



CITY OF MENIFEE

SUBJECT: Regional Homeless Alliance Assessment and Action Plan

MEETING DATE: September 18, 2024

TO: Mayor and City Council

PREPARED BY: David Gutierrez, Police Captain

REVIEWED BY: Chris Karrer, Police Chief

APPROVED BY: Armando G. Villa, City Manager

RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. Receive a report on the City of Menifee's homeless response program and regional collaboration efforts; and
2. Review and discuss the Regional Homeless Alliance Assessment and Action Plan.

DISCUSSION

The number of people experiencing homelessness in the United States has increased over the past decade due to various factors, including rising housing costs, income inequality, and challenges related to mental health and substance abuse. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the total number of people experiencing homelessness grew from around 550,000 in 2013 to over 580,000 in 2023, with urban areas being particularly affected. The most significant rise has been in unsheltered homelessness—individuals living on the streets, in tents, or in cars. This increase has been uneven across the country, with West Coast states, particularly California, seeing sharp increases. Currently, about 30% of people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. reside in California, which also accounts for roughly 50% of all people experiencing unsheltered homeless nationwide (HUD, 2023).

Changes in legislation may also impact the City of Menifee. State laws, such as Proposition 47 have posed significant challenges for law enforcement by reducing illicit drug possession to a misdemeanor, thereby eliminating accountability and reducing opportunities for much needed drug treatment. Offenders are often arrested, booked, and released within 24 hours, only to return to the streets, perpetuating a cycle of re-offense and diminishing the effectiveness of intervention efforts.

In 2018, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued its ruling in *Martin v. Boise*, holding that cities could

not enforce camping bans against individuals experiencing homelessness if there were insufficient shelter beds available. Although the ruling did not completely prohibit enforcement of certain types of camping restrictions, for the six years following the *Boise* ruling, many cities and counties allowed large encampments to exist due to either (i) the unavailability of sufficient shelter beds, and/or (ii) concerns over the liability created by enforcing the restrictions.

The legal environment shifted significantly when the United States Supreme Court issued its ruling on *Johnson v. Grants Pass* on June 28, 2024. *Grants Pass* effectively overruled *Boise* and determined that individuals experiencing homelessness could be arrested and fined for camping and sleeping outside when no safe alternatives exist.

Following the *Grants Pass* decision, Governor Newsom issued an executive order **directing** state agencies and departments to urgently address dangerous encampments while supporting the individuals living in them. Of note, the executive order also strongly **encourages** local governments as follows:

Local governments are encouraged to adopt policies consistent with this Order and to use all available resources and infrastructure ... to take action with the urgency this crisis demands to humanely remove encampments from public spaces, prioritizing those encampments that most threaten the life, health, and safety of those in and around them.

In practical effect, *Grants Pass* and the Governor's executive order have prompted cities and counties to revise their enforcement strategies, and it is anticipated that they will begin to displace larger numbers of homeless individuals. Changes in enforcement practices from surrounding jurisdictions may have an impact on the number and patterns of people experiencing homelessness, and the number of encampments, in Menifee.

As a result of the changes in the law and the associated changes in enforcement practices, it is timely and appropriate to review the City's historic approach to this issue. In 2016, before the establishment of the Menifee Police Department (MPD), the City of Menifee joined forces with Lake Elsinore, Murrieta, Temecula, and Wildomar to form the Regional Homeless Alliance (RHA). The goal of the RHA was for the cities in our region to work in collaboration to address the issues surrounding those experiencing homelessness, recognizing that a unified regional approach is cost-effective and operationally efficient.

On July 1, 2020, the Menifee Police Department began providing law enforcement services to the City of Menifee. During the department's formation, staff recognized the importance of addressing quality-of-life issues that extend beyond the capabilities of traditional patrol officers, with homelessness being one of the most visible challenges. Although Menifee's issues associated with persons experiencing homelessness were not as severe as other jurisdictions', the department sought to be proactive. As a result, the Problem Oriented Policing (POP) Unit was established as one of the initial specialty units. The POP Unit's mission is to proactively address community issues using strategic methods, including data-driven policing and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) working in collaboration with the Community Development Department serving on the City's Development Review Committee (DRC). The

team began with a sergeant, two police officers, and a community service officer, all receiving specialized training to address narcotics-related crimes, vice activities, and general nuisance issues, including homelessness.

Today the MPD works in collaboration with the Riverside University Health System's (RUHS) Homeless Housing Opportunities Partnership and Education (HHOPE) Program. This partnership is critical as HHOPE provides direct access to county resources and behavioral health specialists, enabling immediate screening and treatment placement for those in need. Dedicated to the City of Menifee, the HHOPE team is funded through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Menifee has benefited significantly from this dedicated team serving the city. Other HHOPE teams throughout Riverside County have a larger service area, often spanning multiple cities and unincorporated areas.

One consistent challenge in addressing homelessness is the reluctance of some individuals to accept services, compounded by well-intentioned but potentially enabling actions, such as community members providing food or money. To address this, the department launched the Responsible Compassion campaign, aimed at educating the public on best practices when engaging with homeless individuals. Door hangers are periodically distributed in areas experiencing more frequent homeless activity. The city continues to involve community members, business owners, faith-based organizations, and service clubs in these outreach efforts.

