

COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT
JOINT INFORMATION CENTER
Telephone (707) 441-5000



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 17, 2020

Nearly Five Months into Pandemic Response, County Costs Top \$4.3 Million

On Feb. 20, less than one month after California reported its first case of COVID-19, an individual tested positive for the virus in Humboldt County. The positive case was the ninth in the state and first for any rural county in the country. Since that time, county staff and other local agencies have teamed up to protect and serve the people of Humboldt in ways that have served as a model for other counties around the region and state.

The county is responsible for costs to respond to COVID-19 in both unincorporated areas and cities. Those expenses exceed \$4.3 million, which includes costs of more than 200 staff who have been assigned to Public Health and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Teresa Frankovich said, "The Sheriff and I, as well as Public Health Director Michele Stephens, have directed this response, and we have asked staff to get the job done and done quickly. They have stepped up to the plate and worked tirelessly to make that happen. I continue to be enormously impressed by and deeply appreciative of their dedication to this effort and to their community and their massive accomplishments to date."

As a result of these efforts, Humboldt's rate of case growth has remained well below state and national averages, and certain sectors of the economy have been cleared to reopen where in other parts of the state they have not. Humboldt was the first California county to establish a state-run testing site, and more than 13,000 tests have been administered. Joint Information Center (JIC) employees at the EOC have diverted more than 11,000 non-emergency calls from 9-1-1 and other dispatch systems to protect the emergency response infrastructure while providing timely information to a worried public and to help them navigate changing rules and regulations related to the virus.

"This is a pandemic with a novel virus. We are literally learning about this virus at the same time we are building a response to it," Dr. Frankovich said. "In Humboldt County, this virus landed on our doorstep in February. We are a small county with a small health department and laboratory, but we gathered every resource we could muster to build the infrastructure needed to protect the lives of our friends and neighbors."

"Because of how quickly and massively things had unfolded in Wuhan China, we had no idea as a county, state or country, how quickly this would spread here and what it would look like in a country with our resources. We built infrastructure as if the lives of our families and friends depended upon it, because we believe that they do," Dr. Frankovich said.

The COVID-19 emergency has required staff with specialized skill sets and extensive experience to

work extraordinary numbers of hours to stand up an Alternate Care Site, bring critical testing resources to the county and train disaster service workers in contact tracing. The JIC has helped to keep the community informed about the ever-changing situation and assisted thousands of businesses, places of worship and day care centers reopen in ways that minimize risk for both employees and customers. More than 900 businesses and 3,700 plus workers have received direct support, with more than \$159.8 million provided in low-interest loans and locally leveraged financial resources. Additionally, more than 115 homeless residents have been housed in three local hotels for almost 5,000 nights.

Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal said that Stage One was a critical time for staff assigned to this emergency response. "The initial Shelter-in-Place was instituted to give county leaders and hospitals time to prepare for the impacts of COVID-19 on our community," Sheriff Honsal said. "Staff worked long hours to serve our community, and when I see the costs of this emergency, I see the hard work every member of this response has given to the people of Humboldt County."

Despite these positive developments, the virus has claimed four lives in Humboldt County, and the personal, emotional and social toll it has taken on individuals and families is incalculable. Social networks have been fractured, affecting the mental health of children, young adults, parents and seniors in ways that will likely have impacts well into the future. The local response to the global pandemic has come with significant costs to both the private and public sectors.

From March 20 to June 23, roughly 800 of Humboldt County's more than 7,000 businesses self-reported upward of \$44 million in revenue losses. Nearly 2,400 jobs have been lost permanently and are not expected to come back. The County of Humboldt's costs alone related to responding to the pandemic are approximately \$4,357,000 from February to the end of June, with county staff working more than 70,000 hours, not including substantial and ongoing support from partner agencies. These numbers represent only the costs from staff at the Emergency Operations Center who were assigned to support this communitywide response from different county and municipal agencies and often worked 12 or more hours a day, 6 days a week to meet the needs of the community.

With a goal of preserving local funds for specific local needs, county staff have maximized the use of state and federal funding sources wherever possible. The Finance Section of the EOC has successfully applied for additional grant funds that have become available to support response efforts. To date, more than \$1.8 million has been received and applied primarily to purchase additional equipment for the Public Health Laboratory to increase COVID-19 testing capacity and support communicable disease control efforts. The State of California also has allocated more than \$13 million to Humboldt County via the federal CARES Act to offset the costs of the response.

The county has also utilized resources that were obtained through prior funding from the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program. For example, staff have successfully stored and preserved state caches of emergency equipment for more than 10 years since the H1N1 outbreak, which have been distributed to health care facilities, first responders and the Alternate Care Site for this incident. The county also took advantage of all available state resources to minimize local costs. And in spite of the unique nature of this emergency, members of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and other volunteers have been active throughout.

"I am thankful that our community partners have come together during this emergency and have

lent the county their resources and expertise to provide professional, knowledgeable and skilled individuals to help serve in the COVID-19 response,” Sheriff Honsal said. “Often times these personnel had to not only work on the county emergency response but were also responsible for completing their regular duties at their primary jobs.”

The EOC is maintaining detailed documentation of response activities performed by staff to account for expenses and ensure maximum reimbursement for the county and all agencies working on the COVID-19 response. The Finance Section has maintained records in accordance with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines for reporting and eventual reimbursement of emergency costs.

Below are detailed preliminary costs that are being tracked for potential reimbursement:

Emergency Operations Center	
Salaries & Benefits*	3,490,544
Contracts	22,650
Equipment	9,917
Supplies	73,433
Other	3,669
Total	3,600,213
Medical Surge & Testing	
Contracts	42,180
Equipment	118,786
Supplies	59,908
Total	220,874
Homeless Sheltering	
Contracts	426,228
Equipment	54,240
Supplies	56,088
Total	536,556
Total	\$4,357,643

*Salaries & Benefits are based on hours reported by staff for COVID-19 EOC time.

All of this work comes at substantial costs that are rightfully a topic of concern to both county leadership and the residents of Humboldt County. In the interests of transparency, please see below a link to a document showing all the county staff, including law enforcement personnel, who have worked this incident, their normal positions, their EOC assignments, the number of their regular hours worked, their total regular salary and their total amount of overtime worked and paid. Salary and overtime costs for all classes of employees, including Management and Confidential, are based on longstanding, negotiated agreements with county labor groups.

While the response to the global COVID-19 pandemic continues, EOC and Public Health staff remain committed to the health and safety of the residents of Humboldt County.

Visit <https://humboldt.gov.org/DocumentCenter/View/87874/JUL17-EOC-COVID-Costs> to download the document.

###