

# County to give \$1M to medical clinic aiding the homeless

## American Rescue Plan Act dollars to fund renovations, expenses

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Larimer County commissioners intend to allocate \$1 million from federal American Rescue Plan Act money to a new medical clinic at the Murphy Center for Hope in Fort Collins for people experiencing homelessness.

The county received \$69 million in federal pandemic recovery funds and has been allocating portions of that to fill gaps in community services. The clinic would be the first housed in a center that provides services to the unhoused population in Fort Collins.

The initial allocation will help fund renovations at the Murphy Center to create three exam rooms and a lab, plus operational costs. Commissioners said they may allocate an additional \$1 million in the future if Homeward Alliance — the nonprofit that runs the Murphy Center — secures full project funding.

Murphy Center Executive Director David Rout told commissioners Tuesday that not having an on-site clinic for people experiencing homelessness “is a profound barrier to service.” He expects to have some medical services available early next year and the clinic fully operational in 2024.

Two community clinics currently provide care for unhoused people, but they “consistently report operating beyond their capacity and have waitlists of over 700 individuals, which necessitates booking out multiple weeks out in advance for appointments,” commissioners wrote in a resolution expressing their intent to provide funding.

That means people experiencing homelessness forgo primary care and end up at the emergency room, “where outcomes are poorer and the cost to the community is far greater,” Rout

**See HOMELESS, Page 2A**

# Homeless

Continued from Page 1A

said.

While housing is the ultimate solution to ending homelessness, he said, more needs to be done. "We know the Murphy Center is the place people will go that they trust to receive these services ... and will produce positive outcomes."

Rout told commissioners there are about 700 chronically homeless people in Fort Collins. Housing is equivalent to health for many people experiencing homelessness, he said.

Homeward Alliance held a memorial service two weeks ago for people in the community experiencing homelessness who had died within the last year. They read the names of 42 people they knew of who had passed. The average age was 43. Cause of death was listed as natural causes.

The Murphy Center also worked with the Larimer County Coroner's Office to analyze the deaths of 20 people who re-

cently escaped homelessness. All died within 160 days of housing, Rout said. Nine had respiratory conditions, and 10 had substance use issues that were complicating factors.

"The bottom line is we know we can do more for people before they get into housing and we know we can do more once they get into housing," Rout said. "The reality is there are people experiencing homelessness in our community and in our county ... and will be homeless for a long period of time in some cases."

The Murphy Center's building at 242 Conifer St. is owned by a wholly owned subsidiary of the Bohemian Foundation, which is helping Homeward Alliance connect with an architect and contractor to help with the design and renovation. Homeward Alliance has also identified a potential provider for primary and preventive health services.

Rout declined to name names until contracts are signed. Once the clinic is up and running, Rout said Medicare and Medicaid funding long-term would make the clinic a sustainable endeavor.

Commissioners previously an-

nounced they would provide ARPA dollars to a new 24/7 shelter on North College Avenue for people experiencing homelessness. That shelter is being planned by Fort Collins Rescue Mission. Rout said it is the Murphy Center's intent to be a hub but provide outreach services, at least space for practitioners, at the new mission as well as Catholic Charities, Family Housing Network and other agencies that provide services to people experiencing homelessness. "We are working with operators to provide a robust outreach," Rout said.

Larimer County board of commissioners chair Kristin Stephens said "one of the most shameful things is that we have people living on the streets in a community that's very wealthy."

"There's nothing natural about people dying in their 40s," Stephens said. "This is something we can do to help folks have a better quality of life, have health care, and when they move into housing maybe they won't have chronic issues that will plague them ... we can at least hope for that."