



**Community Services Policy Committee  
Legislative Agenda  
April 2022**

**Staff:** Caroline Cirrincione, Legislative Representative (916) 580-5075

**1. Behavioral Health Policy Statement**

**Issue**

The Legislature is considering a host of behavioral health legislation targeting California's homeless population this year. Historically, counties have been tasked with providing behavioral health services resulting in the absence of Cal Cities policy on the issue. A new policy must be adopted to guide Cal Cities staff in engaging on these critical matters.

**Overview**

Local governments across California are on the front lines of addressing homelessness in our communities. Despite being the fifth largest economy in the world, California is home to more than half of all people without shelter in America, with 161,548 unhoused people as of January 2020. This is occurring not just in major cities and urban areas but also in rural California, in our heavily forested areas, along our rivers, and in our suburban neighborhoods. Homelessness is no longer confined to our major metropolitan areas — it has spread to every part of our state.

A lot has changed since the last statewide count of California's homeless population in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the housing affordability crisis and resulted in millions of people losing their jobs. As policymakers await the 2022 "point in time" count, concerns are mounting about how the pandemic has impacted the number of unsheltered individuals in the state and how to address the needs of this growing population.

Although housing affordability is a major contributing factor to homelessness in California, a large portion of individuals experiencing homelessness also have significant behavioral health needs. For example, in 2020, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that 23 percent of people experiencing homelessness in California had a severe mental illness, and 22 percent suffered from substance use disorders. Additionally, the Treatment Advocacy Center estimates that as many as one-third of California's population experiencing homelessness are also living with a serious mental illness.

For unsheltered individuals with severe behavioral health needs, access to a comprehensive care system can be an essential component of addressing their homelessness. That is why this year, the Legislature has introduced a host of bills to modernize the behavioral health care system in California, directly linked to the state's homelessness crisis. This package is intended to provide increased opportunities and incentives for early intervention and prevention to assist unsheltered individuals in jurisdictions across the state.

## **State Budget Allocations**

The state has invested billions of dollars into addressing homelessness and behavioral health services over the last couple of years. These investments reflect the state's increased role in addressing homelessness by providing funding and supporting local governments' efforts to alleviate the homelessness issues in their jurisdictions.

Specifically, the state budget provided a total of \$7.2 billion in 2021-22 to about 30 homelessness-related programs across various state departments. The 2022-23 budget includes an additional \$2 billion over two years – \$1.5 billion for behavioral health "bridge" housing and \$500 million for the Encampment Resolution Grants Program. These programs are intended to provide short-term housing to transition individuals with significant behavioral health needs out of unsheltered homelessness into a stable living environment.

While these investments are welcomed, they are largely one-time and do not allow cities and counties to plan long-term for how to address homelessness in their community. Additionally, increased funding to address homelessness has come with increased accountability through reporting requirements that are becoming increasingly burdensome for city and county staff.

As the Legislature considers measures this year to modernize the behavioral health care system, it is crucial that the state's budget surplus is directed to support county behavioral health departments, workforce shortages, and behavioral health infrastructure needs.

## **Role of Local Government**

Cities and counties statewide are at the forefront of responding to homelessness, providing shelter beds and behavioral health services, partnering with creative nonprofits and churches, and working across silos to find creative and innovative ways to guide homeless youth, families, seniors, and veterans into shelter and care.

In California, behavioral health services are funded and delivered through counties, including both mental health and substance use disorder services. Counties receive funding from a mix of both federal and state sources, the most notable of which is the Mental Health Services Act. In 2004, California voters approved Proposition 63, and the Mental Health Services Act was enacted in 2005 by placing a one percent tax on incomes above \$1 million. The Act was designed to provide a wide range of prevention, early intervention, and treatment services, including the necessary infrastructure, technology, and enhancement of the mental health workforce to support it. The funding counties receive from the Mental Health Services Act represents 24% of the entire public mental health budget and has allowed for the expansion of county mental health programs for all populations.

