Strategic Plan

2024-2026



Housing Matters

Housing Matters

Resolving Homelessness Together

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In my role as President of the Board of Directors of Housing Matters, I am delighted to share this dynamic continuation of our Strategic Plan that represents what we intend to accomplish during the three year period of January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2026.

The previous strategic plan laid the groundwork for this version by expanding and solidifying our organizational identity. On reflection, the successes and the opportunities for growth over the last three years have brought us to the realization that housing is really at the heart of what we do. We recognized our focus on supportive housing [see page 8] needed to be reflected in this new plan to illustrate our commitment to developing more of it along with the crucial services we already provide such as emergency shelter with case management and housing navigation, supportive services, respite care and so much more.

We identified five areas of focus for this plan:

1. Organizational Excellence: Build a resilient organization characterized by excellence, equity, integrity, and accountability.

2. Program Impact: Deliver effective programs that move more people into housing.

3. Shelter & Supportive Housing: Develop and/or acquire property for supportive housing, emergency shelter, navigation center, and services.

4. Community Engagement: Build a network of allies to support the vision that homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

5. System Leadership: Deepen our leadership across the system by advocating for our vision that homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

As you read through the plan, you will notice a theme around the continued expansion of CalAIM. This is a source of ongoing financial stability that we are encouraged by as we continue the development of our organization to meet the need for services in Santa Cruz County.

Cecilia Espinola,

Housing Matters Board President

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Part 1: Introduction

Strategic planning is essential to Housing Matters' organizational success. It guides us and keeps us focused on our mission and values as we grow in response to the needs in our community.

As the largest nonprofit based in Santa Cruz County specifically focused on solutions to homelessness, we recognize and accept our responsibility to lead our community's response to this humanitarian crisis.

Deciding where and how to best focus our resources to move our mission forward is central to that responsibility, and that's where "strategy" comes into play. In creating this three-year strategic plan, we wanted to create a dynamic, flexible, and useful document for directing our day-to-day and long-term decision-making.

In short, our strategic planning directly informs our focus over the next few years based on what is specifically needed in our community, and how we can meet those needs based on our organizational expertise and other proven solutions.

Planning: Our Operational "North Star"

This Strategic Plan 2024 - 2026 is intended to function as our operational "North Star." It builds on Housing Matters's substantial progress over the past three years in meeting the goals outlined in our last Strategic Plan 2021 - 2023. It also reflects the experience we've gained in doing this work for the past 35+ years, and our commitment to empowering people on their pathway to stable housing. Additionally, it reflects our continued focus on evidence-based solutions that follow a Housing First approach -- such as permanent supportive housing.

Purpose: Growing to Meet Demand

As the number of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County fluctuates, our organization must scale to meet the demand for services. Housing Matters has grown from 65 to 101 employees over the past three years. At the same time, our annual budget has grown from $6.2M to over $21M. This steady growth directly reflects our ongoing efforts to increase capacity and flexibility and scale our programs to meet community demand.

Owning and operating Casa Azul, for example, our newly opened permanent supportive housing facility, is one example of how we have scaled our programs and services to meet demand. Harvey West Studios and the expansion of the Recuperative Care Center (RCC) at an offsite location and the planned Navigation Center are examples of how Housing Matters continues to evolve as an organization — not for the sake of growth, but to meet the evolving needs in our community.



Process & Inputs: Understanding What's Needed

Understanding the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Santa Cruz County is critically important, as it directly informs our operational strategy.

As a data-driven organization, we're continually monitoring data collected both internally and externally to understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our community. This data also allows us to understand the success of our programs and services in meeting those needs. Gathering input from our partners and collaborators is equally important because we know data doesn't always tell the whole story.

Who are our partners and collaborators?

- People with lived experience of homelessness in Santa Cruz County
- Local service provider partners
- Representatives from state and local agencies

Alignment with Community Priorities

Housing Matters is committed to aligning itself with the City and County of Santa Cruz in addressing the community's needs. Specifically, Housing Matters is committed to supporting the goals and initiatives outlined in the City of Santa Cruz's **Homelessness Response Action Plan** and Santa Cruz County's **Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz** updated three-year framework.

