



**Partnership between government and non-profit working to address issues of homelessness and public safety receives statewide recognition**

*Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare and Multnomah County Drainage District Partnership Recognized with Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) Award*

**February 6, 2020 – Portland, Ore.** – [Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare](#) and the [Multnomah County Drainage District](#) (MCDD) were recognized with an Outstanding Special District Program award by the [Special Districts Association of Oregon](#) (SDAO) for the organizations’ joint efforts to address safety and infrastructure issues through a Houseless Outreach & Coordination Pilot Project. The SDAO’s Awards Program recognizes innovative accomplishments by organizations that improve safety, public information and involvement in their communities.

The combination of increased housing costs, health care, and other factors have led to an increase in homelessness in metropolitan areas across the United States. With limited places to live, communities in the Portland-metropolitan area have resorted to camping along the Lower Columbia River and in areas protected by a series of federally authorized levee and water conveyance systems extending from North Portland to Troutdale. This increased activity has made it difficult for field employees to perform regular maintenance work, and in some instances, has caused unintentional damage to the levee system – posing greater flood risks for unhoused communities, thousands of residents, businesses, and some of the region’s most vital resources including the Columbia South Shore Well Field, a source of drinking water serving nearly a million Oregonians, and the Portland International Airport. In order to address these issues, MCDD and Cascadia formed a collaborative partnership and launched the Houseless Outreach & Coordination Pilot Project in 2019.

Through targeted outreach, education, and engagement, the project addressed safety concerns and minimized damage to flood risk-reduction systems with the added benefit of providing education and support services to individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as serving as a line of communication to vulnerable communities in low-lying areas during high water events. “The ability for our field crews to work closely with trained social service professionals on the ground allowed us to perform our core job functions while also gaining greater awareness of the conditions of people who are unhoused in our community,” said Randy Lyons, Operations Manager for MCDD. In addition to working with social services, the project also incorporated ongoing collaboration with other regional service organizations, law enforcement, government agencies, property owners, and the general public.

The project met its goal of improved safety and operations for MCDD and its systems, and expanded education and access to healthcare and housing services for individuals experiencing homelessness. With a total of 250 hours of outreach, MCDD and Cascadia made 148 contacts, provided education and information to 88 individuals, and enrolled nearly 20% of the individuals contacted in services over a period of six months. Additionally, in partnership with District staff, the program ensured the safety of approximately 50 individuals by prompting an evacuation from a low-lying peninsula during a high-water event in April 2019.

“When doing outreach in the community, our main goal is to connect with individuals who are struggling and help them get the support and resources they need,” said Kim James, Program Manager of Homeless Services at Cascadia. “We were thrilled to partner with MCDD on this unique program and offer our expertise in reaching individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Collaboration is a critical component to finding solutions to the issues we face in our community.”

The Houseless Outreach & Coordination Pilot Project represents the benefits of a partnership among public and non-profit sectors. The collaboration between MCDD and Cascadia prioritized compassion and human connection, and allowed a service-first approach in order to avoid traumatic experiences that often occur with the presence of law enforcement and regulatory entities. Looking forward, MCDD and Cascadia will continue to work together to develop strategies and plans that improve efficiency and safety in field operations, as well as health and housing outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.

The Special Districts Association of Oregon will host its annual awards program on Saturday, February 8, 2020 at the Seaside Convention Center in Seaside, Oregon. To learn more about the Houseless Outreach & Coordination Pilot Project, visit [www.mcdd.org](http://www.mcdd.org).

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#### **ABOUT CASCADIA BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE**

Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare is a private, not-for-profit whose mission is to provide whole healthcare for people living with mental health and addiction challenges. For information on Cascadia’s comprehensive range of innovative, integrated clinical and housing support programs, visit: [www.cascadiabhc.org](http://www.cascadiabhc.org).

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#### **ABOUT THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY DRAINAGE DISTRICT**

The Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD) helps protect lives and property from flooding by operating and maintaining flood management systems for nearly 13,000 acres of land along the Columbia Slough and the lower Columbia River. These systems include: 27 miles of levee, 12 pump stations, and 45 miles of sloughs, streams, and culverts. To learn more about MCDD’s flood risk-reduction services visit [www.mcdd.org](http://www.mcdd.org).

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