other addiction;
- Family and relationship breakdown/Domestic violence/Physical and/or Sexual abuse;
- Mental health issues and lack of affordable treatment;
- State law changes such as AB109, Prop. 47 and Prop. 57 which have resulted in individuals with mental illnesses, criminal histories, and substance abuse disorders on the streets rather than hospitalized or incarcerated in some fashion;
- Life decisions or choices – individuals who *choose* to be homeless as a lifestyle;
- Unemployment;
- Poverty;
- Aging out of the Foster Care system; and
- Lack of affordable housing in both sales and rental.

III. THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness has a measurable and significant community impact. Daily calls for service involve Escondido Police and Fire Departments, Public Works, Park Rangers, Building Maintenance, Code Enforcement, and the City Attorney's Office. Problems involve drug use, erratic behavior, aggressive pan handling, illegal encampments, littering and accumulation of trash, junk, debris, and human waste.

In addition to the cost of response, homelessness and transiency lead to a less safe, less clean, and less healthy environment. The same issues bring additional costs to business and private property owners in the form of loss of business, higher operating costs, vandalism, and lower property values.

Recent studies throughout Southern California have estimated the annual cost per homeless individual can range from \$40,000 to over \$60,000. Costs include, emergency medical and police response, incarceration costs due to chronic law violations, encampment and trash cleanup, power washing of sidewalks and storefronts due to public health risks, uninsured medical treatment, and social services such as temporary housing and counseling.

Public health can also suffer. A recent 2017 outbreak of Hepatitis A in San Diego County spread through the homeless community, impacting all cities. While Escondido was aggressive in addressing the Hepatitis A outbreak, these efforts cost money, including for items such as repairing and equipping public restrooms with effective soaps and cleansers; frequently cleaning and disinfecting public restrooms, sidewalks, and store fronts; providing free hygiene kits; and police officers teaming with county nurses through Health and Human Services to locate and provide free vaccinations to the homeless.

And finally, there is the human cost, which is difficult to quantify, but very real. On February 12, 2021, two homeless men sleeping in a landscaped area at Mission Avenue and Ash Street were killed when a car left the roadway in an accident.

IV. COMPONENTS OF A SOLUTION

A. Policy Support

1. City Council/City Manager's Office

The City Council provides policy direction and allocates necessary financial resources for proposed strategies, including approval of grant application requests. The City Manager's Office implements policy direction from City Council, provides oversight on all departmental efforts, coordinates City resources with other agencies, and manages this "Strategy."

B. Public Safety

1. The Police Department

The Escondido Police Department approaches homelessness and transiency primarily with a “COPPS” unit. This specifically trained team of four officers, one sergeant and one lieutenant focus on “community-oriented policing and problem solving” (COPPS). The COPPS Unit strategy and goals are to contact, educate, and connect the homeless with services in an effort to find long-term solutions. The Unit has had success in arranging to reunite many homeless individuals with their families across the nation. The Unit regularly participates in community and County committees and meets with community groups to share information and address concerns.

Officers work in cooperation with social service and non-profit agencies to find a suitable program for dealing with drug addiction. Dealing with the addiction will often lead to a higher rate of success in sustaining long-term shelter and housing.

The COPPS Unit also utilizes three PERT (Psychological Emergency Response Team) clinician team members who partner with the police officers. Together the team spends time building the rapport and trust necessary to lead the homeless individual towards assistance in receiving the proper medications in an effort to stabilize and improve the level of cooperation for a long-term solution.

For individuals who have made homelessness a lifestyle choice, refuse the assistance offered to them, and choose to commit crimes, Escondido police officers will enforce all laws. Simultaneously, these individuals are offered an opportunity to remain compliant with the law and receive assistance in shelter. The goal is not to criminalize homelessness but to ensure individuals do not create a negative impact on the health and safety of the community.

Consequently, the COPPS unit has a primary direct approach that involves helping individuals and families who have fallen on hard times that desire to get back into a home and lead a healthy and productive life. Initially, police officers contact people experiencing homelessness and identify individual life circumstances and needs. Understanding that each homeless individual’s circumstances are unique, officers take the information that they learn and reach out to organizations, such as Interfaith, McAlister Institute, Traveler’s Aid Society of San Diego, St. Vincent De Paul, and Salvation Army. Through a collaborative effort, police officers, social services providers, and members of the faith community are able to protect our community while assisting the individual in obtaining emergency shelter, transitional housing, and finally into permanent housing.