While some counties may provide short-term housing supports to help stabilize individuals with significant behavioral health needs, generally, this is not a focus of county behavioral health programs. Providing emergency supportive housing, transitional housing, and access to navigation centers often falls to cities. Cities across the state have led the charge in delivering housing for unsheltered individuals. This was especially highlighted

during the pandemic through the Project Roomkey and Homekey programs, which have housed over 8,000 individuals since 2020.

### **Legislative Package**

It is clear that modernizing the behavioral health care system to address the state's homelessness crisis is a key priority of the Legislature this year. Senator Eggman has proposed an eight-bill [behavioral health legislative package](#) that is sponsored by the big city mayor's coalition. This package focuses on improving the conservatorship process while also increasing access to data to ensure tangible results.

Additionally, the Governor and subsequently the Legislature have proposed a new Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment ([CARE](#)) [Court framework](#). The framework targets thousands of Californians suffering from untreated mental health and substance use disorders connected to homelessness. CARE Court would connect individuals with a court-ordered care plan managed by a care team in the community. These care plans can include clinically prescribed, individualized interventions with several supportive services, medication, and a housing plan.

Historically, cities have not engaged in policies related to the behavioral health system because counties provide and receive the funding for these crucial services. However, as the homelessness crisis continues to impact the cities of California, improvements across the continuum of care system would free up essential city resources such as our public safety personnel. This will ensure cities are better positioned to support county partners in service delivery.

While Cal Cities has existing policies related to housing for homeless individuals and law enforcement interactions involving people living with mental illness, Cal Cities' policy does not specifically mention the behavioral health system. Additional guidance in this policy area from our members would prove beneficial for Cal Cities' continued engagement on such issues.

Additionally, adopting new policy in this space aligns with Cal Cities' organizational priorities. Cal Cities 2022 action agenda seeks to secure increased funding and resources to prevent homelessness and assist individuals experiencing homelessness. The Community Services Policy Committee Work Plan additionally includes homelessness and wraparound services.

### **Existing Cal Cities Policy:**

As noted below, Cal Cities Summary of Existing Policy and Guiding Principles does include policies related to homelessness and law enforcement's interactions with individuals living with mental illness. However, the existing policy does not mention the Cal Cities' position on providing behavioral health services or conservatorship:

- **Housing, Community, and Economic Development:**  
*Housing and programs for homeless and other extremely low income populations are necessary to ensure quality of life and economic viability for all Californians.*

*Homelessness is a statewide problem that disproportionately impacts specific communities. The state should make funding and other resources, including enriched services, and outreach and case managers, available to help assure that local governments have the capacity to address the needs of the homeless in their communities, including resources for regional collaborations.*

*Homeless housing is an issue that eludes a statewide, one-size-fits-all solution, and collaboration between local jurisdictions should be encouraged.*

*State and federal funding programs should be designed to reflect responsibilities imposed by state and federal law.*

- **Public Safety:**

*Cal Cities supports the promulgation of policies and the use of resources to increase collaboration between first responders and health agencies for incidents involving people living with mental illness or experiencing substance use disorders.*

*Cal Cities supports resources for increased training and education for first responders to serve people living with mental illness or experiencing substance use disorders as well as increased multidisciplinary collaboration.*

**Proposed Addition:**

The proposed addition would fall within the Community Services section of the Summary of Existing Policy and Guiding Principles document. If approved by the committee and Board, the following policy would be added:

**Behavioral Health:**

**Cal Cities supports additional funding and resources to expand access to behavioral health services, including efforts to assist California's homeless population, especially those individuals experiencing mental health and substance use disorders. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting counties in expanding community-based care settings to provide for prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery systems.**

**Staff Comments:**

Cal Cities staff believes the policy detailed above will provide needed clarity to the Community Services section of Cal Cities Summary of Existing Policy and Guiding Principles. This policy will ensure that Cal Cities can play an integral role in advocating to support behavioral health services throughout the state.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Cal Cities staff recommends **adopting** the proposed policy.

**Committee Recommendation:**

**Board Action:**