Additionally, Housing Matters is committed to working closely with the City to establish and operate a new navigation center adjacent to the Housing Matters campus, as outlined in the **2022 - 2023 Coral Street Visioning Report**. The future navigation center will provide low-threshold, temporary emergency shelter with on-site housing navigation and wrap-around services for adults experiencing homelessness.

As part of our ongoing process to develop this strategic plan, we conducted one-on-one interviews and small focus groups to explore Housing Matters' strengths, challenges, and opportunities. This gathered input served as a body of insight to inform our strategic plan.

Participants in this process included people who previously experienced homelessness in Santa Cruz County, service provider partners, and representatives from local public agencies.
A partial list of these participants is as follows:

Housing Matters program participants with lived experience of homelessness

City of Santa Cruz
Matt Huffaker, City Manager, City of Santa Cruz

City of Watsonville:
Rene Mendez, City Manager
Suzi Merriam, Community Development Director

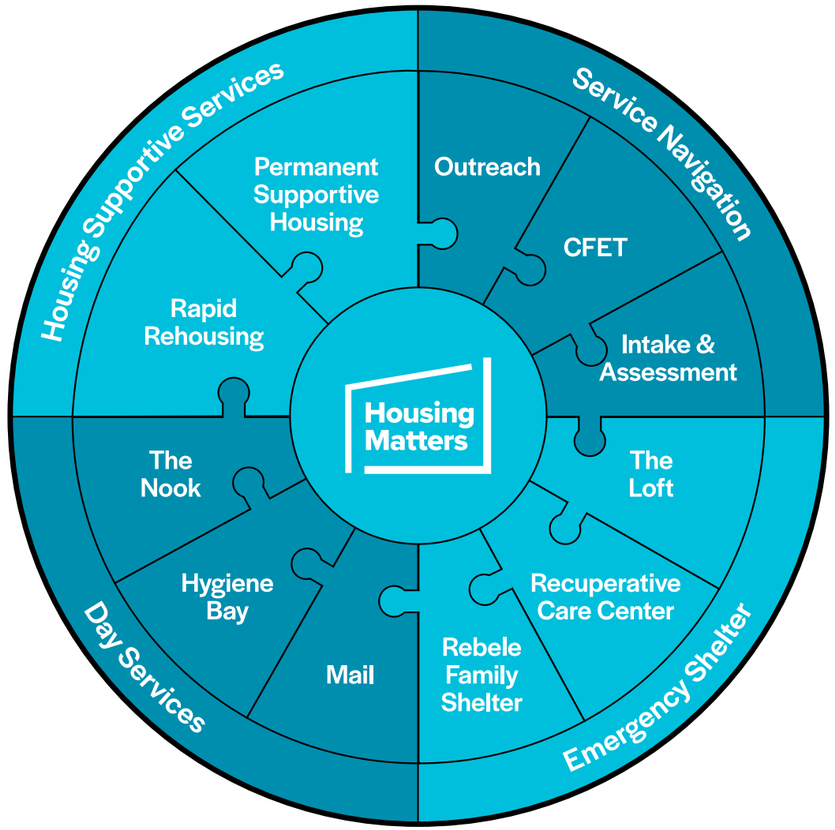
County of Santa Cruz:
Monica Morales, Director, Health Services Agency
Randy Morris, Director, Human Services Dept.
Dr. Robert Ratner, Director, Housing for Health Division, Human Services Department

Local nonprofits:
Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County:
Susan True, CEO
Pajaro Valley Shelter Services:
Mike Johnson, Executive Director
Destination: Home:
Ray Bramson, COO & Housing Matters Board member

Healthcare providers
Dr. Nan Mickiewicz, President/CEO, Dominican Hospital
Dominique Hollister, Director, Administrative Services and Community Benefit, Dominican Hospital
Joe Foster, Public Affairs Officer, Kaiser Permanente
Lisa Hom, Community Health Manager, Sutter Health
Michael Schrader, CEO, Central CA Alliance for Health

Part 2: Background

Housing Matters serves over 3,000 people each year. Our services and programs — based on a Housing First approach to resolving homelessness — touch the majority of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.