2. Fire

The Fire Department experiences the impact of homelessness and transiency in two primary ways. Calls for medical assistance are handled by the Fire Department, and the homeless community often interacts with the medical system for the first time as the result of a 911 call and the actions of first responders. In addition, living on the streets, in undeveloped areas, and on vacant and abandoned property also creates additional fire risks through open cooking and heating. In 2020 alone, the Department responded to more than 54 separate incidents of fire caused by homeless or transient activity, at a cost in excess of \$20,000 for hourly personnel alone.

3. Downtown Park Rangers

Escondido's Rangers have traditionally been responsible for typical Ranger duties at the City's recreation spaces such as Lake Dixon, Lake Wohlford and Daley Ranch. However, a focus has now been added for the Escondido Creek Trail, and the eleven urban parks within the City. Rangers receive training in Penal Code section 832 powers of arrest, report writing, defensive tactics, radio procedures, proper use of pepper spray, and advanced training in first aid.

Since becoming involved, Park Rangers have commenced twice-a-day patrols of the entire length of the Escondido Creek Trail during which they look out for graffiti, trash, and other conditions that need attention. They contact Public Works for follow up and keep this corridor safe and clean throughout the week. Additionally, Park Rangers, in cooperation with the Public Works Department, keep the City's historic Grape Day Park safe and clean.

C. Clean Up and Improve Conditions

1. Public Works

A significant and visible impact of homelessness on a community is the litter and debris associated with transient living, including discarded shopping carts, clothes, broken bicycles and parts, human waste, and cardboard and other material used for shelters. Particularly sad is the frequent existence of goods and materials donated as an attempt to help others through generous acts of compassion. Such items are often discarded on City streets and open spaces, particularly if the individual finds shelter or assistance. In such cases, an active and engaged Public Works team, with appropriate health and safety training, gear and equipment, becomes a key part of keeping the community clean.

There are also full-scale homeless encampments within open space and habitat preserves, and around public facilities. Drainage channels and open spaces are a common choice, and the effort it takes to locate, remove, and clean up these encampments represents a significant cost to the City and taxpayers. In each circumstance, every effort is made to establish the owner of the encampment, and provide the owner a reasonable amount of time to remove their encampment structure and its

related trash, as well as to introduce them to and offer services. Personal belongings of homeless individuals are stored at the Public Works yard so the individual can claim their personal property if they choose.

The Public Works Department has also established a two-person “encampment crew” responsible for the removal of illegal encampments and the associated trash left behind. In addition to proactively patrolling over 70 known areas for encampments, this crew responds to calls for service from police officers, other City employees, and reports from the public. By removing encampments as soon as discovered, the team has successfully prevented these encampments from expanding, encourages individuals to seek help, and prevents an unhealthy living environment from existing.

2. Code Enforcement

The Code Enforcement Division works to address homelessness throughout the City in conjunction with the other departments listed above that collectively make up the Quality of Life Team. Working primarily with private property owners, Code Enforcement identifies primary issues and root causes, and collaborates with property owners and business management to correct situations of illegal encampments, trespass, transiency, and vandalism. One of their main focuses is to address the blight that homeless activity brings to the City.

3. Caltrans

Escondido is intersected by two major transportation routes under the jurisdiction of Caltrans. These are the Interstate 15, running north to south, and State Route 78, running east to west, and transitioning from a full-scale freeway to surface streets just to the east of its intersection with I-15. Both routes have ample rights of way, which are in turn, landscaped with trees and shrubbery, and fenced throughout with chain link. The chain link is easily breached, and without adjacent business owners to complain, and no other pedestrian traffic, as well as side-hills and trees for shelter and structures, the Caltrans rights of way are popular camping spots for homeless and transient individuals.

Caltrans generally insists on serving as the entity to address such problems. Unfortunately, Caltrans lacks the constituency or management structure to prioritize prompt enforcement. As a larger, statewide bureaucracy, they are less quick to respond, and less likely to use a tailored approach, or to develop innovative ways to solve a particular problem. When possible, the City simply handles Caltrans issues on its own.