Recognizing the need to enhance homeless outreach and enforcement efforts, the MPD expanded the POP team in 2021 by adding a Homeless Liaison Officer (HLO) and a Community Behavioral Assessment Team (CBAT) Officer. The CBAT Officer works alongside a Mental Health Clinician from RUHS. While the HLO and CBAT Officers are funded by the city, the RUHS Mental Health Clinician is funded by the county. Together, the HLO and CBAT Officers collaborate closely with the HHOPE team to connect the homeless population with available services and resources.

The primary mission of the CBAT Officer and the RUHS Mental Health Clinician is to respond to calls involving mental health issues within the community, including those involving homeless individuals. Riding together in the same patrol car, the Mental Health Clinician takes the lead in assessing behavioral health concerns, while the officer ensures safety and provides law enforcement expertise.

In addition to hosting the RUHS HHOPE team and the RUHS Mental Health Clinician, Menifee PD also provides office space for four members of the Mobile Crisis Management Team (MCMT). Although not specifically assigned to or funded by the City of Menifee, their proximity makes them a valuable asset. The MCMT includes a Clinical Therapist, a Behavioral Health Specialist, a Substance Use Counselor, and a Peer Support Specialist. The team specializes in short-term case management, crisis intervention, substance use treatment, and peer support services, working closely with community agencies to provide outreach, therapy, substance use counseling, and case management, while connecting individuals and families to long-term support.

Beyond these resources, Menifee PD prioritizes collaboration with neighboring agencies, business owners, community partners, non-profit groups, and faith-based organizations to address homelessness and other quality of life issues. The police department values willing collaboration, especially in large retail centers where it's common for homeless individuals to be

present. It's critical to have business owners who are responsive and actively engaged in working collaboratively to find solutions, including CPTED fixes and the use of technology such as video surveillance and License Plate Readers (LPR).

The combined efforts of the POP Unit, RUHS HHOPE, RUHS MCMT, and community partnerships have significantly impacted the community over the years. Between January 2023 and June 2024, outreach teams made 1,414 contacts with 171 individuals as part of harm reduction efforts, 29 individuals received Narcan and fentanyl test strips, 10 were connected to transitional housing, and one was placed in permanent housing. From April to June 2024, 12 were linked to ongoing mental health services and 29 individuals were screened for substance abuse treatment, with several successfully entering programs. Patrol officers continue to support these initiatives by frequently engaging with homeless individuals, connecting those willing to receive assistance with services, including housing, while proactively enforcing laws against those involved in illegal activities.

These efforts are reflected in the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count conducted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The unsheltered count decreased from 28 individuals in 2022 to 25 in 2023, representing an approximate 10% reduction. While this progress is encouraging, there is still work to be done. The police department continues to receive service calls related to homelessness, and officers often proactively engage with homeless individuals.

Despite ongoing efforts of staff to reduce the impact of homelessness in Menifee and provide vital services, several challenges continue to impede progress. These include limited access to immediate shelter space for individuals needing street exits while receiving case management, property owners' reluctance to implement CPTED recommendations, and a lack of coordinated and collaborative efforts between jurisdictions, often leading to ineffective and redundant actions. Additionally, obtaining trespass authorization from property owners can be difficult, complicating enforcement efforts.

To address these challenges, in late 2022, the City of Murrieta secured \$500,000 in federal grant funding to hire consulting services to develop a Regional Homeless Alliance Assessment and Action Plan, an effort supported by all five RHA member cities. The assessment, which began in June 2023, involved a thorough review of documents, stakeholder interviews, meetings with city leadership and personnel from RHA cities, field visits, ride-alongs with street outreach teams, resource inventory and GIS mapping, participation in RHA meetings, and the formalization of the RHA governance structure. Completed in mid-2024, the assessment and action plan produced 26 recommendations that emphasized the importance of a regional approach to addressing homelessness.

The recommendations were prioritized into short-term (18 months or less), medium-term (two to five years), and long-term (five-plus years) goals. Key recommendations include:

- Establishing regionally coordinated outreach teams that operate across city borders
- Creating a regional by-name list of homeless individuals to better allocate resources
- Forming subcommittees
- Implementing formal encampment protocols,
- Participating in Continuum of Care (CoC) board meetings

- Collaborating with the County's HHOPE Team
- Enhancing data sharing
- Standardizing the use of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- Establishing service contract agreements
- Applying for relevant grants as the RHA
- Formalizing RHA governance
- Engaging with school districts affected by homelessness
- Expanding access points and shelter space.

In a continued effort to improve service delivery and proactively address the anticipated impacts of the Grants Pass decision and the Governor's executive order, staff have been exploring a range of strategies to tackle homelessness in our community and neighboring partner cities. This includes forming a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with other RHA cities to deploy regional outreach teams, expand shelter access, enhance service delivery, and compete more effectively for grant funding to address the complex needs of those experiencing homelessness. Staff are also working to engage service providers like Health Care in Action (HIA). Established in 2021 as a 501(c)(3) organization and medical group, HIA operates mobile clinics staffed by healthcare professionals, community health workers, and social workers who bring medical care directly to unhoused individuals. Healthcare is a crucial component in establishing meaningful connections and building trust with the homeless population, making it a key element of our outreach strategy moving forward.

The challenges of homelessness have become too complex for cities to address in isolation; regional collaboration is now more essential than ever. By pooling resources, expanding outreach, increasing shelter availability, and coordinating case managers and support staff, cities working together can better secure County, State, and Federal grant funding, greatly improving the quality of life for homeless individuals and the broader community.

STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVE

Safe and Vibrant Community

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Regional Homeless Alliance Assessment Report and Action Plan
2. Resolution No. 16-577 - Regional Homeless Alliance