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## County homeless get help with rent during recovery

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A \$706,773 federal grant will give homeless alcoholics help with rent as they work to recover from their addiction.

U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, announced Wednesday the money was coming to Santa Cruz County under a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development pilot project.

"What this really is rental assistance," said Christine Sippl of the county's Homeless Persons Health Project. "As we identify people who meet the criteria we can assist them to find a rental apartment."

The money was awarded to the county's Health Services Agency to help pay rent on the 33 apartments that will be scattered around the county.

But the subsidy comes with a condition — the new renters must be working on their addiction recovery plan.

People who have been homeless for 365 days during the past five years are eligible.

They are expected to come from a pool of clients that participate in Project Connect, a three-year-old program aimed at providing health care to the homeless without them resorting to emergency rooms. Other candidates will come from the Serial Inebriate Program which allows people with numerous public-drunkenness charges to get treatment rather than serve more jail time.

The aim is to help treat the root causes of homelessness.

"As they come out of treatment they can make some changes in their lives," Sippl said. "Sometimes it is difficult to pay for sober living settings and transition to their own apartment. So many times, they end up back on the streets."

The HUD grants went to 11 communities nationwide, including five in California — Santa Cruz County, San Francisco, San Jose, Contra Costa County and Santa Monica.

"By picking Santa Cruz County as part of this pilot program, HUD is recognizing the unique social service network our area has developed and rewarding the SCC Health Services Agency for their initiative in putting together a strong proposal," Farr said in a written statement.

A survey conducted earlier this year by Applied Survey Research on the county's homeless population showed alcoholism and drug addiction were primary reasons for homelessness for about 13 percent of the 400 respondents. Nearly 60 percent had been homeless for a year or more and 28 percent said they were abusing alcohol at the time of the survey.

Last June, the city and county of Santa Cruz approved a project that will renovate 11 cottage-style apartments at the Hidden Court Motel on Barson Street for single homeless people.

That effort, too, will involve addressing those tenants addiction problems as well those who have mental health problems and physical disabilities.

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