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Supervisors Support Whole Person Care Application

The Orange County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the County's application to the State Department of Health Care Services for a pilot program to ensure a more holistic approach to targeting the impacts of homelessness, and promoting mental and physical wellness.

If Orange County is selected for the Whole Person Care (WPC) Pilot Program, the Health Care Agency (HCA) will contribute \$2.35 million dollars a year over the next five years from Mental Health Services Act dollars and tobacco-settlement funds. The County would receive a match in federal dollars, with program spending totaling \$23.5 million over the course of the program.

The program 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.

"Participation in this pilot will allow the County to have the technological infrastructure that allows us to take a coordinated approach to caring for our most vulnerable population," said Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District, who collaborated with the Health Care Agency and CalOptima to pursue the application. "Not only would we take a huge step in addressing homelessness, it would improve the capacity of emergency room services in our communities."

"For those experiencing homelessness, it is often too difficult to navigate through the maze of services to receive care," said Supervisor Andrew Do, First District, who also sits on the CalOptima board. "Now, we will provide coordinated and comprehensive services in real time."

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

Health Care Agency Director Mark Refowitz praised the Board of Supervisors for demonstrating leadership on homelessness through the Commission to End Homelessness and the recent addition of the County's Director of Care Coordination for homeless services.

"The challenges posed by homelessness and mental health issues are complex, and cannot be adequately addressed or treated by just one organization," Refowitz said. "That's why the collaboration between local hospitals, community clinics, CalOptima and the County of Orange is so essential to providing the wrap-around, longer-term care and support these folks need."

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