



Sonoma County's Measure O for Behavioral Health and Homeless Services Annual Report for Fiscal Year 20-21

Background on Measure O

In June 2018 the need for expanded access to behavioral health and homeless services reached a crisis level in our community and region. The devastating wildfires of 2017 exacerbated an already strained health care delivery system, decimated over five percent of the county's housing stock, and increased the need for trauma-informed behavioral health services. Furthermore, the Department of Health Services budgetary crisis positioned our behavioral health safety net at risk of being severely harmed as the Department was faced with reducing services and programs due to inadequate funding. At the same time that more and more residents needed treatment, budget shortfalls forced drastic reductions to services. Lack of Federal and State funding resulted in cuts to essential programs, such as early intervention programs serving children at schools and reductions in the number of beds available at facilities to serve those in a crisis.

The Department of Health Services worked diligently on redesigning the County Behavioral Health system to focus on core mandated services centered on crisis stabilization. This work was essential for the sustainability of services to support the needs of the most vulnerable residents of the County, yet resources were not sufficient to meet the growing behavioral health needs of residents. These compounding issues demanded creative approaches to generate additional revenue to support the needs of the most vulnerable residents of Sonoma County. Revenue measures in other jurisdictions demonstrated success in bolstering a system of care wherein public agencies partner with community-based providers to address the increasing need for behavioral health and homeless services.

In August 2019 Sonoma County hired Terris Barnes Walters Boigon Heath, Inc. (TBWBH) to conduct a feasibility study and develop a ballot measure. A sub-committee made up of key staff met from August 2019 until the measure was placed on the ballot in August 2020. The sub-committee worked with TBWBH, EMC Research, and Middlebrook Communications to determine the feasibility of a potential measure, conduct outreach to the community, and develop a measure that reflected voter priorities and matched the County's needs. EMC Research conducted two polls to gauge voter opinion and ensured the final ballot measure reflected voter priorities and included a tax rate that was palatable to voters. EMC Research conducted a baseline voter opinion poll in August 2019 and a tracking survey in May 2020.

Initial baseline polling indicated that support was strong, with 75 percent of likely voters supporting the potential ballot measure. Strong poll results lead the County to continue developing the measure and seeking feedback from the community. The tracking survey conducted in May 2020 confirmed that voter support remained strong and above the two-thirds threshold, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff and TBWBH conducted dozens of community meetings with local elected officials, local city staff, community organizations and community leaders to seek input and refine the expenditure plan that would eventually go to voters. The two-way approach to the meetings helped the County provide information to community leaders while also receiving valuable feedback.

No one could have predicted the timing or impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it caused new challenges and obstacles throughout the County. Stress, uncertainty, and feelings of hopelessness or fear related to the pandemic increased the need for reliable and available mental health services. This increased demand for help aligned with the goals of a ballot measure, helping bring awareness to the need for service expansion that a measure would provide. The final measure incorporated feedback from voters, community leaders, and organizations with a detailed expenditure plan to provide clarity on priorities for usage of the funds.

Once Measure O was placed on the ballot, a group of community leaders came together to launch the campaign to pass Measure O. The formalized Committee to Support Sonoma County Behavioral Health and Homeless Services, Yes on Measure O included a diverse group of stakeholders - local health professionals, elected officials, labor union members and leaders, Santa Rosa Junior College administrators, professors, and students, and other local community advocates. Thanks to fundraising efforts, the campaign received crucial donations from labor unions, hospitals, local organizations, and individuals. These funds allowed the Measure O campaign to send targeted mail and implement digital advertisement and volunteer field programs.

In November 2020 Sonoma County passed Measure O to provide essential funding for mental health and homeless services with 68.07 percent of the vote. Measure O, a one-quarter cent sales tax, generates \$25 million each year for 10 years to help protect essential mental health and homelessness services and is one of just two measures for mental health and homeless funding in the state (Mendocino County's Measure B passed in 2017).

The Measure O Sales Tax Ordinance identified five categories of services to be funded with the revenue: (1) Behavioral Health Facilities, (2) Emergency Psychiatric and Crisis Services, (3) Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Outpatient Services, (4) Behavioral Health Homeless and Care Coordination, and (5) Transitional and Permanent Supportive Housing. The [Expenditure Plan](#) designates a set percentage of funding for each of the categories.

Revenue and Expenditures for FY 20-21

The first fiscal year of Measure O was only a few months long, as sales tax measures passed in November do not begin collecting revenue until April of the following year. As such, FY 20-21 covers only the time period of April 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021. The Annual Report for FY 2021-2022 will show the first full year of Measure O's impact in Sonoma County.

Total Revenues received as of June 30, 2021- \$536,454.53*

| Measure O Category | Revenue Received |
|--|------------------|
| Behavioral Health Facilities | \$118,019.30 |
| Emergency Psychiatric / Crisis Services | \$236,038.58 |
| Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Outpatient Services | \$96,561.23 |
| Behavioral Health Homeless / Care Coordination | \$75,103.19 |
| Transitional & Permanent Supportive Housing | \$10,732.23 |
| Total | \$536,454.53 |

*Cash received as of June 30, 2021 for April 2021; May and June received in July and August 2021

Total Expenditures and Fund Balances as of June 30, 2021

| Measure O Category | Expenditures | Fund Balance |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Behavioral Health Facilities | \$59,673.88 | \$58,345.42 |
| Emergency Psychiatric / Crisis Services | \$119,347.75 | \$116,690.83 |
| Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Outpatient Services | \$48,824.08 | \$47,737.15 |
| Behavioral Health Homeless / Care Coordination | \$37,974.28 | \$37,128.91 |
| Transitional & Permanent Supportive Housing | \$5,424.90 | \$5,307.33 |
| Total | \$271,244.89 | \$265,209.64 |

Description of Expenditures: The County's Registrar of Voters received reimbursement of \$271,244.89 from the proceeds of the tax for the costs of the Election in accordance with the Expenditure Plan.

What's Next for Measure O

In January 2021 the Board of Supervisors created a Measure O Ad Hoc committee and appointed Supervisors Gore and Coursey to serve on this committee. The Measure O Ad Hoc Committee was formed to guide the Department of Health Services' and Community Development Commission's implementation of Measure O. The purpose of the Ad Hoc is to inform the Board of how Measure O funding will support the Behavioral Health budget in both existing and new programming, and provide homeless services support as defined in the measure. The Ad Hoc committee is supported by staff from the Department of Health Services (DHS), the County Administrator's Office (CAO) and County Counsel. In August and October of 2021, the Board reviewed and approved recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee for investments to make for new and redesigned programs using Measure O funds. These expenditures and program impacts will be reported in the FY 21-22 Annual Report for Measure O.

If you have questions about Measure O or would like more information, please contact us at: MeasureO@sonoma-county.org or visit us at www.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Behavioral-Health/