Starting a Local Homeless Mortality Count

Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless program
Alameda County Public Health Department
10/16/2019
Homeless Mortality in Alameda County

To date, there has never been a countywide count of homeless deaths carried out in Alameda County.

Annual Homeless Persons Memorial Day events are regularly carried in Oakland, Fremont and Hayward by service providers.
Medical Examiner/Medical Investigator vs. Coroner

John Oliver Explains it all in 22 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnoMsftQPY8

**Coroner**: Elected, lay people, professional training not required. Generally only deal with unattended or suspicious deaths. In Alameda County, run by sheriff’s department.

**Medical Examiner**: Appointed, board-certified in medicine. Range of oversight over all deaths in jurisdiction. No medical examiner/investigator in Alameda County.
ACHCH/CAPE Mortality Methods 1

Access to Statewide **Electronic Death Records System** data. Access through Public Health Department. More than 9,700 residents die (in Alameda County and elsewhere) and about 1,200 non-residents die in Alameda County every year.

EDRS Spreadsheet is about 11,000 death certificate entries with over 200 columns (fields).
ACHCH/CAPE Mortality Methods 2

Compile data of persons known to be homeless in Alameda County:

1. HMIS homeless services utilization
2. Coordinated Entry System housing applications
3. Health center utilization list
4. Countywide Homeless/High Utilizer list
5. Hospital system list of deaths of patients indicated as homeless

Try to identify last date of contact and housing status

“Bump” these names against EDRS list to find matches
Compile list of Addresses which might serve to identify people experiencing homelessness:

- List of 900 address of facilities, SNFs, B&C’s, shelters, transitional, recovery, support centers.

“Bump” these addresses against EDRS addresses to find possible matches of persons who died in homelessness
1. List of decedents identified as “transient” by coroner’s office.
2. Community Reporters list of people known to have died.
ACHCH/CAPE Mortality Methods 5

Research media for reports of homeless deaths

- Google news, with keywords (transient, homeless, death, unidentified, murder, etc.) for each city.
ACHCH/CAPE Mortality Methods

- Manually review EDRS death record spreadsheet for clues that might point to homeless status of a decedent (transient, vagabond, no next of kin, potter’s field burial, indigent, other key words or phrases in free text sections)

- Advocacy work for statewide required housing status field (aligned with HHS definition)

  Short-term: Better training for death reporters
## Homeless/Housing Status

| Literally Homeless                                                                 | Place not meant for human habitation: car, tent, street, doorway, park, encampment, garage, abandoned building, public transit, public buildings, etc.  
|                                                                                   | Emergency shelter  
|                                                                                   | Transitional housing program for people experiencing homelessness  
|                                                                                   | Hotel or motel paid by a government agency or homeless assistance program as a form of temporary shelter  
|                                                                                   | Medical respite program for homeless individuals  
|                                                                                   | Safe Haven for homeless individuals with serious mental illness  
|                                                                                   | Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, and the consumer has no other residence or support networks to obtain other permanent housing  
| *If the deceased person died in an institutional setting AND was residing in the institution for less than 90 days AND was in one of the other living situations prior to entering the institution, they are considered “homeless.”* |
| Doubled Up / At Risk                                                            | Doubled up = staying with friends or family because of hardship and the consumer lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other housing  
|                                                                                   | Hotel or motel *without* payment by a homeless assistance program  
|                                                                                   | Consumer will imminently lose their primary residence because of eviction or similar demand to leave, and no subsequent residence has been identified, and the consumer lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other housing  
| Institutional setting for *more than 90 days*                                  | Psychiatric hospital or other mental health facility  
|                                                                                   | Substance use disorder treatment facility  
|                                                                                   | Hospital or other residential medical facility  
|                                                                                   | Jail, prison, or juvenile detention facility  
|                                                                                   | Foster care home or foster care group home  
|                                                                                   | Long-term care facility or nursing home |
### Cause of Death

- General (“natural” causes)
- Accident
- Homicide
- Suicide
- Substance

Questions?