



homeless adults camping with their children on the streets.

State homeless coordinator Scott Morishige says those efforts will continue, but he says additional money has been requested by Ige this year to more quickly connect the chronic homeless to housing options.

“This is because their numbers are increasing — up 27 percent from last year,” Morishige says. “They are the ones you see on the streets and in the parks. They are costing the most in public dollars with their repeated visits to hospital emergency rooms, the courts and the jails and prisons.”

Providing medical care to the chronic homeless cost The Queen’s Medical Center \$89.3 million last year, much of that in emergency room services.

## More Options Than Shelters

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s definition of “chronic homeless” is a person who has lived unsheltered a year or longer or who has been homeless four times or more in the last three years.

Morishige says a key barrier to coaxing Hawaii’s chronic homeless into housing is that many of them still think their only option is to move into an emergency shelter. And sometimes, their thinking is also clouded by mental illness or substance abuse problems.

“More seem willing to come in when they find out there are other options including rental subsidies, housing for veterans and the Housing First program that provide people with permanent housing as quickly as possible,” says Morishige.

Morishige says encounters with outreach workers have to be continuous and heartfelt to persuade the chronically homeless they will be better off living under a roof.

The new approach will feature homeless outreach teams in targeted areas that will work to establish trust with the homeless, primarily getting them interested in housing

Morishige’s office calls the outreach teams “housing navigators” hired to help street and park dwellers with their basic needs, as well help them overcome the barriers that keep them from seeking housing services.

He says the state’s new approach will make drug abuse treatment and mental health care more readily available to help the hard core homeless stabilize their thinking so they are able to leave their tents and tarps for good.

## New Contracts Awarded

Here are some of the key features of the new approach:

The state has awarded contracts to four non-profit agencies to concentrate homeless outreach work in four

zones on Oahu. The contracts take effect Wednesday.

Until now, two main homeless outreach providers served most of Oahu: Kalihi-Palama Health Center and Waikiki Health's Care-A-Van mobile outreach service. Waikiki Health lost its \$480,000 annual contract with the state this year.

The new contracts for specific zones have been awarded to the [Institute for Human Services](#) for East Oahu and Waimanalo to Kaneohe; [Kalihi-Palama Health Center](#) for downtown and Windward Oahu from Kahaluu to Kahuku ; [U.S. Vets](#) for Central Oahu, and Kealahou West Oahu for the Leeward Coast.

IHS will be taking over the area once served by Waikiki Health's Care-A-Van mobile homeless outreach.

Each agency that's been awarded an outreach contract will work in partnership with other non-profits to address the specific needs of the population they will be serving.

For example, IHS in its outreach to [homeless on the slopes of Diamond Head](#), will work in partnership with Kalihi-Palama Health Center and [The Chow Project](#), a non-profit dedicated to helping drug addicts.

## 'I Don't Get Hassled Here'

Many of the Diamond Head homeless are alcoholics or users of heroin or crystal meth.

Terry Richardson, a man I spoke with on Diamond Head on Thursday, fits the "chronic homeless" description. IHS outreach specialist Wendy Taylor was interviewing Richardson when I joined in the conversation.

Richardson told us he's been living in a tent on the slopes of the crater for seven years. He says he's struggling to overcome a crystal meth addiction and has episodes of paranoia.

He says he intends to keep camping on Diamond Head because "I don't get hassled here. People don't bother me."

Richardson says about all that concerns him are the large, brown centipedes that sometimes crawl near his bedding.

But he seemed interested when he heard there were other housing options available to him besides moving into one of the emergency shelters which, he's heard are dirty and have bed bugs.

Morishige says encounters with outreach workers have to be continuous and heartfelt for a worker to be able to persuade the chronically homeless they will be better off living under a roof.

As part of the new plan, the Ige administration is asking the Legislature for a lot more money this year to address chronic homelessness and the underlying conditions that cause it.

The total budget request for homeless outreach for the next two fiscal years is \$20.9 million with much of

that request to reduce habitual homelessness. It includes:

- \$1.5 million for the homeless outreach services described above.
- \$3 million for the Housing First program to provide housing and support to chronic homeless with mental health or addiction issues. This includes money for the first time to bring Housing First to the neighbor islands.
- \$1 million for the Department of Health's outreach counseling to homeless residents with serious and persistent mental illness.
- \$800,000 for outreach and counseling to substance abusing homeless people.
- \$2 million to store property taken in homeless sweeps.

Morishige declined to give a reason why Waikiki Health's contract was pulled. He would only say that it did not prevail in a competitive procurement process for outreach services.

Waikiki Health also would not say why it failed to get a new contract. It has been doing outreach work for the state since 2002. It will continue to provide medical care and other services to homeless at its drop-in clinic in Kaimuki, although its vans will no longer be used for homeless outreach services.

State Sen. Josh Green has introduced a bill this session that would call for spending \$1.4 million to bring back mobile medical vans to help the homeless.

But Morishige says that's not necessary because the state is already providing medical care to the homeless with its new and more intensive homeless outreach effort.