Access to Sanitation for People Experiencing Homelessness:
State and Regional Water Board Roles
IRWM Summit
October 14, 2020
Homelessness in California

California

33 in every 10,000 people were experiencing homelessness

-1.2% change from 2017
+5.3% change from 2010

Total Homeless, 2018
129,972

Estimates of Homelessness

109,008 individuals
20,964 people in families with children
12,396 unaccompanied homeless youth
10,836 veterans
32,668 chronically homeless individuals

**sheltered is emergency shelter or transitional housing**
MYTHS OF HOMELESSNESS

- **Myth:** People come to CA when they become homeless because of the weather, etc.
- **Truth:** Most people experience homelessness close to where they lost their housing.

- **Myth:** People are homeless because they choose to be or because they have a drug addiction and/or mental health issues.
- **Truth:** California has an extreme shortage of affordable housing. It is also extremely difficult to receive health services when unsheltered.

- **Myth:** If we provide toilets, washing stations, and water it will encourage unsheltered individuals to continue living on the streets and discourages housing solutions.
- **Truth:** Access to water and sanitation is a basic need that human beings have the right to. Providing for basic needs and building housing are not mutually exclusive
Lack of Access to Drinking Water and Sanitation

Californians Without Access to Toilets or Hot and Cold Water, 2015

From Plumbing the Depths (2019)
Barriers in Accessing Public Toilets

Public restrooms are often:

- Shared among too many people
- Too far from place of residence
- Closed at night
- Dangerous to visit
- Poorly maintained and cleaned
- Without doors, locks, soap, or toilet paper

See Measuring Progress and Plumbing the Depths for documentation

pacinst.org | @PacificInstitut
California’s Human Right to Water Law

Water Code Section 106.3.

- **(a)** It is hereby declared to be the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.
- **(b)** All relevant state agencies, including the department, the state board, and the State Department of Public Health, shall consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and criteria are pertinent to the uses of water described in this section.
- **(c)** This section does not expand any obligation of the state to provide water or to require the expenditure of additional resources to develop water infrastructure beyond the obligations that may exist pursuant to subdivision (b).
- **(d)** This section shall not apply to water supplies for new development.
- **(e)** The implementation of this section shall not infringe on the rights or responsibilities of any public water system.

*(Added by Stats. 2012, Ch. 524, Sec. 1. (AB 685) Effective January 1, 2013.)*
Regional Water Board Engagement

- Venues sharing ideas and information
- Water quality permits
- Participation on local task forces
State Water Board Engagement

• 2019 Workshop
  – https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/conservation_portal/assistance/

• General Permit for Caltrans

• Data collection and metric development
Climate Change Impacts

• More population
• Less snowpack
• Warmer temperatures
• More extremes (drought and flood)
• Sea level rise
• Ecosystems and communities transformed by fire
IRWM Nexus

• Supporting watershed health in concert with people living in riparian areas
• Projects that enhance water and sanitation access for people experiencing homelessness
• Improving urban stormwater quality
Next Steps

• Gather additional information on resources devoted to public sanitation access
  – Local government funds
    • Handwashing stations
    • Portable restrooms
    • Trash collection services for unhoused populations
  – Private sector funds
    • Mobile showers
Next Steps

• Work with local governments and other stakeholders to develop and track sanitation access metrics
  – Example: geographic distribution and use of hand washing stations
Contact

Mary Yang
Environmental Scientist
Office of Research and Planning
Mary.Yang@waterboards.ca.gov
916-322-6507

Questions?