

NEWS

Dec. 11, 2023

For Immediate Release

County Honored to Win Statewide Award For Innovative Homeless App

Redwood City – The County of San Mateo is honored to accept a statewide award for an innovative mobile-friendly app that helps outreach workers improve service to unhoused residents – a critical tool in the County’s efforts to provide shelter for all those who want it.

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) awarded a prestigious Challenge Award to the County for the SMC HOME (Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement) app, a collaborative effort by the Human Services Agency’s Center on Homelessness and the Information Services Department’s GIS Team. The County was one of 14 honorees chosen from a pool of 389 across the state’s 58 counties.

Challenge Awards spotlight innovative and unique programs developed by California counties and those involved in the app’s development say it is already showing benefits.

“The HOME App is a powerful communications tool that streamlines the County’s rapid response process to assist people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in San Mateo County,” said Claire Cunningham, director of the Human Services Agency. “As we compile data, we develop maps that show where people experiencing homelessness are congregated so we can target our outreach efforts.”

While the app is for internal use rather than the public, it is a novel piece of technology that lets outreach teams quickly respond to reports of unsheltered individuals in need. The teams learn of the type of location, the number of individuals and any safety concerns so workers can be deployed with the right resources like emergency food or hygiene kits. As a result, workers are able to streamline and speed up their responses to those in need. The app also helps the County capture real time information on the precise location for homeless outreach requests, which is more accurate than past reporting via phone calls or email.

In 2023 alone, the app has handled 94 rapid response requests: 63 percent for encampments; 25 percent for individuals living on the streets outside encampments; and 12 percent for those living in vehicles.

The state association lauded the County for its work.

“All counties applaud the County of San Mateo for your innovation and dedication. Congratulations on winning a prestigious 2023 Challenge Award,” said Graham Knaus, CEO of CSAC.

In May 2023, the app was similar honored with an Achievement Award by the National Association of Counties.

“While I am proud of my team and HSA for collectively building this program, what I’m even more proud of are the numbers of people we are now better able to help in a timely way,” said ISD Director Mike Wentworth. “ We created the infrastructure but the true success is in assisting our neighbors.”

###