D. Targeted Geographic Areas

From a geographic perspective, the visible impacts of homelessness can be seen on a somewhat logical basis. For example, homeless impacts are most likely found in places close to where services are offered, places which are “out of sight” and offer some degree of privacy, and places which offer protection from the elements or easy accessibility. Efficiency in addressing homelessness will acknowledge the existence of these locations,

provide for patrolling them regularly, and thereby allow an “up-front” means of confronting the problem and being proactive rather than simply waiting for complaints. Areas of targeted patrol in Escondido include:

- All 11 urban parks
- Reidy Creek
- Harmony Grove
- Escondido Creek Trail
- Downtown businesses
- Escondido Public Library

E. Partnerships

Homelessness cannot be reduced, managed, or eliminated without the active involvement of our community members. Escondido enjoys a great working relationship with:

- Residents and Business Owners
- Community Stakeholders
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Federal and State Agencies
- Social Service Agencies
- Non-Profits
- School Districts

1. Non-Profits and Faith-Based Organizations

Other than the occasional community clean up, few non-profit entities and faith-based organizations are eager to address the impacts of the homeless and transient population on the community. Fortunately, there are many such organizations which have the resources to impact this population more directly rather than dealing with the secondary effects. Such entities are important partners. Indeed, Appendix A to this Strategy is a list of the non-profits that provide one form or another of services to assist this vulnerable population.

One of the greater challenges facing the City as it deals with impacts concerns education on proper strategies for these groups. A second challenge is coordination of activities. The location of volunteer activities can be critical with non-profits engaging in the occasional volunteer activity (i.e. a soup kitchen or clothing distribution). Educating on what works and what doesn't, who needs help and who won't accept it, and similar types of briefings for the non-profits help in getting the maximum return on the volunteer investment.

Similarly, coordination of effort is more critical to the non-profits that provide ongoing services. In this respect, a network can be created to provide maximum benefit, not only to the non-profit attempting to help with limited resources, but to the targeted individuals in getting the help they need.

2. Private Business & Commercial Sector

At the local level, the City is usually the recipient of citizen complaints about the impacts of homelessness and transiency. Likewise, the City is looked to as the focal point for solutions, whether providing solutions directly, or coordinating with other entities in providing solutions.

Private businesses and the commercial sector generally are important partners in addressing impacts and need to be encouraged to communicate the issues becoming an important part of the solution. However, there are four key ways in which private businesses can contribute to the solution. These include cooperation, coordinating and using private security, alterations to their property, and exercising their property rights. Each is discussed briefly below:

- Cooperation is generally the easiest means of assisting the City with the impacts of homelessness because it often requires nothing more than using the City's Report It! App or making a phone call to report problems that can be addressed by the City team. However, sometimes it requires persistence and enlisting the support of other property owners. If no one cares and no one reports the issue, the burden then falls solely on the City to spot and rectify problems. Serving as the eyes and ears of the City, the private sector can provide critical cooperation in addressing impacts.
- Use of private security. The City is currently engaged in a process to invite the management of security companies in our most impacted areas to existing meetings with area businesses in a targeted geographic area. The goal will be to boost communication among all interested parties and the private security industry to take a more coordinated approach to the criminal transient problems plaguing much of our city. Education on techniques and reporting is an important part of this communication.
- Private property owners can also make alterations to their property to deal with the impacts of transiency. Indeed, this form of solution has an acronym (CPTED) and has developed into somewhat of a mini-field of study and expertise. Specialized training in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) allows Police Officers to evaluate properties and identify improvements such as lighting type, vegetation, fencing, and limiting access to water and power that will reduce the likelihood of crime taking place.

- Private property owners can exercise their property rights, primarily through forbidding trespass, by allowing law enforcement to intervene and move individuals from sites causing problems. In Escondido, the use of "602" letters, referring to Penal Code Section 602 forbidding trespass, is a well-utilized, technologically efficient means of addressing the trespass problem.

These four concrete mechanisms for addressing impacts can be the subject of education and forums through local business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association, and local equivalents of homeowner's associations in industrial parks.

Finally, the City of Escondido Economic Development Department is an important liaison in furthering these private solutions. The Economic Development Department works closely with the business community and other groups to implement a consistently proven method to address the negative elements of homelessness on their property and to provide information to the homeless population on where they can get assistance that will lead to a permanent solution.

F. TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS

The City's Housing and Neighborhood Services Division is charged with improving living conditions for low to moderate income communities and individuals in Escondido. The Division administers four separate, but complementary, funding sources:

1. Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds can be used to create a suitable living environment for low-moderate ("low-mod") income persons. In recent years, the City has funded homeless shelter programs at Interfaith Community Services through the Alliance for Regional Solutions, a homeless youth program at Escondido Education COMPACT, and repairs at the Center for Community Solutions (a domestic violence shelter) and Interfaith Community Services.
2. Federal Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds are restricted to assisting homeless persons or those at imminent risk of homelessness. The City has received these funds since 2016 and has funded homeless shelter operations, outreach, rapid rehousing programs and homelessness prevention programs through Interfaith Community Services as well as a homeless youth program at Escondido Education COMPACT.
3. Federal Home Investment Partnership (HOME) funds can be used to build and rehabilitate affordable housing. In 2018, City Council approved an allocation to assist Community Housing Works in rehabilitating Las Casitas Apartments, 6 transitional apartments for homeless families.
4. Low-Moderate Income Set-Aside (SHA) funds were funds generated by the City of Escondido's Redevelopment Agency. This was historically the largest source of funding for affordable housing in Escondido. The State dissolved the redevelopment agencies in 2012. The City continues to receive payments on

developer loans and first-time homebuyer loans and works to develop new affordable housing as funds accumulate.

As of the end of 2018, the City assisted 24 deed restricted, affordable rental developments (totaling 1,165 apartment units) and eight homeowner projects (totaling 70 homes). In recent years, most rental developments have included some units to be set aside for homeless households. Housing & Neighborhood Services oversees these affordable complexes, ensuring compliance with health and safety standards and deed restrictions (including Housing First standards where appropriate).

Housing & Neighborhood Services staff coordinates with outside organizations working to respond to the homeless crisis, including the Regional Taskforce on the Homeless, the Continuum of Care organization for the County of San Diego, and the Alliance for Regional Solutions, a coalition of nine cities and more than 50 non-profit service providers and funders. The Alliance was first assembled to develop a winter homeless shelter system. This was accomplished 12 years ago and has evolved into a “Bridge to Housing” program to move chronically homeless individuals and families into permanent housing. The Alliance has taken the lead in North County to implement the Coordinated Entry System, a centralized data system used by agencies to ensure that services are being coordinated in order to maximize resources and alleviate duplication of homeless services.

Housing & Neighborhood Services is responsible for searching for appropriate grants to help homeless and low-mod income households and for writing grant submissions, implementing, and administering those grants.

SUMMARY

The City of Escondido is actively engaged in addressing the impacts of homelessness and transiency with both empathy for those seeking help and with low tolerance for those engaged in criminal activity and bringing blight upon the City. This Strategy can continually evolve to meet the needs by outlining the City’s plan to fulfill our role by providing policy, pursuing funding (federal, state and county, as well as the use local tax dollars), engaging with our partners, and providing the resources of the departments within the City. It is a very complex issue and we strive to be consistent and vigilant in our efforts to keep Escondido safe and clean in an efficient manner.

APPENDIX A

PARTNERSHIP ENTITIES

- Interfaith Community Services – addresses the needs of low-income, homeless and under-served people in North San Diego County by providing tools and resources in the following areas: nutrition and basic needs; employment; self-sufficiency and supportive services; behavioral health and recovery; and housing.
- McAlister Institute – provides high-quality, low-cost substance abuse treatment, drug intervention, and recovery support services to more than 10,000 men, women, teens and children throughout San Diego County.
- Alpha Project – provides work, recovery and support services to people who are motivated to change their lives and achieve self-sufficiency. Programs require successful completion and permanent independence through education, employment, sobriety and stability.
- Palomar Health – focuses on building a coordinated system of healthcare that concentrates technology, expertise and volume in specific locations where high competency can be maintained. Their North County delivery system is anchored by three hospitals, two which provide an array of acute care services and one specialty hospital focused on Obstetrics, Rehabilitation, Behavioral Health, Pediatrics and Neonatal Intensive Care.
- North County Lifeline – builds self-reliance among youth, individuals and families through problem solving, skill-building and accessible community-based services. They also provide youth development, housing and stability, child abuse prevention and intervention as well as behavior health services.
- San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency – provides a broad range of health and social services to promote wellness, self-sufficiency, and a better quality of life for individuals and families in San Diego County. The Agency integrates health and social services through a unified service-delivery system that is family focused and community based.
- Psychological Emergency Response Team – consists of a licensed mental health clinician and a dedicated Escondido Police Officer that work together to assess mentally ill individuals. Assessed individuals are generally referred to a community-based mental health facility that can provide crisis intervention, outpatient care and case management services.
- Veteran’s Village of San Diego – serves homeless military veterans with housing, homeless court, employment, training, rehabilitation and mental health services.