Mission & Vision

Housing Matters partners with individuals and families to create pathways out of their homelessness into permanent housing.

We hold firmly to a vision that homelessness in Santa Cruz County should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Our Values

- We stand for equal and just treatment of all people.
- We treat people experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect.
- We empower our participants to move forward on their pathway to housing through establishing trusting relationships, providing safe, compassionate, and flexible services that meet people where they are.
- We provide leadership and advocacy for collective impact, and we support public policy that leads to a reduction and eventual ending of homelessness in Santa Cruz County.
- We value integrity, and are accountable and transparent in all interactions.

Benefit Statement

Housing Matters is the only non-profit organization in Santa Cruz County focused on the whole-system flow for a person or family experiencing homelessness.

From outreach and intake to housing placement, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing, we meet people where they are and partner with them along the path to stable housing.

Our "Special Sauce"

Housing Matters is a unique organization that is unlike any other in Santa Cruz County. We offer programs that aren't offered anywhere else, and our services have become integral to the fabric of the community. But it's the combination of our strongest organizational attributes that create what we call our "special sauce." These attributes include:

- Our ability to respond swiftly and compassionately to meet community needs — and even anticipate needs before they arise.
- Our enthusiastic commitment to ending (not just reducing) homelessness.
- Our trailblazing attitude and growth mindset, which gives us the courage to try new things.
- Our organizational resilience and ability to nimbly adapt to changing circumstances.
- Our human approach to meeting people experiencing homelessness where they are, and elevating their voices in the community.





Overview: Five Areas of Focus

Housing Matters has accomplished much over the past three years, housing more people than ever before. Our progress in meeting past goals gives us the tools and insight to set our sights even higher — ending homelessness for veterans and families, for example, and expanding our impact and visibility in Watsonville.

At the same time, we recognize that our role in the community is now more significant than ever, and that demands an interconnected strategy within the broader services ecosystem in Santa Cruz County. Deepening our relationships with partner organizations has become critical to our mission.

A more visible role in the community also compels us to increase our efforts in educating community members about issues related to homelessness and in advocating for positive system change.

To accomplish these objectives, we've identified five areas of focus, along with clear goals and tactics.

1 Organizational Excellence

Build a resilient organization characterized by excellence, equity, integrity, and accountability.

Goal #1:
Develop the right team to lead Housing Matters and execute the strategic plan.

Actions we are taking:
1. Identifying gaps and opportunities for leadership development
2. Promoting or hiring to expand and diversify our current team
3. Enhancing the skills of current and future team members

Goal #2:
Build staff capacity to achieve resilience, well-being, and operational excellence.

Actions we are taking:
1. Strengthening our robust, competitive, and equitable HR practices
2. Supporting staff with wellness and resiliency tools
3. Enhancing staff training that emphasizes quality improvement and clear, documented standards
4. Laying the foundation for CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) certification
5. Providing staff with suitable facilities and resources to do their best work

Goal #3:
Maintain our strong financial position.

Actions we are taking:
1. Maximizing existing revenue sources with an immediate focus on expanding CalAIM billing
2. Improving our finance and data systems to identify problems early and respond quickly
3. Enhancing internal control, enterprise risk management, governance,and fraud deterrence processes using established frameworks for effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability

Goal #4:
Cultivate a dynamic and collaborative Board of Directors who act as effective advocates, ambassadors, and fundraisers for Housing Matters.

Actions we are taking:
1. Recruiting dedicated, passionate community members to serve on our Board who support Housing Matters' mission and want to volunteer their time and talent to help us realize our strategic goals

Goal #5:
Develop and foster an organizational culture that aligns our strategic initiatives with our values.

