



## **County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors**

### **Agenda Item Submittal**

**From:** Health Services Agency

**Subject:** Project Update: Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program, and Fund Transfer Approval

**Meeting Date:** February 25, 2025

**Formal Title:** Accept and file Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Project Update, and take related actions

### **Recommended Actions**

1. Accept and file an update on the County's Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program;
2. Approve the transfer of funds in the amount of \$791,548 to implement various interim agreements to fast-track Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program services; and
3. Direct the Health Services Agency Director to return with a further update on the County's Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program on or before December 9, 2025.

### **Executive Summary**

On June 25, 2024, the Board directed the Health Services Agency Director to return in February 2025 with an update on the County's Behavioral Bridge Housing (BHBH) Program. This program, funded with awards from the California Department of Healthcare Services (DHCS) Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Fund (\$10.2 million), Whole Person Care Housing Pilot funds (\$2.7 million), and Measure K funds (\$500,000), is intended to rapidly deploy services and housing resources for individuals with behavioral health conditions experiencing homelessness.

The State's BHBH award is particularly tailored to fund programs at the local level that assist people with limited access or engagement with mental health and substance use disorder treatment services that experience long or repeated episodes of homelessness. Participants in the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court receive priority access to BHBH funded resources. The BHBH Program plan partners staff from the County Administrative Office, Human Services Department (HSD) Housing 4 Health (H4H) Division, Health Service Agency (HSA) Behavioral Health Division (BHD), and General Services Department (GSD) Community Development and Infrastructure (CDI) Division.

### **Discussion**

The County's rapid deployment plan includes an infrastructure component to develop a 32-bed Low Barrier Navigation Center (LBNC) comprised of LifeArk modular units that offer living spaces and congregate spaces for gathering, food prep, laundry, and bathrooms as well as clinic and office space to deliver supportive behavioral health services. The total cost to open the LBNC, which is sited on the county-owned parcel at 2202 Soquel Avenue, adjacent to the existing County Behavioral Health Facility, including hard and soft costs, is currently estimated at about \$4.5 million. These costs are fully funded with the complement of available revenues detailed above.

The program component, with an allocation of about \$7.6 million of the BHBH grant funds, operates through June 30, 2027 and funds a contract with Housing Matters to manage and operate the LBNC campus, a contract with Community Action Board to manage a Participant Assistance Fund for direct housing-related financial assistance to those eligible for BHBH services, and a contract with Pathways Housing First Training Institute to support the creation of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) Housing First teams within the County that are linked with specific permanent housing resources. The BHBH grant also funds a county position to coordinate services and to collect and report data on Program outcomes, and funds administrative and management support.

The Board took several actions in 2024 to advance the Bridge Housing program, including appropriating BHBH grant and other funds, approving design and modular construction contracts with LifeArk, and approving a preliminary site plan for the LBNC. The report that follows will outline the challenges GSD staff encountered related to rapid deployment of the LBNC at the proposed site and the various approaches that H4H and BHD staff will pursue until the navigation center is operational.

The fast-tracked LBNC project experienced an approximately 6-month delay when the design team identified the need for additional geotechnical investigations at the proposed project site. The geotechnical field work and analysis ran from November 2024 through January 2025. The resulting recommendations will be incorporated into the project design plans being completed for permit review now. Additional work to prepare the site for the installation of the modular system not originally contemplated will add time to the construction schedule, but the project team is working to reduce any further impacts. The current goal is to complete the LBNC, so it is ready for move-in by late summer/early fall of this year.

BHBH partner staff are working closely with Planning staff to expedite the permit review and inspection processes at the site. The contract with LifeArk already includes work to secure the necessary approvals of the modular components and design through the State Department of Housing and Community Development.

To move forward with the non-infrastructure program elements and to fast-track services to the very vulnerable unhoused population eligible under the BHBH Program and to retain and fully utilize the \$7.6 million in BHBH grant funds allocated to programs, H4H staff, in partnership with Behavioral Health, will execute several interim agreements. These include an interim housing services agreement with Housing Matters, the vendor selected to ultimately operate the LBNC. This interim agreement will allow Housing Matters to retain program management, care management, housing navigation and necessary administrative support staff to offer housing and related supportive services to CARE Act and other prioritized Behavioral Health clients in need of temporary housing and long-term housing supports. The interim agreement also includes funding for emergency hotel/motel stays, determined on a case-by-case basis, for up to 20 individuals at any one time. Housing Matters will manage the agreements with hospitality providers and coordinate supportive services with County Behavioral Health staff.

In addition to the interim agreement with Housing Matters, H4H will expedite the planned contract with Community Action Board (CAB) to provide one-time housing related financial assistance to BHBH-eligible clients through the BHBH Program's

Participant Assistance Fund (PAF). These funds are a crucial element to securing permanent housing by providing security deposits, rent, residential room and board payments, furnishings, or other housing needs. Request for draws from the PAF come from County Behavioral Health service providers through CAB for evaluation and disbursement.

H4H is also utilizing BHBH funds to jump-start the contract with the Pathways to Housing Training Institute to provide local training and staff support to implement the Pathways to Housing – Housing First model as part of the new collection of system resources that have proven to be successful to address the housing and service needs of individuals with behavioral health conditions experiencing or at-risk of homelessness within the County.

### **Financial Impact**

The attached AUD 74 forms request approval for the transfers of \$791,548 from Professional Services to Intra Fund Transfer. These actions will permit the transfer of funds from HSA to HSD to implement the interim agreements that will advance the BHBH Program now, considering the temporary delay to complete the LBNC due to conditions at the site. Currently, there is no requirement nor request for County General Fund resources to finance the Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety, Attainable Housing, Operational Excellence

### **Submitted By:**

Monica Morales, Director of Health Services

### **Recommended By:**

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

### **Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.