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County Partners Provide Homeless Support Amidst the Pandemic

MERCED COUNTY, CA –In an effort to protect vulnerable homeless individuals from COVID-19 and slow the spread of the virus in our communities, 98 homeless individuals have been sheltered in hotel rooms in Merced County. This statewide initiative is known as “Project Room Key.”

Merced County allocated \$3.5 million in funding to address housing, health care, toiletries and food needs for unsheltered individuals who test positive for COVID-19. In addition, services are available to those who have symptoms and require isolation based on medical advice, and those that are medically vulnerable and highly susceptible to the virus. The funding, originally allocated to address homelessness, was made available through a partnership between the Merced County Continuum of Care, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Human Services Agency and funds provided by state and federal COVID-19 response allocations. No General Fund dollars are included in this effort.

In addition to the nearly 100 individuals housed, staff with the Mass Care and Shelter Branch and community organizations have contacted more than 300 homeless individuals to provide immediate services, including food and other essential items and services.

Housing and health care services are provided on a priority basis, but food and toiletries are available to all.

The program was coordinated locally by the Merced County Human Services Agency, the Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Department, Merced County Department of Public Health, and community partners comprised of faith-based and non-profit organizations.

“We are taking a multi-agency approach to engaging with unsheltered homeless individuals and identifying those who need services and medical follow-ups due to COVID-19,” said Yvonnia Brown, Director of the Merced County Human Services Agency. “These efforts will not only provide much needed assistance to those individuals, it will also help contain the spread of COVID-19 within the community at large.”

“We are excited about being a part of a program that is providing basic needs for individuals with some of the greatest need,” said Dr. Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, Director of the Merced County Department of Public Health. “We care about the health and safety of all residents, including the most vulnerable in our community. This project highlights how Merced County is advocating for the well-being of homeless individuals by providing some of the most basic vital needs. It is our hope that this project will be successful in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community.”

Please check the Department’s webpage at www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus for the most-up-to date information about the current cases in Merced County.

For general information pertaining to COVID-19, please contact the Merced County Public Health Department information line at **209-381-1180** (English, Spanish, Hmong).

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