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## County Approved for Whole Person Care Pilot Project

The County of Orange has been approved through the state Department of Health Care Services for a five-year project to implement the Whole Person Care (WPC) pilot program, which is designed to ensure a more holistic approach to targeting the impacts of homelessness, and promoting mental and physical wellness.

The Board of Supervisors approved the application for the funding in June, pledging to contribute local matching funds of \$2.35 million dollars annually over five years from Mental Health Services Act dollars and tobacco-settlement funds. The County will receive a match in federal dollars, with total spending reaching \$23.5 million over the course of the program.

The WPC goals are consistent with the County's ongoing efforts to take a broader approach to meeting the needs of those without permanent housing. The HCA proposal includes WPC Connect which would alert participating entities when a patient experiencing homelessness enters an emergency room. Upon notification of a non-urgent situation, the County's community partners would connect the individual to recuperative care or other supportive services.

"This is tremendous news for Orange County and our efforts to provide additional support for our vulnerable residents who are without permanent housing," said Board of Supervisors [Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett](#), Fifth District, who collaborated with the Health Care Agency and CalOptima to pursue the application.

"This pilot project will allow greater collaboration between local hospitals, community clinics, CalOptima and our community partners to improve the efficiency of the services that we provide to individuals in need of support," said [Vice Chair Michelle Steel](#), Second District.

"Orange County is addressing the underlying causes of homelessness," said Orange County [Supervisor Andrew Do](#), who has led the county's comprehensive response to homelessness. "This pilot program will work to reduce emergency room visits by identifying each person's medical and social service need."

In 2015, Orange County taxpayers paid the Medi-Cal bills for 5,918 homeless patients that accessed local emergency rooms. More than 1,000 of these patients visited Orange County emergency rooms more than once within a three-month period. The Whole Person Care program will work to reduce these frequent emergency room visits by coordinating medical, behavioral health and social service programs to meet the individual needs of these high-risk Medi-Cal members.

“Every person’s situation is unique. For some, it’s serious mental illness. Other people may struggle with substance abuse,” explained Supervisor Do, First District. “Our goal with this pilot program is to deliver personalized solutions that keep people off the street and out of the ER.”

“Emergency rooms are impacted and we need to increase capacity so that people have access to medical care when they really need it. Working with the homeless in a holistic way that addresses health, addiction, job reentry and mental health services will free up beds in emergency rooms in ways we haven’t seen before,” said [Supervisor Todd Spitzer](#), Third District. “The Whole Person Care Project and the opening the new Kraemer Homeless Shelter and Service Center will help eliminate homelessness in Orange County.”

“The approval of this pilot project is a reflection of our commitment to combine resources to achieve results that are beneficial to Orange County and to the greater community,” said [Supervisor Shawn Nelson](#), Fourth District. “We need and welcome lots of partners to address the issue of homelessness and its many components.”

Participating hospitals and community clinics have agreed to redirect a portion of their existing allocations of tobacco-settlement funds toward the pilot program and to develop homeless outreach and care-coordination positions within their emergency room departments.

Upon final approval of the WPC agreement with the state, HCA will reconvene a WPC Collaborative to begin implementation and will also work with Susan Price, the County’s Director of Care Coordination, to convene a WPC Steering Committee as directed by the Board. HCA will return to the Board of Supervisors within the next few months for approval of the necessary agreements with participating entities including: infrastructure development, navigation and outreach services, and recuperative care.

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