Actions we are taking:
1. Assess and characterize our current culture
2. Define the culture we aspire to and identify and implement the process to transform where needed

Goal #6:
Commit to continuous improvement to ensure programs, services, activities, and initiatives align with best practices, community priorities, and our Mission, Vision, and Values.

Actions we are taking:
1. Implement a process for rolling assessment of all programs, services, activities, and initiatives

2 Program Impact

Deliver effective programs that move more people into housing.

Goal #1:
Expand high-quality services to meet (and exceed) our housing goals, and contribute to county-wide priorities for decreasing homelessness.

Actions we are taking:
1. Incorporating CalAIM Community Supports and Enhanced Care Management
2. Increasing inventory of tenant-based and project-based rental assistance
3. Using evidence-based practices including Housing First, Trauma-informed Care, and Harm Reduction as well as low-barrier shelter and coordinated entry

Goal #2:
Create conditions for successful operation of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs.

Actions we are taking:
1. Learning from others
2. Strengthening staff capacity
3. Building partnerships with complementary service providers and property management entities

Goals for Housing Success

475 move ins annually by year-end 2026

End family homelessness by year-end 2025

End veteran homelessness by year-end 2025

Reduce total PIT count to 1,200 by year-end 2026

Maintain a 90% retention rate for our PSH programs

3 Shelter & Supportive Housing

Develop and/or acquire property for supportive housing, emergency shelter, navigation center, and services.

Goal #1:
Expand shelter and services county-wide.

Actions we are taking:
1. Creating a countywide plan for Housing Matters sites and services, including a Coral Street campus master plan
2. Participating in the City of Santa Cruz Coral Street visioning process
3. Creating and implementing a decision-making framework for operations

Goal #2:
Sustain the recent expansion of recuperative care.

Actions we are taking:
1. Engaging Recuperative Care Center (RCC) partners and building shared long-term goals
2. Expanding CalAIM program
3. Evaluating RCC property for permanency

Goal #3:
Expand supportive housing.

Actions we are taking:
1. Creating a countywide plan for Housing Matters sites and services
2. Creating and implementing a decision-making framework for property acquisition and operations
3. Developing an opportunity fund and "land banking" to ensure future opportunities can be secured

4 Community Engagement

Build a network of allies to support the vision that homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Goal #1:
Activate community-wide collective action.

Actions we are taking:
1. Building our capacity to convene and lead efforts for collective action
2. Developing a multimedia educational toolkit to empower the community to become housing justice allies and advocates
3. Engaging people with lived experience in action efforts

Goal #2:
Grow revenue streams in order to anticipate, respond to, and meet community needs.

Actions we are taking:
1. Developing and expanding relationships with donors, and the community at large, to ensure adequate financial resources
2. Advancing current relationships with private foundations, and pursuing new certifications to expand our portfolio of foundation involvement
3. Leveraging partnerships with public agencies to grow their investment in Housing Matters

Goal #3:
Create positive narrative change around homelessness and its solutions.

Actions we are taking:
1. Developing a comprehensive two-year strategy for community-wide narrative change
2. Convening community-wide conversations that support evidence-based approaches to resolving homelessness, as well as Housing Matters' mission and vision
3. Furthering the development of the Community Conversations program lived experience story archive and speakers bureau

5 System Leadership

Deepen our leadership across the system by advocating for our vision that homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Goal #1:
Develop and lead a collaborative effort with service provider partners to build community ownership and action.

Actions we are taking:
1. Mapping the existing ecosystem of service providers and funding in Santa Cruz County
2. Building relationships and creating a framework for the Coalition to End Homelessness

Goal #2:
Influence policy change.

Actions we are taking:
1. Developing a robust policy advocacy function focused on local, state, and federal government
2. Creating and implementing an advocacy campaign to uplift and support our work, leveraging our partnerships and network of allies for policy change

We believe homelessness should be rare, brief and **non-recurring.**

Housing Matters

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