- North County Veterans Stand Down – enables homeless veterans from across San Diego County to receive much-needed services in a safe, friendly, drug free and secure environment. They also provide food, lodging, clothing and a variety of services to help them both physically and mentally.
- Center for Community Solutions – Hidden Valley House – provides temporary, emergency shelter for survivors of intimate partner violence and their children. They offer safety planning, crisis counseling, advocacy services and assistance with obtaining long-term safe housing.
- Mental Health Systems – provides an integrated approach to specialized services and is uniquely qualified to offer mental health, corrections, and alcohol and drug services through a network of statewide programs. They maintain an empathetic, ethical and responsive attitude in all phases of care.
- Victory Outreach – a Christian ministry which evangelizes and disciplines the hurting people of Escondido. They are dedicated to instilling within men the qualities that transform them into Godly men needed in the home, community or church.
- Escondido Family Services Salvation Army – a social services provider delivering assistance to those in need by providing the following services: drug and alcohol rehabilitation, homeless services, senior programs, youth programs, disaster services and spiritual services.
- Community Housing Works – provides and builds life-changing affordable apartment communities with resident-centered services for working families, seniors and people with disabilities to forge stronger futures. They also provide programs, services and connections to resources to help people attain financial stability, improve their health and overall well-being, and set school-age children up for success in the classroom and beyond.
- Solutions for Change – transforms lives and communities by permanently solving family homelessness by using the transformational housing model. They equip parents with the skills, knowledge and resources to completely transform themselves and their families. They provide counseling services, parenting classes, employment training and work experience to create solid foundations that support meaningful futures.
- Escondido Education COMPACT – provides innovative academic support, leadership development, workforce development, prevention/intervention, health and wellness programs that achieves the vision of having safe communities comprised of contributing, healthy, educated and empowered individuals.

- Regional Taskforce on the Homeless – provides comprehensive data and trusted analysis that enables the community to identify, implement and support efforts that most effectively prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- Esperanza Crisis Center – a community research foundation that offers short term care (14-30 days) for those that are experiencing a crisis.
- Exodus Recovery –offers services for those that are homeless and need assistance with mental health.
- Veterans Community Services – offers services for homeless and in-crisis veterans.

APPENDIX B

CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

RTFH – San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homelessness

HUD – U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Using the RTFH Data Dashboards

The RTFH has three data dashboards available to the public. It is important for users to understand the different data dashboards and intended uses. We encourage you to watch [this video](#) prior to using any of the dashboards. For questions on how to use the dashboards or which one is best suited to help with your specific interests please email support@rtfhdsd.org.

Community Performance Dashboard

The [Community Performance Dashboard](#) provides a broad overview of populations and programs. It allows for customizable date ranges, sub-population filtering, and insights into various performance metrics. The data uses de-duplicated client records. See dashboard dictionary [here](#).

System Performance Dashboard

The [System Performance Dashboard](#) provides a year-over-year trend analysis of San Diego's performance on HUD's System Performance Measures. Data is only available for the most recent available reporting period to HUD. For more information please see [HUD's System Performance Measures](#).

Project Performance Dashboard

The [Project Performance Dashboard](#) is based on data calculated in HUD's standard Annual Performance Reports (APR). This dashboard allows the user to choose date ranges for which APR reports have been run and dig into the performance of specific projects, although the names of projects are anonymous and only known by the organization providing the service. The data is not de-duplicated. Clients may be enrolled in one or more projects. For more information please see [HUD's APR specifications](#).

[2020 We All Count Report](#)

[2019 Regional Task Force on the Homeless Annual Report on Homelessness in the San Diego Region](#)