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Forum on San Diego's Future: San Diego SSN Members Share their Recommendations

FEBRUARY 12, 2020

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Eight members of San Diego SSN wrote the memos to provide research-based resources on issues being discussed by candidates for city and county office. Each brief is grounded in scholarly research and proposes best practices based on research findings.

If you are a local journalist, policymaker, or civic leader looking for support from researchers in the area, please reach out to San Diego SSN leaders Brian Adams, John Skrentny, and Jennifer Nations.

Increasing Access to Public Bathrooms is Critical for San Diegans' Health

Jennifer Kate Felner, Megan B. Welsh, and Jerel Pasion Calzo

San Diego County has the fourth-highest homeless population in the United States. According to recent data collected by the San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless, on any given night, thousands of San Diegans are living outside and thousands more are in temporary shelters.

Efforts to secure housing for people experiencing homelessness have received some attention

and support, and should receive more. While these efforts continue, San Diego's policymakers and civic leaders should consider another, related public health challenge that warrants more attention—access to public bathrooms.

Continuing Support for Migrant Shelters in San Diego

Gustavo Lopez

In October 2019, the federal government ended the so-called “safe release” program, under which the Department of Homeland Security coordinated travel arrangements and ensured individuals were able to contact a family member or sponsor before they were released from temporary immigrant detention and border processing. This decision led to the release of over 20,000 people into the city of San Diego in late 2018 to fall 2019. After the termination of the program, the responsibility of relocating migrants fell to local non-profits and San Diego's government. While the number of asylum seekers arriving in San Diego has dwindled in recent months, the local leaders working to support these vulnerable groups still need support.

The Case for Local Action on Welcoming Immigrants

Karina Shklyan

Immigrants are a boon to San Diego's culture and economy. Comprising one-fourth of the city's population, immigrants play a critical role in keeping jobs local, stabilizing population growth, and supplying key industries with entrepreneurial leadership. In the absence of coordinated national integration policy, it is the responsibility of local government to adopt policies that ensure the continued success of immigrants and their families. When done successfully, welcoming policies can help to promote social and economic cohesion for all city residents.

Why Cities Must End Their Reliance on Police to Manage Homelessness - and How They Can Do It

Megan B. Welsh and Jennifer Kate Felner

As the City of San Diego has revitalized its downtown core in recent years, the San Diego Police Department has been tasked with enforcing a wide range of “quality of life” laws, including a municipal code originally intended to deal with wayward trash dumpsters by prohibiting the encroachment on the public right-of-way. Tickets and arrests for this so-called “encroachment” law have been the target of recent lawsuits for excessive enforcement, after similar lawsuits a decade ago curtailed excessive use of a state law against “illegal lodging.”

Do District-Based Elections for School Board Help Minority Candidates Get Elected?

Evan Crawford

There are over 10,000 local school districts in the United States. How voters elect their school board members varies across and within states. In some areas, school board candidates run for office across an entire district—at-large election systems. In other areas, candidates run for office within a specific sub-district or ward—district-based election systems. Much of the research in the 1980's and 1990's suggested that at-large systems disadvantaged minority candidates

Sanctuary and Public Safety: Busting the Myth that Immigrants Bring Crime

Greg Prieto

The scholarly consensus has been and remains that immigrants commit crime at [lower rates](#) than the U.S.-born. Whether measured with prison statistics, crime rates (locally and nationally), or individual level survey data that asks representative samples of immigrant and non-immigrant respondents to self-report any criminal activity, the answer is the same: immigrants commit crime less often than the U.S.-born.

Family Homelessness and Gentrification in San Diego

Stacey Livingstone

The unaffordability of housing is one major contributor to San Diego's housing crisis: the City of San Diego is home to the fourth largest concentration of homelessness in the country, including 1,545 individuals living in unhoused families. As the housing stock improves and increases in price, affordable housing options have not been built to house displaced families. According to a report issued by the Corporation for Supportive Housing in October of 2019, San Diego's affordable housing production is far behind the needs of very low, low and moderate income households: a reality that has forced a trend of "down renting" as moderate income households compete for the same scarce resources and squeeze very low income households out of the housing market.

Reform with Care: Expanding Mental Health Conservatorships in California

Neil Gong and Alex Barnard

For fifty years, policymakers, clinicians, and advocates have agreed that people living with serious psychiatric disabilities should have access to voluntary, community-based care. Since the 1960s, the number of public hospital beds available for severe mental illness has decreased by 90%. There is ongoing debate as to whether crises of patient homelessness and incarceration are due to inadequate resources or the legal inability to force people into treatment. With this in mind, policymakers and other leaders are now considering loosening the criteria for involuntary treatment and placing people in locked facilities.