

County increases funding for mental health, social services

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Funding for mental health and social service programs in Del Norte County increased for 2022, and permanent housing at The Legacy could be offered by the fall.

That's good news for the Del Norte Department of Health and Human Services, which experienced a 300% increase in crisis calls at the beginning of COVID-19 - a trend that has waned but not dipped below pre-pandemic levels.

"It was hard on our team, but they did a wonderful job," said Heather Snow, director of DHHS.

On Dec. 3, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors approved \$853,370 worth of services and contracts focusing on behavioral health and social services. That's an increase of \$316,790 compared to 2021.

As a result, two new programs have been added to the department's mental health offerings: One that assists foster care youth who have aged-out of the system but still need stable housing; the other residential

treatment and detox services at a facility in Redding.

The first program, which received \$6,370, will be run through the DHHS Social Services Branch, and will identify and assist young adults between the ages of 18-25 who are exiting foster care.

“This is our first time to have this contract,” said Snow. “It’s like the case management part of housing for this population.”

Though the contract is pending approval from the state and will be run with oversight from the Department of Housing and Community Development Transitional Housing Program, Snow said she expects the services to go into effect immediately. She added that anywhere from 3-5 youth are currently eligible under this program.

Another \$1,600 - funding that mirrors last year’s allotment - will be used in conjunction with other state and federal funds to secure housing for the same clientele.

Behavioral health services, meanwhile, are largely non-existent in Del Norte County and must be contracted out.

A new (not to exceed) \$30,000 contract with Redding-based Empire Recovery Center will allow the DHHS Behavioral Health Branch to provide both residential treatment and detox services.

“We have seen a lot of clients relapse during the pandemic, especially those who were in their first year of recovery,” Snow said.

Snow added that a lack of residential treatment in Del Norte County became “scarier” when people were told to stay home.

“People were isolated and peer support was lacking, which is a huge part of recovery,” she said.

Similar to residential treatment, psychiatric services are not offered within the county’s existing hospital system. This year, an additional \$280,420 was added for a total of \$625,400 so that residents may receive these services - at least by telephone - with Kings View Corporation in Fresno.

The contract supports initial evaluations, ongoing psychiatric counseling and monitoring of patient medications through the Anasazi Doctor’s Home Page - which enables electronic prescriptions to be sent to pharmacies.

The tele-psychiatry also enables qualified mental health providers to remotely provide services through the use of video conferencing to individuals who face issues with mobility, poverty or incarceration.

According to Snow, BHB has used Kings View’s services since 2009.

Two additional contracts were approved by the board of supervisors that will provide in-patient services to those facing more significant mental health challenges: A \$150,000 contract with Willow Glen Care Center in Yuba City, and \$40,000 to work with Heritage Oak Hospital in Sacramento.

Willow provides lock-down care for adults under a Lanterman Petris Short Conservatorship - a California legal-based authorization that allows another adult to be responsible for an individual's medical treatment due to mental illness. The latter program offers care and treatment of acute episodes of mental illness. Both programs are carry-over contracts that work in conjunction with Medi-Cal.

The final piece - permanent housing in Del Norte County - should be offered by the fourth quarter of 2022 at The Legacy, thanks to a \$2.4 million Homekey Grant that allowed DHHS to purchase the former motel about two years ago.

The facility, located at 665 L Street in Crescent City, currently offers temporary housing until they are able to add permanent kitchens to each unit and laundry capabilities.

The 30-unit former motel currently houses 37 residents in 23 of its units. Current vacancies aren't being filled to allow DHHS to start adding the kitchens. According to Snow, an architect is currently designing the remodel, and funding to pay for the construction and sustaining The Legacy's services will come "from a variety of sources."

Asked whether funding in 2022 will cover the need, Snow said she was grateful for what DHHS is able to support, but "in general, I would say it's not enough because every year mental health needs are growing," she said.